

The president should be rightly inclined



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

POWER-game watchers are of the considered view that most heads of state or government as they appear in framed photographs in the corridors of power or the gorgeous palaces look grim and somber. This writer is not sure whether the occupiers of the highest public offices in Bangladesh have enjoyed their tenure while performing their supposedly onerous functions. In thinking over matters like this, one would perhaps not be very far from the reality to observe that almost all the framed photographs of our heads of state and government, both present and past, depict some kind of pensiveness. However, this characterisation could be an interesting area of enquiry for those who evince at least academic curiosity about the comparatively lesser known aspects of stately mansions. Some such thoughts were in my mind while the other day in a public office I was looking at the framed official photograph of our head of the state who at present is also the head of the government. To me it appeared that the President in his looks in the photograph was slightly inclined on one side, may be on the right side. Or was it an optical illusion? One can definitely

ignore such horizontal inclination as it may appear in a photograph. What, however, is of concern to the discerning observers of our polity, particularly during the caretaker dispensation of the present, is the alleged inclined actions or responses of the supreme authority. All right thinking citizens would agree that the President-

the myopic actions of our politicians. In fact, the apprehension is that the controlling levers of our collective politico-economic existence are steadily passing into the hands that are unaware and unappreciative of the slide down. There is no denying that our leaders are unable to effect political transition in an orderly and acceptable manner and the

conduction of public affairs. Therefore, the President-cum-Chief Adviser has to establish that he can effectively be neutral in the transaction of official business despite his being a nominee of the immediate past political government. The reconstitution of Election Commission and the correction of an admittedly flawed voters'

services, the major responsibility devolves on political government for obvious reasons but the caretaker administration cannot allow public servants to be politically active in a manner which compromise their neutrality. The services must avoid creating the impression of political bias. Such matters need closer attention of the President-cum-Chief Adviser to

the national election. Events of the last four weeks have unfortunately indicated that the supreme executive power has existed in several compartments and the colleagues of the Chief Adviser were found in an embarrassingly untenable position explaining the impropriety of some extremely sensitive administrative measures. For sometime, at least, the government was in a lackadaisical state.

The honourable President of the Republic has to effectively convince the nation that his assumption of the office of Chief Adviser was really caused by the compulsion of circumstances than by design as has been alleged by many responsible political leaders. One way to establish confidence and credibility would be to take significant administrative measures like the caretaker administration of 2001. To act and be seen like the Chief Adviser our President has to be present more often in the Chief Adviser's office than the largely ceremonial Bangabhaban. The Council of Advisers needs to be taken in full confidence and the frequency of interactions between the Chief Adviser and his colleagues should be more than has been so far. The President in his address to the nation has admitted that he was not prepared to assume the responsibilities of the Chief Adviser of a non-partisan and neutral caretaker government but now that he has willy-nilly been catapulted into that position, an apprehensive polity expects that he will at last conscientiously bear the heavy burden.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former Secretary and IGP.

STRAIGHT LINE

The honourable President of the Republic has to effectively convince the nation that his assumption of the office of Chief Adviser was really caused by the compulsion of circumstances than by design as has been alleged by many responsible political leaders. One way to establish confidence and credibility would be to take significant administrative measures like the caretaker administration of 2001. Now that he has willy-nilly been catapulted into that position, an apprehensive polity expects that he will at last conscientiously bear the heavy burden.

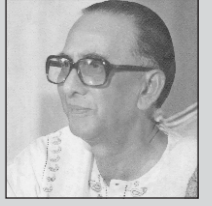
Our President who had been very gently active as a teacher of Dhaka University in the not-too-distant past need not be told that the Bangladeshi society, as of now, has become a perilously polarized polity and that partisan behaviour and actions have lowered the quality of our public life. The vitality of our corrective and regulatory institutions has been sapped by

constitutional arrangement of neutral and non-partisan caretaker government is an uncomfortable testimony to that sorry state of affairs. However, a time has come when even that transient arrangement runs the risk of being irreparably denigrated in public estimation. In such an environment, the premonition is that if the aforementioned denigration is not stilled effectively and demonstrative actions to restore order and propriety not taken, then we might find ourselves in a virtually unmanageable state in the immediate future. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that now we find ourselves at the crossroads of history in so far as our democratic progression is concerned. If we the too many faulty steps and mistake the dress for gold we shall render ourselves unfit for civilised

list are very serious matters demanding the close attention of Chief Adviser because the right to vote is at the top of the list of constitutional rights. In other words, it concerns the right to full political participation. The right to vote and correctly vote gives added zest and meaning to the entitlement of other liberties. Exercising voting rights illustrate the example of key civil liberty which is realizable only through positive state action. It has to be remembered that the right to vote cannot exist in the abstract; it requires a large state machinery to make it work. The reason for distinguishing the voting right as civil liberty from other human rights is that political participation becomes a primary right from which additional rights flow. Regarding the imperative of ensuring neutrality of public

ward off further polarization. It is an admitted fact that during the last couple of years the ethos of our public service has experienced condemnable shocks and in the process many officials have been denied their well-deserved promotion. Quite a number of them have been socially and psychologically affected. It is time to look into these cases on a very urgent basis and take corrective measures to place officials in their rightful positions. Along with the anticipated administrative changes in the wake of the upcoming election, the prejudiced officials should be given suitable postings. There has to be a balance in the public service along with a sense of propriety in our public life. The Chief Adviser has to appreciate that it is a part of his stated resolve to ensure a level playing field for the contenders in

A nation in crossfire An encounter in dream



MUHAMMAD HABIBUR RAHMAN

A nation in crossfire
A nation is all a stir
Between autocracy and democracy
Between aristocracy and plutocracy
Between mobocracy and snobocracy
Between monarchy and bureaucracy
Between liberators and collaborators
Between the blue sea and the alligators
Between the patricians and the plebeians
Between the common man and the lordling
Between the sans culottes and the silk-stocking
Between the rich men's lariat
And the lumpen proletariat
Between the sulky, surly and sullen
Between the glum, grum and grim
Lowering black looks
Glowing long faces
Soreheads and hotheads
The scum of the earth
And the wretched of the earth
Swear and smear
Threaten each other to tear
Apart, and they also threaten us
And that's all the same to us
By coup d'etat or coup de grace.
But miracles of all miracles
The voices of Cassandra and oracles
Are blown away by the spectacles
Of a new awakening
The nation is again lively and astrir
It has survived all crossfire
Oh! Ye! Raise your voice.
Oh! Ye! Rejoice!
Between all antonyms
And no synonyms
The anonymous mass
Suddenly become unanimous
On peace and order.
And on law and order
The storm is now blown over.
It is not an encounter in a dream
It is an early morning dream
Indeed a great breakthrough
It is most likely to be true.
Do you think or don't you,
That it's most likely to be true?

Muhammad Habibur Rahman is former Chief Justice and head of caretaker government

Literacy facilitators as teachers

WOLFGANG VOLLMANN

IN certain countries the number of adult illiterates outnumbers students attending primary education schools. This is the case in Bangladesh, but also in India, Pakistan and Nepal. Yet, the learners in primary education are instructed by teachers whose profession is widely recognised, in terms of salary (sometimes insufficient), as well as in terms of legal and social status. At the same time countries with huge numbers of illiterates, for Bangladesh alone accounts for some 60 million, a significant number of adult learners are following literacy classes, organised by NGOs and Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MPME) and being taught by so-called "facilitators". But these "facilitators" are usually not considered by the national authorities as being part of the teaching profession.

My proposal consists of looking at the shape and size of the teaching task for literates (adult learners), and from thereon develop an argument in favour of considering these "facilitators" as full professionals, a part of the teaching profession. The debate on this issue has been going on for many years, including inside UNESCO. Established teacher unions appear to be most rigid on the question of regarding as teachers those who work in adult literacy. In the eyes of the government and the unions, teachers at the primary level and beyond represent a well structured and recognised profession in contrast to literacy "facilitators", who often even work on a voluntary basis. However, and in view of the large number of literacy facilitators operating in the country, it is time to look at the training, status and professional outlook of such teaching personnel.

First of all, one has to assess the scope of the problem of illiteracy in a country like Bangladesh. It is assumed there are more than 60 million adult illiterates in the country, truly a gigantic task of training and learning, if widespread literacy activities were to be started.

For the time being, in Bangladesh NGOs are largely delivering the task of teaching the 3Rs, often under difficult circumstances, and with very limited resources. MPME is also running some valuable programmes. However, only a small fraction of

the 60 million illiterates is actually following any kind of literacy course. Probably less than 10,000 "facilitators" are involved in this difficult task, usually on a part time basis. To complicate the matter, one has to acknowledge that only literacy is not the panacea. Recent research on success stories has shown that for instance in rural areas a combination of skills training (income generating skills) and literacy provides the highest chances of acquiring sustainable skills. The problem here being that acquired professional skills appear to be more sustainable than literacy. The absence of a literate environment also plays a negative role. The complexities of teaching practical skills and functional literacy do point to the performance of a difficult task by the

tors, issues related to adult learning and behaviour are usually left out. The mismatch between the learner's initial motivation and the lack of specific training of the literacy teacher contributes to a rapidly decreasing motivation by the adult students, followed by early drop-out. Valuable time could have been gained had the teachers been trained on effective adult pedagogy in classrooms where progress needs to be fast but sustainable. Learners need to see early results when spending daily hours on learning. Hence literacy teachers have to use a method of teaching providing for a rapid acquisition of competencies, without wasting the valuable time of these adults.

Literate environment
Literacy requires sustainability,

The urgent and dramatic task to drastically increase literacy levels in Bangladesh does require to seriously look at the central role of the literacy teacher, and take necessary steps to enhance their training and social status. Imparting literacy alone has not always been successful, and three other promising strategies need to be considered in the battle against illiteracy: linking literacy with professional skills training, paying attention to literacy sustainability and develop post-literacy strategies, involving the literacy teachers as facilitators; and integrating literacy teachers, with full qualifications, into the national teaching profession.

"facilitator".

Teaching adults
Those imparting literacy and skills have usually not received any significant pre-training for this challenging and complex task. As for adults, inserted in a dense social network with distinct social responsibilities, to follow learning courses is a considerable challenge, it requires a high degree of motivation, to be created by the "facilitator", but also by the quality and design of the courses. Often the simple perspective to learn a real skill or trade, with the perceived possibility at the end to increase income within the next months to come, motivates to devote one hour a day to learning. The diverse learner profiles further aggravate the difficulty of the facilitator/teacher to adapt his/her teaching to all at the same time. The "one-size-fits-all" teaching approach has condemned so many literacy projects...Yet, had the literacy "facilitator" received proper pre-training with respect to the social complexity of the task, learning outcomes would have been much higher in many cases. Whatever training is currently being imparted to literacy facilitators,

something that can be acquired in the post-literacy stages. This is a time when reading and writing skills need to be further developed, if possible on a daily basis. Post-literacy has become a standard component of any literacy project, where the role of a leader, animator or facilitator appears as one of the most promising strategies. The knowledge of local constraints, availability of learners, needs of further learning and simply the personal ties the teacher already has developed, make him/her the best placed person. In a rural, isolated environment, the teacher would become the backbone of the entire post-literacy process: organizing reading and writing sessions, reading competitions, bringing in new and attractive reading materials, developing materials with advanced learners, etc, to confirm acquired skills and competencies. At this stage the literacy teacher is indeed entering the realm of community work and empowerment, something which will distinguish his/her job from any other teaching task known. This obviously has also implica-

tions concerning their training and job outlook. The extended job requirements covering also post-literacy do add a new and challenging dimension and will enhance his/her status in the community and beyond. On the other hand literacy organisers, NGOs or government, can no longer consider the acquisition of literacy as a short-term job, three or five months only. It should be seen by all as a fulltime commitment to learning.

Training of teachers
In view of the above, the scope and curriculum of training of literacy teachers need to be fully reconsidered, with a view to firmly establish their professional skills. The literacy teachers should get pre-service training which would impart basic principles of adult

Conclusion
The urgent and dramatic task to drastically increase literacy levels in Bangladesh does require to seriously look at the central role of the literacy teacher, and take necessary steps to enhance their training and social status.

Imparting literacy alone has not always been successful, and three other promising strategies need to be considered in the battle against illiteracy: linking literacy with professional skills training, paying attention to literacy sustainability and develop post-literacy strategies, involving the literacy teachers as facilitators; and integrating literacy teachers, with full qualifications, into the national teaching profession. Experience has shown that projects considering the above requirements, have achieved impressive results, especially with respect to sustainability. What is needed now is the recognition of literacy teachers as full-fledged teachers; in particular the teacher unions and government need to bring forward this long overdue recognition.

ing in isolated environments.

Salaries and benefits
If we accept the wide scope of responsibilities of literacy teachers, and having agreed on the relevance of pre-service training, other elements equally call for attention. For example until now, literacy managers at higher levels considered their work of short time nature, and no qualifications were required except being able to read and write. As we have seen from the above such assumptions have caused the failure of many a project. What is needed now is to reconsider not only the training but also salaries consistent with the training and the difficult type of work required. This would mean that literacy teachers if well trained, could receive a salary equivalent to that of a primary school teacher. Literacy teachers must be enabled to look forward to professional perspectives, job security, further training, and career perspectives.

The author is Director, UNESCO/Dhaka, Bangladesh.

INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN Make them aware of their rights

PARVEZ BABUL

TO protest and end brutality and violence against women the United Nations declared November 25 as the International Day to End Violence against Women. The day commemorates the death of the Mirabel Sisters who were brutally killed for their political activism against the dictator Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic in 1960.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

World Health Organization (WHO) noted in its report that the most form of violence against women is domestic violence, or violence in families. At times women are seriously injured and in some cases killed or die as a result of their injuries due to violence. The nature of violence against women in families has prompted comparisons to torture. The assaults are intended to injure women's psychological health as well as physical.

Results of reliable, large-scale studies of every country indicate that between 16 percent and 52 percent of women have been assaulted by an intimate partner. It is also indicated that widespread violence against women is an important cause of morbidity and mortality. On the other hand, surveys in a number of countries show that from 10 percent to 15 percent of women are forced to have sex by their intimate partner.

In fact, there is no safe place in the world where there is no violence against women. Violence against women starts before they take birth as girls. Even the womb of the mother is not safe for the girl child. If the embryo of the child is detected as a girl, in most of the cases she is being killed by selective illegal abortion. One in every six death of a female infant in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan is due to neglect and discrimination.

Giving less or low quality food to the girls or women is another type of dominating practice and indirect violence against women. As a result most of the girl children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers suffer from long-term malnutrition. Basically malnourished women give birth to malnourished children. Thus we cannot be free from the curse of the vicious cycle of micronutrient deficiencies. Still there are ignorance and superstitions that if the pregnant women

are given more food then the child can grow bigger in the womb and create complicity at the time of delivery!

Still girl children are unwelcome in most of our families. I talked with many educated girls and found ignorance among them about their rights. Suppose, dowry is illegal, but many girls and parents are afraid of saying 'no' to dowry as it may result in breaking of marriage. Sometimes we see our sisters or daughters killed or burnt by their husbands and in-laws for dowry. But a social revolution against dowry is not created yet due to some greedy people in our society.

In a recently held seminar: "Forced marriage a gross violation of human rights", the speakers said that series of crimes are often committed in forced marriages where victims may be abducted, abused, imprisoned, harassed, beaten, raped and as such they even try to kill themselves. On the other hand, social insecurity and family pressure lead to early marriage and repeated pregnancy, and often force them to have unsafe abortions.

Any way, let us see the following historical declarations favouring women, which describe the equal rights of women and how to end discrimination/ violence against them.

Beijing Declaration: "...Women's rights are human rights. Eradication of poverty based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice requires the involvement of women in economic and social development, equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centered sustainable development. Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Promote and protect all human rights of women and girls..."

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women: "...Refrain from engaging in violence against women. Because violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution. Take measures to ensure that law enforcement officers and public officials are responsible for implementing policies to prevent" ...

United Nations Millennium Declaration: "...The General Assembly (resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000) proclaims the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from

hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights. No individual and no nation must be denied the opportunity to benefit from development. The equal rights and opportunities of women and men must be assured"...

Therefore, we get clearance through the above declarations that women are human beings too same as men. Our constitution and the United Nations have given women the same rights in everything like men. But to make women aware about their rights is a vital and urgent issue. The more they are aware of it the more they would tend to practice equal rights. Topics on women's rights should be included in curriculum so that the girl children can know those and involve themselves in the social revolution to establish the truth that women's rights are human rights.

In fact, the equality of men and women is linked with men's attitude on equal rights of women. So, women deserve the opportunity and favourable environment to get proper/ higher education, non-violent atmosphere everywhere. Also to be self-reliant through earning, to get floor to raise their voice for due rights, chance to say 'no' and good-bye to unacceptable/ conditional marriage, dowry and unsafe sex. So, men's positive attitudes, support, helpful cooperation and active participation can play vital role to prevent and end violence against women.

Between 50 and 60 per cent of women in Bangladesh experience some form of domestic violence. Every week more than ten women in Bangladesh suffer an acid attack that leaves them brutally disfigured, often blind and disabled. More than 200 women are murdered each year in Bangladesh, because their families cannot pay demanded dowry. Adult literacy rate is 42.5 percent for females while it is 59.4 percent for males. Similarly, net enrollment at secondary school is 19 percent for females as against 23 percent for males. The wage rate for women is only 57percent of men.

These discriminations must go.

Parvez Babul is a development activist.