Paper No. 102

AN ENGINEER IN SEARCH OF AN IMAGE

By SH. NISARUL HAQ*

In the modern world of science and technology, the social scientists have borrowed many technical words—one such word is 'Image', which has become quite fashionable in the last decade or so. Mostly used by mass media, public-relation and publicity experts, the word Image denotes the impression that a person or group of persons have in the public mind. The impression may be real or imaginary, but the psychologist and sociologist tell us that it is the IMAGE which determines the effectiveness or otherwise of a person or group of persons among masses and is thus a very important factor in success or failure of all those who have to deal with groups of human beings, namely, the politicians, bureaucrats and managers. It is thus, not only imperative, but necessary for survival of an individual/or a group to try to cultivate a successful IMAGE ! It is, therefore, quite pertinent to know what sort of an IMAGE engineers have, because on this depends the success and effectiveness of engineers as a group in the society. Engineers may move mountains, but unless they cultivate a proper IMAGE they will not get their proper place and status in the society.

It would be quite logical to assume that as in Physics the IMAGE of a person would depend on :—

(1) The surface on which the IMAGE is taken *viz*. the Mirror. Whether it is concave or convex, smooth or rough.

(2) On the object itself, whether it is photogenic or not, what shades it has.

(3) On the view-point of the beholder, or in other words the angle from which one is looking at an object. For example, things are bound to look topsyturvy if looked upside down. An observation may be acute, obtuse or oblong depending on the position of the beholder. In case of the public image of a person or a group, all these factors *i.e.* the mirror, the object and the angle of observation are quite pertinent. However, since we are dealing with such imponderable things as human beings, we will not get a cut and dry answer as one would while dealing with physical sciences.

**Director, M.P.O. (WAPDA), Lahore.*

For instance the surface of the mirror through which we are reflected is not a simple or straight surface, it is as complex and as complicated as human minds can be. Since there are no Gallups or other pollsters who could confront us with the IMAGE of an engineer in Pakistan, we will have to look for ourselves and find out from our own resources what IMAGE a Pakistani Engineer has among the society. Let us take the mass media of communications, which includes Films, Radio, T. V., and newspapers. Our films are not concerned with realities of life and thus mirror mostly fantasies borrowed from folklore or copied from Hollywood. Our film heroes are mostly romantic idiots or He-men. There has seldom been a film with an engineer as a hero; Doctors yes, administrators sometimes but engineers never. Our newspapers mostly indulge in politics and whatever little space is left from this 'noble' art is devoted to housewives, children, students and the matinee idols. It is only when engineers make news, as they did last year in controversy over appontment of a member in WAPDA, that the newspapers divulge their mind and that too not in complimenting terms. So the mass media of communication does not help us much in our quest of an IMAGE. We have to depend on our experiences to find out what others think about us. Here are some such experiences; a few incidents which flash across my mind as I think of a Pakistani engineer.

The one incident, I recall, happened very recently, I was waiting for a bus at a bus-stand on a cold shivering morning, when another fellow traveller came and stood by me. He happened to be a talkative person and started talking about Pakistan and its affairs in general. The Karachi-Hyderabad Highway had just been opened to public at that time. While discussing the subject, he remarked, "Look at the Highway, how well it has been built by Italian Engineers ! If it had been built by our own engineers, it would have gone to pieces in a month or so and why should not it; our engineers would have pocketed most of the money". With one black brush my fellow traveller had tarnished all Engineers and had said in fact **"Pakistani Engineers are a corrupt lot."**

Second incident I recall is about our interview with Cornelius Committee in Lahore in early 1970. When we had finished pleading our case for a better deal for Engineers in the services, a member of the Committee said, "Gentlemen, I want to ask you a question? In Punjab we had three Chief Engineers, who were also Secretaries to the Government. But they could never agree among

themselves. "Why do Engineers quarrel among themselves". This is another view taken from another angle. **Engineers are a quarrelsome lot. They cannot get together and that is why engineers make poor administrators.**

Third incident, I recall is about a Senior Civil Servant who was travelling with a Senior Railway Executive, who also happened to be a Mechanical Engineer. As luck would have it, the Air Conditioning Unit in the train failed. The Civil Servant said to the Railway Executive to set the Air Conditioner right. When the Railway Executive expressed his inability to do so and called for the Air Conditioning Mechanic, the Civil Servant remarked, "I know you are only a paper engineer". Thus our Civil Servant was echoing the general feeling that Pakistani Engineers are paper engineers. They do not like to soil their hands and like to sit in Air Conditioned rooms and deal with files. These are the three IMAGES from three different view-points :—

(*a*) First, the Engineers are corrupt unpatriotic lot who are only making money.

(*b*) Secondly, the Engineers are narrow-minded, selfish and can never agree among themselves and, therefore, make poor executives and administrators.

(*c*) And thirdly, the Engineers are an impractical lot, their knowledge is bookish. They don't want to soil their hand. Pakistani Engineers are mostly white collar engineers.

Most of us will not agree with this as we know that Pakistani Engineer is a patriotic, hardworking, honest person who has served the nation in a very difficult and trying role of a developer of national resources. But still he is generally considered as corrupt and inept and incompetent.

We must look into the reasons and find out why the IMAGE of the Pakistani Engineer has been so distorted. In my opinion some of the reasons are :—

(*i*) There are vested interests in our midst who are intentionally maligning engineers and engineering profession. Most of our civil servants are afraid of the large number of engineers in Government service and consider them a threat to their privileged position. In the garb of various reorganizations they have already entrenched themselves in the service structure, so much so that even two martial law regimes have not been able to dislodge them. This group has been deliberately maligning engineers.

(*ii*) These vested interests in our services have been joined by another vested interest, the foreign consultant/adviser, who in common

with the privileged civil servant is trying to keep the Pakistani Engineers down. It is the foreign engineer who has spread the story of paper engineers. In fact in his own country, the educated professional engineer is mainly a paper engineer who plans, organises and directs engineering effort and the actual field work is carried out by craftsman. The craftsman who is sometimes called euphemistically an 'engineer', is quite distinctive from a professional engineer. To continue their hold on the economy of Pakistan, the foreign consultants/advisers only wants to encourage the craftsmen and not the educated engineers who can design, plan and organise.

(*iii*) There is the 'frustrated' engineer, who has been kept down, under one pretext or the other. In his frustration he has lost all sense of direction and exaggerates the stories of corruption and inefficiencies of his colleagues. He is unable to identify the real enemy and like Sanchopanza attacks imaginary wind-mills.

(*iv*) Then, above all, there is our social milieu. In a Feudal Society, it is the man or group of men who wield power, get all the respect and honour. Those who do not deal with real power do not get the respect they deserve although their contribution to the well-being of the Society may be very great. Our society has not yet shaken off its feudal character and has not learnt to judge persons or group of persons according to their usefulness to the society. Therefore, unless our social milieu and feudalistic attitudes change engineers shall not be able to attain the IMAGE that they deserve.

However, this does not mean that we should do nothing and sit idle and wait 'Micawber-like' for something to turn up. Mine is not the counsel of despair. But I hope you will agree with me that there is no point in glossing over the facts either. We must first like good engineer, ascertain our facts and then plan on line of action. Some of the suggestions I would request you to consider are :—

(*i*) First of all we must work consciously to build our image and undo the effect of the propaganda of our enemies. This job of image building must be taken up by bodies like Engineering Congress and Institute of Engineers of Pakistan. We must realise that image making is a science and we must use all the modern tools of this science. This must be a conscious effort. No effort must be spared to create a proper image of Pakistani

Engineer. Any derogatory remarks about engineers in the Press or in public must not only be confronted, but the people must be continuously reminded of the services of engineers to the cause of Nation. We have much to our credit and we must not be ashamed of blowing our own trumpet.

(*ii*) We must close our own ranks and remove the artificial distinction from our ranks. When we are committed to eliminating all distinction of caste, creed and colour from our society, there is hardly any reason why these be kept in the profession. Those of us who are more gifted or cleverer than others must stand on their merit. They do not need artificial props of classes and cadres to stand-out among their equals. Thus we will eliminate most of the bickerings and quarrels among us.

(*iii*) We must be true to our profession and its ethics. Ours is one of the noblest professions. There is lot to be done around us. It is only the Engineer and the Scientist who can bridge the gap between the developed and the developing countries, provide a decent living to the masses and banish poverty from among us. We must, therefore, by our words and deeds identify ourselves with the aspiration of our people. No amount of Image-making can sell a product which is not up to the mark. Unless engineers live up to the standard they have set for themselves, they shall never improve their Image.

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