

Manpower export policy

We shouldn't be missing any buses

THE fact that the government, after having identified the need for a comprehensive policy on export of manpower back in 2003, has not been able to formulate such a policy in the intervening two years, indicates the shockingly low priority having been placed on the sector in a critical phase of the globalisation process.

This constitutes a serious lapse that shortchanges what has come to be one of the mainstays of the Bangladesh economy and ignores the legitimate needs, aspirations, and expectations of millions of Bangladeshi citizens who have a right to government assistance and attention in the field.

The total number of Bangladeshis working abroad is now in excess of 4 million, with some 250,000 new job seekers being added to the number every year. These migrant workers remit an astonishing \$4 billion back to the country annually, which is the core of the country's foreign exchange reserves, and far outstrips overseas development assistance disbursed by the donors and export earnings from all sectors other than garments.

Nevertheless, no government, and certainly not the incumbent one, has ever afforded our overseas workers the respect that they deserve. The conditions in which they toil are often unacceptably oppressive, and cheating and abuse both by the manpower exporting agencies and in the host countries are rampant. And, when visiting home country they are often mistreated.

Further, the sector is today poised at a historic crossroads and it is imperative that the government quickly put in place a policy to best take advantage of the changing world market for labour.

In recent years, there has been a small decline in the number of Bangladeshi job-seekers sent overseas as the traditional manpower importing countries have moved towards nativisation of their work force. But at the same time, new countries, particularly in Latin America, are entering the market to take advantage of freer trading regimes and the increased volume of world trade, and the government should ensure that Bangladeshi manpower is well positioned to reap the benefits.

What is needed is full government attention to the sector that includes market-targeted, demand-oriented training for those to be sent overseas. Unfortunately, as things stand right now, this is very low on the list of official priorities.

It is imperative that the government formulate and put in place a policy for this all-important sector and take full advantage of the new opportunities for manpower export now falling by the wayside for lack of a policy.

BRTC service

Big room for improvement

OFTEN one gets to see buses of the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) plying the city roads that are in poor running condition. The worn-out vehicles come nowhere near the standard in terms of comfort that is expected of a public sector operated service. Also, let us not forget that old and faulty vehicles, whether they belong to state or private sector, tend equally to slow down the traffic.

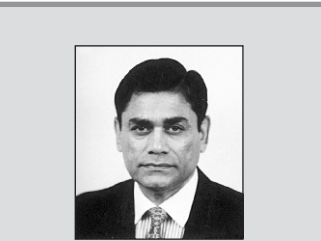
Significantly, however, the state-run BRTC is one of the few organisations that has recovered from a long losing streak and its operational plan of leasing out a part of its fleet of buses to private operators has been successful. The organisation has reloaded itself like that. But it has clearly not been able to fulfil the conditions that would make it a worthy competitor in a field with many private transport operators. The latter have introduced luxury buses which offer much better services in every respect. So the BRTC has to improve its services to stay in business and better serve the public as well. The organisation must break the stagnancy that characterises most of the state-run enterprises in the country.

The appalling disregard shown for passenger comfort cause, as evidenced in the picture of a BRTC bus carried in this newspaper yesterday, is but an example of poor maintenance which could only be the result of poor management.

The BRTC is yet to live up to popular expectations. It has to maintain the standard expected of a state-run transport agency in a modernising capital city. Furthermore, it is the biggest commuter service provider in the city and, consequently, a huge number of people depend on it. So it has to cater to commuters' needs efficiently.

The BRTC planners and decisionmakers should be fully seized of the reality that it is facing stiff competition and that as a state-run enterprise it shoulders the responsibility of providing better services at an affordable price to the citizens.

Iran and disgraceful double standards



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

WHAT'S wrong with a country trying to perfect nuclear technology? What's wrong with a country trying to diversify its sources of energy when the existing known sources are likely to run out in not a very distant future? What is wrong with a country trying to enhance its security and assert its sovereignty in the face of distinct threats from the greatest superpower state in the region that is playing the role of the regional bully in the Middle East on behalf of the only superpower and the self-appointed international policeman. Nothing, if you are tied to the apron strings of the United States and play to its tune in securing its strategic interests. You can get away with doing all these and more, but not if you are a country awedly nationalistic and refuse the dictates of the lone superpower of the world.

Foreign policy and international relations have no time or space for principles or morality, only self-interest and everything that perpetuates it compels the actions of

the big powers. This has been demonstrated once again in the actions of the United States and some European countries since the issue emerged a couple of years ago, and again since last week when apparently Iran stepped on their toes by resuming its nuclear programme after two years of moratorium. Iran, and in fact all those countries that have tried to assert their nationalism, have been the targets of the US government's wrath over the years, particularly in the years after the Second World

and trade is threatened by nationalism -- that is efforts to follow an independent course (italics mine). "The threat of nationalism is recognised in the public record as well. Thus after the successful CIA coup that overthrew the parliamentary regime of the conservative nationalist Mossadegh in Iran, the New York Times commented that all of this was, 'good news indeed,' however costly 'to all concerned' primarily Iranians, the 'affair may yet be proved worthwhile if lessons were learned from it."

plan to report it to the Security Council it hardly cares to remember that Iran's nuclear program began under the Shah in 1958, with the first US-supplied reactor becoming operational in 1967. And according to Middle East watchers, "The program will likely continue under future governments unless fundamental regional dynamics are altered."

And let's once again ask why can't Iran have a nuclear program? Is it because Iran is a signatory to the NPT? We often conveniently

with the full support of the West, although Britain's supply of twenty tons of heavy water to Israel was well before the NPT regime came into being.

As for disarmament very little has been done in respect of reduction of nuclear arsenal by the declared and the non-declared nuclear weapons state. In fact there are reports that suggest that new and more devastating variety of nuclear weapons may be under development by the US.

And what of the double stan-

the world knows to be true, and reiterated last week by the Saudi foreign minister, most Middle East weapons programs were a response to Israel's development of nuclear weapons, which started in the early 1950s and had secretly yielded a bomb by 1968. And again, according to some estimates, Israel is now believed to have between 100 and 200 nuclear weapons, a stockpile of chemical weapons and a biological weapons program that may have developed several weapons agents.

The NPT itself was biased since it only legitimized the continuing possession and multiplication of nuclear stockpiles by those few states possessing them. Possession of weapons that are capable of wiping out the human race is immoral; no rationale can justify their possession or acquisition by any country, and every effort must be made to eliminate the world's arsenal of nuclear weapons.

While the US and its allies, some of whom are themselves responsible for proliferation of nuclear weapons, go after a signatory to the NPT on suspicion that it might be on its way to producing nuclear weapons, they chose to support and countenance a non-signatory to the NPT who is known to possess not only nuclear weapons but also the means of delivery, whose range extends right up to the Russian heartland.

Thus when we hear about a particular world order we shudder at its character that thrives on double talk and double standards.

The author is Editor, Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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War and more assertively after the US debacle in Vietnam.

Seeing the US attitude towards Iran vis a vis the nuclear issue and the role of the "free press" in the US one gets a feeling of deja vu. Just see what Chomsky has to say in respect of US attitude towards nationalism in other countries and the reaction of one major US newspaper following the rein statement of the Shah in Iran in 1953, courtesy the CIA and MI6:

"The major threat to US interest is posed by 'nationalistic regimes' that are responsive to popular pressure for 'immediate improvement in the low living standard of the masses' and diversification of the economies. The need to protect and promote American investment

"Underdeveloped countries with rich resources (italics mine) now can learn object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their numbers, which goes berserk with financial nationalism. It is perhaps too much to hope that Iran's experience will prevent the rise of Mossadegh in other countries, but that experience may at least strengthen the hands of more reasonable and more far-seeing leaders who will have a clear understanding of our overriding priorities." (Chomsky: Detering Democracy)

Do not the motivations of the US administration and the supportive comments of the US press fifty years ago ring familiar tones now? While the West go after Iran and

overlook the three important pillars of the NPT, and the treaty will technically remain unsummed if all the three elements namely, nonproliferation, disarmament, and the right to peacefully use nuclear technology, remain unfulfilled.

And if Iran is pilloried for breach of the NPT for causing proliferation of nuclear weapons, then there are several Western countries that can be similarly treated for violation of the NPT, either for directly providing raw materials for weaponisation and nuclear technology or letting the development of nuclear weapons go unchecked under their nose.

It is no secret that Israel's nuclear weapon was developed

dards in this regard?

While all the attention of the world is focused on Iran and its alleged attempt to develop nuclear weapons and the furor that this has created, to the extent that military options are talked about in certain quarters in the US, one hardly finds any mention of the other side of the equation -- Israel's nuclear weapons programme.

But as many observers believe, "The tough talk against Tehran has inadvertently put on the table a program that no one in Washington wants to discuss openly -- Israel's nuclear weapons program."

And that is as it should be, because undeniably, in spite of Israel's nuclear opacity and what

Governance at stake?



Md. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE minuscule middle class in the country, just about 20 percent of its population but conscience keeper of the society, is in a state of shock and bewilderment. Leaving aside the middle class and intellectuals, there is possibly not a single Bangladeshi who has not been outraged, shamed and sickened by the manner people in the country have been held hostage to the grand sinister designs of the JMB operatives when the law enforcers in the country were unable to pick up the faintest scent. Even though there has been a lull in the suicide bomb attacks but with more JMB arms factories being unearthed with each passing day, the general populace are numb with fear and trepidation for more attacks to come.

On the other hand renewed incidents of Sarbahara group attacking a police camp at Natore on the day the PM was inaugurating the construction of a bridge just 30 km away, killing three Ansars and looting their rifles; trading of gunfire with terrorists at Sylhet and killing of three civilians at Kushtia when police opened fire on some allegedly illegal cane crushers on the same day in different parts of the country came as a pathetic reminder of disquieting scene in the country or rather the futility of the administration's glib talks of improvement in the law and order situation.

As politicians on both sides of the divide trade charges and counter charges of plots, the real issues of lawlessness, extreme poverty, joblessness and economic slowdown has taken a back seat. Coalition government is reluctant to admit that our villages, once the most tranquil zones in the country have had the highest incidence of crime today ranging from killing, abduction, looting and extortion. The situation has come to such a pass due to growing political interference and inaction of the agencies concerned and worst of all, politicians of a particular hue abetting such clandestine activities.

The failures have been at different levels of the government. How-

ever, the overarching failure has been at the political level. Profoundly true, the country started with enormous political capital accumulated during our liberation war. The leaders at that time were generally austere and patriotic. In the last three decades and a half, this political capital has been depleted. Political parties these days are unable to attract genuine talent.

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At the judicial level also there are deficiencies that contribute to deficiencies in governance. The biggest failing is the huge backlog of cases. There are long delays in disposing of even the most urgent cases that has helped fuel more crimes. Pathetically true, these days the legislature makes more noise than laws and the executive is marked by scandals than governance. The failing of the legislative and judicial branches pales in comparison with the failing of the executive branch. It is at this level that there is little intellectual and moral support for either economic reforms or urgent development programmes. The administrative top tier, it appears, these days does not make room for persons of talent, merit, dynamism, innovative ideas and integrity. The ministerial cabinet, working for the last four years, could not deliver the goods perhaps because of coalition pressures to enforce their own party agenda and likewise demanding key ministries regardless of their administrative experience, competence and knowledge over the diverse issues confronting the ministry.

As a result there are many square pegs in round holes. This leads to a rigid hierarchy aggravating the problems at the administrative level. If a minister is unfamiliar with the subject, the bureaucrat virtually takes over his functions and reduces him to a rubber stamp. Paradoxically true, the country's power, gas and aviation sectors during the last four

years suffered badly because of this deficiency. No one in the civil service holds his tenure based on performance. So it is possible for a low level bureaucrat to keep at bay for months an investment proposal running into thousands of crores of taka that ultimately takes a heavy toll on the country's resources and development. In fact, that is precisely what happened to the proposals that came to the government from independent power producers. The administrative system does not allow for talent to rise to its natural level. Nor does it allow for outside talent to be inducted into the system. Sound economic policy is necessary but not sufficient itself to ensure progress. It must be rooted in good governance.

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Could anybody imagine that because of political or ideological differences, a Muslim could go to the extent of killing his adversaries belonging to the same faith, chop the body into four pieces, feeding one piece to dogs and the rest three dump under the ground without formal burial as per Muslim rites? Khejur Ali of Attra in Rajshahi was killed in such a barbaric manner in the early part of 2004 by the JMB activists in presence of his mother and sisters. Abdul Qaiyum Badshah of Shafiqur village in Baragaha union in Rajshahi was first killed by the so-called Islamists in Viti campset up by JMB operatives and then his lifeless body was hung up on a roadside tree in Nandigram with his head upside down. All these dirty jobs were done by Bangla Bhai, his deputy Professor (?) Lutfor Rahman, now arrested, and his associates, still at large. Can this be a type of Islam that summons up so much violence and vengeance even at death as was profoundly stirred up by the mastermind Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai, the so-called radical Islamist leaders now rocking the whole country?

With 1.2 billion followers Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. If the carnage carried on by the zealots in recent time in different parts of the country were typical of the faith, and Islam inspired and justified such violence, its growth and increasing presence of Muslims throughout the world would be a

terrifying prospect. Fortunately, that is not the case. While recalling those gory incidents of killing and looting by the Bangla Bhai and his associates, people in the country rather demand to know what the administration has done about that former S.P. of Rajshahi whose action of providing support and escort to Bangla Bhai and his associates in the city streets of Rajshahi made headlines at that time. Even after Bangla Bhai's carnage, brutal murders and sinister designs were exposed, the administration remained unfazed. This is the type of government behaviour which probably let the entire country slide to its pathetic state at the first place.

Sadly true, the worthy and workable consensus of tolerance and

lines from the opposition for curbing terrorism in the country. The mainstream Coalition partner as well as the Opposition parties know the places, persons and parties harbouring them and it's for the government to put their nest on fire. Given the fact that media reports from the beginning have given enough indications of the dangers lurking in, the administration can ill-afford to ignore the catastrophic signals.

Paradoxically true, trying to destroy the credibility of the journalists is perhaps easier than judging the facts presented by them. But most dangerously, the law enforcers have closed their eyes to what has been going on in many places around them, allegedly because in

most cases they have to heed nods from the terrorists and their patrons. Coincidentally, the PM ordered the arrest of Bangla Bhai at a time when he and his followers were wreaking havoc at Rajshahi and adjoining places, but the law enforcers didn't take the order in letter and spirit even if the general public did.

At the moment the alliance government seems to be a bedraggled lot. In a recently held Parliamentary by-election, the four party alliance could win in two only, showing a fast dip in the popularity index. Precisely true, the ruling alliance's lack of vision and assiduous nurturing of some chosen party men to the complete disregard of the people's interest has left the country gasping for such essentials as power, water, electricity and hassle-free roads and highways.

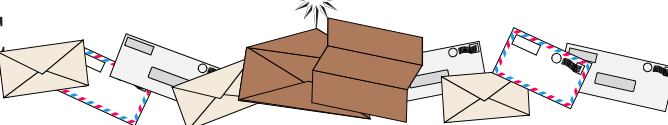
win in two only, showing a fast dip in the popularity index. Precisely true, the ruling alliance's lack of vision and assiduous nurturing of some chosen party men busy in collecting funds from all sources to the complete disregard of the people's interest has left the country gasping for such essentials as power, water, electricity and hassle-free roads and highways.

As for electricity, the less said the better. Even in these winter days most towns outside Dhaka remain dark for hours after evening as supply plants resort to indiscriminate load shedding. And the way drinking water is drying up, only a miracle can save Dhaka city and other south western districts from a severe water scarcity next summer. Undeniably true, if the city's as well as the country's resources have been under tremendous strain, it is also because of the burgeoning population. In the meantime Dhaka city's population has boomed to almost 13 million. With more than 4 lakh cars, jeeps and micro buses; 7 thousand passenger buses and almost 40 thousand auto-rickshaws plying the Dhaka city roads, something like the law of the jungle prevail on the roads. What a nightmare experience it is that it takes one hour and a half to travel a distance of 15 km from Uttara to Dhaka city by any mechanised transport like bus or car. With no thought given to constructing by-pass routes down the Mohakhali flyover, traffic congestion problem has further aggravated as cars, buses and auto-rickshaws from the surface route and the route above slide down the Mohakhali and cantonment crossing from three directions simultaneously.

Instead of tackling the crisis, the government has been talking of sky pass, sub-way lines and river transport around Dhaka to ease road congestion. The citizenry are left wondering how many more rides the government will take them for. If the roads are virtual death traps with unusual hold ups for hours, people are not safe in the confines of their homes or business premises either. The PM must have noticed that there is general disenchantment with her government's inability to do anything that goes in favour of good governance. With the advent of election time, just ten months away, it will be left to the chief executive to see leaving aside explain why the government failed to protect the poorest of the country's citizens from the depredations of corrupt officials involving all sectors of bureaucracy.

Md. Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics and Controller of Examinations, BUET.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Engaging in politics

Nowadays every educated family in our country is advising children not to enter politics. Is it a good sign for our nation? No, not at all.

Without qualified people we cannot expect a healthy political situation. We all are used to blaming our political leaders and the political situation for the troubles that we are facing. We start discussion on political problems and finish it up with the conclusion that it is not possible to have a positive political situation in Bangladesh. Nobody is trying find a practical solution. Yes, I am talking about the politics of future because the two popular parties of our country have failed to do what they were supposed to, thanks to corruption and the tendency to hang on to power.

But we should not lose heart. The new generation has to should-

der the responsibility of leading the nation towards prosperity.

Tamim Ahmed
Business Department
East West University

Fundamentalism and we

People having different faiths have lived in harmony in Bangladesh for centuries.

There is no room for extremism or fundamentalism in Islam. The British colonial rulers tried to divide Muslims and destroy Islam through encouraging different militant schools of religious thinking.

Sheikh Monirul Islam
One-mail

BRTA
I refer to the letter of Mr. Zahir

published in your daily on 9 December 2006 on the above subject.

I fully agree with the views of Mr. Zahir regarding this matter. I had to visit the BRTA office several times for the payment of Car Tax Renewal Fees and also for Fitness Tests of my car. The whole procedure of the system is faulty and cumbersome. I would suggest the following measures:

a. Appoint a system analyst to breakdown all the jobs being done in that office by each staff member.

b. Check the jobs done by them presently.

c. Organise the jobs in such a way that "computers" can take over.

d. Balance work can be done by trained/efficient staff quickly.

But "each staff member" should be trained properly and given

written "Job Description". Their "performance" has to be monitored closely and the inefficient employees must be given a "golden handshake".

Unless there is hiring and firing based on the principle of merit and efficiency, we cannot expect improvement.

I. Haq
One-mail

Protect environment

I whole heartedly support the idea of my former teacher Asadullah Khan. We cannot live and prosper by destroying the echo system around us. We owe this to our country and our next generation. As an expatriate Bangladeshi and an ex-BUET student I am willing to participate in any type of effort undertaken by Professor Khan or The Daily Star to save Uttara Lake.

I am sure many others like me will also come forward. Let this be a model project and an eye opener for city planners, real estate developers, and the city dwellers. I am certain the patriotic citizens of the mega city Dhaka will come forward to support any move in this regard. My suggestion to The Daily Star is: set up a bank account for this project and designate a correspondent for this purpose.

May I also suggest approaching IUCN-Bangladesh Country Office in Dhaka for their support.

Shafiq Islam
California, USA

Students and politics

My letter is to put some light on the letter written by Md Jashim Uddin and the photograph along with that with the heading "Students and politics" that were

published in your daily on 4 January. I do agree with Mr. Jashim that lots of students of our country are trapped in vicious politics where politicians are the only beneficiaries. But again, you all will surely agree with me that it is the students or youths who always stood by the people at times of crisis.

Can you name a single progressive movement where the youths or students didn't participate? But they need to be guided properly. Otherwise, the nation will be deprived of their valuable service.

Saad M K
NSU, Dhaka

Filling of wetlands

We are greatly disheartened by what we have been reading in the pages of The Daily Star over the

past few months concerning the government's apparent inability or unwillingness to protect Dhaka's remaining wetlands and khals from the continuing thoughtless and often illegal filling. Considering both Dhaka's own record of worsening urban flooding over the years due to poor water, sewer and open space management, and the evidence gained from New Orleans this past fall, it amazes me that the planning for Dhaka's future can be so short-sighted. It is widely acknowledged by scientists and engineers around the world that cities built on deltas need to provide large areas for short and long term storage of surface waters during flood season, as well as corridors for surface flow through the urban areas. Why, in light of all the data collection, flood modelling and the threat of worse floods in the future from the effects

of global warming, cities like Dhaka and New Orleans continue to destroy the ecological infrastructure that is so necessary for sustaining major urban settlements in some of the world's most unstable landscapes is incomprehensible. Everyone who shares in the decision-making, use of, and ownership of such lands has a moral responsibility to the present and future population of Dhaka to consider the impact of their actions, to educate themselves about the hydrological reality of their setting and the critical role the city's wetlands play in this delicate cultural-ecological balance, and to do everything possible to protect these areas to ensure a sustainable future and quality of life for Dhaka and its residents.

Elizabeth Dean Hermann
Professor of Landscape Architecture
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