

Easier, the Institutional Way

The government doctors' strike has come to an end on the sixteenth day by virtue of a High Court Order in the shape of a mandatory injunction. Almost a miracle has happened given the way things were drifting between the medicalmen, led by the BMA, and the Health Ministry. It's neither media persuasion nor a last-minute settlement negotiated through any normal administrative mechanism nor indeed the fear of alienation from the public that has made it possible.

The Vacation Bench of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court not only issued the mandatory injunction on the striking doctors asking them to resume their duties immediately it also delivered *Rule Nisi* upon BMA and others "to show cause as to why their strike should not be declared illegal." So, on a writ petition, the very legality of their strike is coming under a process of adjudication at the highest level of the judiciary. The doctors' association will now make out a case defending their strike. It is noteworthy that the BMA does not say it has called off the strike. On the contrary, it has used the word 'postponement' while referring to its latest action. In other words, the BMA seems to be retaining its right to strike — in the same matter.

The High Court, on a petition filed by the BMA President Dr M A Majed, on the other hand, has issued *Rule Nisi*, returnable within four weeks, upon the government to show cause why the terms of the agreement it had reached with the BMA on January 20, should not be implemented by it. The BMA argues that a 7-member inter-ministerial committee was formed on February 13, to implement the decisions contained in the agreement, not later than a month thenceforward. But nothing tangible really followed despite numerous sittings with the government, they add.

As things stand now the government has promoted the 7th grade health cadre officials to the sixth grade scale and is ready to implement four other demands like regularisation of the services of 1362 adhoc appointees, regularisation of the positions of the acting Civil Surgeons and Assistant Directors, exemption of the doctors (up to the 10th BCS) from senior scale examinations, etc, and encadrement of doctors working in the family planning directorate.

While reflecting on the latest turn in the situation we are constrained to make what we believe to be some quite valid points. It is not agitation but an ultimate recourse to the institution of judiciary, as the final arbiter of justice, that a remedial process has got underway now. Since it is an institution that we have to go to anyway for the redressal of our grievances why not adopt the institutional methods from the very beginning to sort out problems? The tax-payers were denied of medical treatment when, on top of that, the functioning government hospitals and rural health centres, private practice also came to a partial halt. Consequently, a writ was filed seeking to restore medical services in the country.

What however, cannot escape public notice and perhaps a close scrutiny, is why the BMA did not seek a judicial remedy in the first place before deciding to go for the strike which put the whole nation through an ordeal. The *Rule Nisi* that has now been issued on the government could have materialised much earlier and the process of implementation of their demands quickened, even smoothened.

The BMA no doubt has a constituency to serve, namely, that of thousands of doctors and the medicalmen are also very much entitled to their individual political inclinations; but when it comes to dealing with the lives of people it is the professional responsibilities that should top their agenda.

Eco-friendly Interment

Human vulnerabilities, as manifest in religious practices and sentimental demands, would not allow bodies to be recycled. Rather, an overwhelming majority of our people — about 80 to 90 per cent, would have permanent places for interring the dead. This is inspite of their religion, Islam, wanting the faithful not to venerate graves. We have sometime back pointed at the problem of burial going fast out of hand in Dhaka. A generation's tenure of earthly existence is said to be plus-minus 25 years. In 25 years from today the present generation of nine million Dhakaites would be replaced by almost a new one. Where will the old one go? Millions would go to their graves. And some to the burning ghats.

The problem in New Zealand, on this score, is much less formidable than it is here. Still they are trying to find an answer to this important problem posing a threat of very soon becoming as unmanageable as the dumping of nuclear waste is at present. A report from Auckland says a local city council is considering the creation of an environment-friendly cemetery without coffins and where headstones would be replaced by trees. They are thinking of a system where a reusable box would transport bodies to cemeteries for burial in a shallow grave sprinkled with quicklime to speed decomposition.

It seems Muslims are way ahead in this respect. They have no use for coffins and they have been burying their dead in shallow graves for at least fifteen hundred years. And then there is no need for a headstone in a Muslim grave either. The only improvement on the Muslim practice — speaking environmentally, that is — is the use of a chemical to hasten decomposition. The population of Dhaka, or for that matter Bangladesh, being predominantly Muslim, things here should have been capitalily environment-friendly. Accretions — possibly received from subcontinental practices — regarding disposal of the body, which insist on establishing a permanent and undisturbed home for the body, are synonymous with more and more land being used up as time fleets.

In harking back to orthodoxy lies a way out for us in this matter. This must be a very rare kind of exception to the rule that not in rigidity but in resilience and the liberal outlook lies the resolution of all of man's problems.

Science has No Miracle Cure for World's Ills

Linda B Bolido writes from Cairo

There is a widespread and mistaken belief, that as in the past, science and technology can produce 'miracles' to solve current problems so we can go ahead as before

If humanity does not stabilize the global population in a humane and gentle way, nature will do it brutally and savagely.

If consumption is not curbed, people will leave a ravaged earth. And science and technology, warned physicist Henry Kendall, a 1990 Nobel Prize winner, will not provide the answers to halt this drift towards certain destruction.

In one of two lectures presented during the recent International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) here, Dr Kendall, a physics professor at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States, said: "There is a widespread and mistaken belief that science and technology, through previous 'miracles' can produce solutions to (current) problems. So we can go ahead as before because science and technology will rescue the world."

Dr Kendall said the scientific community does not believe this nor should anyone else.

While science and technology are important for the task ahead, he said they will not rescue people from their difficulties because they are human problems and will have to be dealt with on that basis. He said the nature of current problems is not of science and technology.

The Nobel laureate reiterated the 1992 warning of the

Union of Concerned Scientists that human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Many human activities being carried out in huge scales are putting a tremendous pressure on systems on which life depends. The pressure worsens as the capacity of human beings increases.

People have "already altered the natural world in very significant ways", Dr Kendall said citing, among other things, climatic change, ozone depletion due to certain chemicals and acid rain.

While the bulk of these harmful activities relate to energy production and use, human activity has also altered land surface. It has caused deforestation and loss of species, with the numbers of animals and plants decreasing at very alarming rates. The destruction of land is affecting food production, the physicist said. Earth faces water and irrigation problems. Groundwater, which is not replaceable, is being drawn at disturbing quantities and salinization is worsening, threatening the world with severe water shortages.

Pressure on the oceans is increasing due to pollution caused by soil runoff, industrial and agricultural chemicals, among others.

The Green Revolution, which allowed food production to grow at very impressive rates especially during the

1960s and to outpace population increase, has contributed to many of current problems because it was not pursued sustainably. Moreover, Dr Kendall said, it is unlikely that similar increases could be achieved in the near future.

The physicist said that just to keep up with current population increases, food and energy productions will have to grow at twice the current rates at the very least.

The Nobel winner stressed that the stabilization of population is a prerequisite if remedies proposed are to become achievable. He said this is clear to those who have looked at the problem.

On the other hand, the physicist said developed countries (which is home to one in five of the world's people) have the responsibility to reduce overconsumption and wastage of resources. Calling the developed nations the world's largest polluters, especially the US, he said these countries have to reduce pressure on resources and the environment. He added that developed nations have to help the developing countries improve food accessibility and distribution.

Dr Kendall stressed that earth and its resources are finite. There are limits to the global systems capacity to provide food and fuel, absorb waste, and support people. Humanity is approaching those limits and injuring the systems at the same time.

He said even the scientific community is deeply troubled by recent developments. Given the size and magnitude of current problems, as well as the speed of development of problems, Dr Kendall said this means the present generation will have to cope with them and not leave their solution to the next generation.

In another ICPD lecture, Dr M S Swaminathan, head of the Centre for Research on Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development in Madras, India and former director-general of the Philippine-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), stressed that food security is not simply physical but also economic access to food.

"The problem is not so much physical access but lack of purchasing power due to lack of employment and income. The ability to buy as well

as availability of food are important in food security," Dr Swaminathan said.

Moreover, according to him, what is important is food security at the household or individual level, particularly for women and girls, not at the international/national level.

Dr Swaminathan pointed out that despite impressive successes in improving food production in quantitative terms, there is still a lot of hunger, especially chronic malnutrition in many parts of the world.

He stressed that it will be very difficult for people to have a satisfactory way of life, particularly in terms of safe water supply and balanced diet, if the human population continues to grow.

Like Dr Kendall, he stressed the need to maintain a balance between population and food supply. He also echoed the physicist's assessment that at least a doubling of food production will be needed to keep pace with the continued growth in human population.

Dr Swaminathan said what is important is to marry ecology, technology and economics in a sustainable way. Biological diversity — or the mix of living organisms which ensure each others' survival — has to be looked at in ecological, economic and social terms.

He said taking action is necessary to avoid the dire predictions about humanity's

future.

In a statement at the ICPD plenary, Jacques Diouf, director-general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), reiterated some of the points raised by Dr Swaminathan.

He reported that there are still 78 countries classified as low-income food-deficit nations. These nations have a combined population of 3.2 billion. About 800 million people in the developing world have too little food to eat to lead a productive and healthy life.

"This year, additional millions are again living under the threat of famine," Mr Diouf said.

He added: "FAO believes that to succeed, population policies must be an integral part of an overall development strategy which has food security as one of its main objectives."

On the other hand, James Gustave Speth, administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) joined in Dr Kendall's indictment of the industrialized world for the current global crises.

"At the global level, population growth in the developing world isn't the main threat to our planet's sustainability. The biggest threat comes from population growth and resource consumption in the industrialized world," Mr Speth stated.

— Depthnews Asia

Future of Jute: Appropriate Attention is the Need of the Hour

by M A Laís

The Roundtable on Future of Jute (DS 19 Sept) throws enough light in the matter. I am too insignificant to make any comment. Yet as a retired service holder, who had been closely associated with jute and jute industry for over 35 years, I feel I may also throw some light on this subject of vital national importance.

THE main reason of losing the world market of jute by Bangladesh may be traced back to a comment of the first jute minister of Bangladesh, Mr Musleh-uddin Ahmed, who once visited Dundee (UK) in connection with the jute business. He was shockingly shown some 'yellow powder' of rotten jute. In a tray, by the Dundee raw jute traders. On coming back to Dhaka, he was almost choked at the airport, and commented to the waiting reporters, "We are producers of the best quality jute but we are not the best businessmen." His such comment need no further clarification, why our jute, the golden fibre, is gradually losing its position in the world market.

Jute is hygroscopic by nature. It regains moisture under normal atmospheric condition, up to max. 17.75% (18%) in the wet season and 13.75% (14%) in the dry season. But for trading, and for local consumption in the mills, max. up to 20% in the wet season, and 16% in the dry season were allowed for procurement of jute. Unfortunately, our traders of raw jute did not, and do not, bother even now about such limitation while trading of raw jute for export, as well as for local consumption in the mills.

Various grades and qualities of jute are generally determined by its strength, length, colour, smoothness, and presence of specs, runners on the body of the fibre, and the percentage of hard roots etc. High grade export quality jute is supposed to be completely free from all defects. The export quality fibre should be sufficient in length, strength, brilliancy of colour and in smoothness. 'Top' and 'Mid' qualities are generally meant for export, while the 'Bottom' quality jute is required for local consumption in the mills. But the question is, do our traders honestly and sincerely follow the criteria while dealing with raw jute?

Dishonesty has become a chronic disease in most of our trades, and perhaps more so in jute trade. The so-called 'commission' has reportedly become almost a legal demand (?) by our sector corporation personnel (buyers), from the

sellers of raw jute at the different jute procurement centres in the distant villages of the country. The same 'commission' system, is said to be also in practice with the agents of foreign buyers. Such type of illegal and corrupt practice in business must be severely dealt with, if we want to revive our jute for the future.

The British Expert Mission to Adamjee

Immediately after liberation, the Bangladesh Jute Industries Corporation (BJIC) was formed as part of the country's nationalisation policy. This corporation was, later on, renamed Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC). All the private jute mills, including those mills, abandoned by the Pakistani owners were brought under BJMC. The late Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had requested the British government to send an expert team to study and improve the condition of the war damaged jute industry of Bangladesh. In response to his call, The British Mission to Adamjee was here during 1973/74.

One of the members of the team happened to be Mr D Robertson under whom I had the opportunity to work for several years during Pakistan time. He came as a technical and jute expert with the mission. On coming to Bangladesh after the war, Mr D Robertson was looking for me and was pleased to learn that I was alive. Later on, I was brought from the Rajshahi Jute Mills to Adamjee by him, and placed in the overall charge of 'Jute and Batch Control'.

The British Mission's thorough study and recommendations for improvement of the Adamjee Jute Mills were recorded in their quarterly 'Bulletin' published from Dundee and sent to the Bangladesh government as well as to the BJMC for implementation.

Since I was very closely associated with the British Mission, particularly with jute and the jute batch, I should say that those were an excellent recommendations and, if implemented properly by the BJMC, the story of the jute industry of Bangladesh would have been different now. And the world consumers would not also have gone for whole-sale artificial synthetic fibres now contesting our products of natural jute fibres on all fronts. Besides other aspects, I could only say, the standard set by the British mission for White 'X' Bottom with proper strength and max. 20% root, occasional specs, but no runners, were their suggestion. (Here, I feel it will not be out of place to mention, that at present, as high as up to 30% root, including specs and sometimes Runners are also allowed as standard for White 'X' Bottom jute). However, the recommendation of the British mission on Jute Batch was, that only White 'X' Bot. of their standard would be sufficient for the Hessian Fabrics. As for the CBC Batch, White 'C' Bot and Tassa 'X' Bot to be used but no Mesta (it's a cruel fact that low grade weak fibre Mesta was being regularly used in the CBC Batch just to keep the 'Batch Price' down after departure of the British mission from Bangladesh. Mesta being a weak fibre, the foreign buyers did never like Mesta to be injected into the CBC Batch).

The British mission's suggestions on Jute and the 'Jute Batch' was so nice, so economic, and so high in standard that, the average daily production of the Adamjee Jute Mills raised as high as up to 265/270 tons per day, during their stay i.e. 1974/75, with reasonable cost/ton and max. profit.

The British mission's main objective of productivity in the Adamjee was:

1) An ideal Batch composition with the best standard

quality of jute for an economic 'Batch-price' — no cheap Batch-price injecting poor quality jute into the Batch composition, making the Batch low, which is injurious and affects production, quality of fabrics, and subsequently, leads the mills toward loss. 2) Low cost and high production. 3) To maintain steady and standard quality of finished products in order to attract foreign buyers. 4) Proper planning for advance booking of sale, and timely shipment. 5) Proper planning for timely procurement of raw jute, quality-wise, as per production requirement, to start just with the beginning of the jute season. 6) Proper maintenance and cleaning of the machineries, with requisite stock of all kinds of spare parts in the store. 7) Early programme to be chalked out (before making advance booking of sale) for fulfilment of sale commitment by quick supply of finished goods for timely shipment, leaving no scope for unnecessary over-time work. 8) Disciplined administration, punctuality in duty by officers, staff, and workers, and smooth running of all the machineries just from the starting hour of the mills (which is only possible if the Project Head remains present at the mill-gate well ahead of the mills office starting hour).

There are the pre-conditions for viability of a jute mills. Unfortunately, after 1975 tragedy (killing of Bangabandhu), the principle and system of the BJMC were totally changed (for bad, as it appears now), and as a result, so valuable recommendations of the 'British Mission' were thrown into the waste paper box having been totally rejected by the BJMC. Such poor attitude of the BJMC, as well as of the successive governments of Bangladesh, towards jute, after 1975, is one of the main reasons for gradual downfall of jute and jute industry, maybe

leading to its ultimate extinction in the near future, if measures are not taken now.

Role of International Jute Organisation (IJO)

The IJO was formed with its Headoffice in Dhaka with a noble intention of improving the overall condition of jute sector of Bangladesh and in the neighbouring countries. The members of the IJO were from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Thailand, and the representatives, from other buyers of the donor countries of Asia, Europe, and the USA. One of the main objectives of the IJO was to improve the quality of raw jute in Bangladesh, and to find out ways and means of expanding trade facilities of raw jute and jute goods to foreign countries. In this regard, one of their main programme in Bangladesh was to improve the quality of raw jute at growers level by eliminating roots, specs, runners etc, through improved and modern process of 'Rating' by giving proper training to our growers — who are mostly poor and illiterate, living in the interior villages.

Now the question is, how far their mission in Bangladesh has been successful? Have they made any effort by deputing their men and field workers to the distant and interior jute growing areas of the country? Have they ever given any training to our poor growers with improved system of 'Rating Process', so that, roots, specs, runners etc could be totally, or at least partly, eliminated? If so, then why our country is losing the world market of raw jute and jute goods? Why the donor countries of the world are discouraging production of jute goods in Bangladesh and, rather, encouraging India and Pakistan to increase their production and export?

From the above it appears that the role of the IJO in Bangladesh is rather negative, and their performance and contribution with regard to improvement of jute and jute industry in this country is nil. I strongly feel there is no more need for presence of the so-called IJO in Bangladesh. Our people, if become sincerely honest, zealous with patriotic mind, can themselves try to revive the future of jute in Bangladesh without any outside assistance.

Some Suggestions

In conclusion, I would like to make some specific suggestions towards survival of jute and jute industry of Bangladesh, negating its total collapse in the near future. The suggestions are:

1) To re-assess the role of the BJMC now controlling about 35 jute mills.

2) To abolish all the zonal offices of Dhaka, Khulna and Chittagong to save cost. The head office in Dhaka alone is quite sufficient to control the mills which number only 35.

3) The BJMC Audit Division may be abolished for the time being. The audit people of the BJMC Head office and the zone office very frequently visit the mills and often keep the management and other floor officers unnecessarily engaged for the whole day, as a result of which the normal function of the mills production is seriously hampered. To speak the truth, those BJMC officers frequent visit to the mills, in the name of inspection, in fact, not always happens to be real

inspection or audit. The mills auditing can well be made by government commercial audit team, at much lesser cost once in a year.

4) The project head of each mills under BJMC should be given maximum autonomy and full administrative power to run the mills independently, of course, with accountability so that, they may be able to bring the mills into viable productivity within a reasonable time limit allowed to them.

5) A comprehensive programme to be chalked out for procurement of raw jute quality-wise, as per batch composition, for production of different qualities of fabrics at the mills, well ahead of the coming jute season, so that the procurement of raw jute can be made just with the beginning of the season — not in the last week of August or in September, as it has become a peculiar system now-a-days. And raw jute should be purchased, directly from real growers in open market, not through the Farhians or middlemen and contractors.

6) The CBA to be banned totally (if necessary, by enacting provision by the government). These CBA people, as it appears, unnecessarily interfere into the mills normal functions. They themselves often doing no work, just roam about in the mills and office, in many cases creating chaos and hampering normal production.

In absence of the CBA, the general sincere workers, staff and officers should be paid handsome wages/salary against their hard work for increasing productivity of the mills. Besides this, other lucrative facilities may also be provided to them, so that they need not go for any CBA.

7) The government may recruit some foreign experts from Dundee on contract basis, and appoint them as Project Head or advisor to some of the big mills under BJMC.

8) The government should provide each mills under BJMC with alternative 'Power Supply Generator', so that they may not depend on the 'mercy' of the PDB, which, as often found, is quite unable to supply required 'power' to the mills. Shortage of power supply to almost all the mills except the Adamjee and its frequent strip off or load shedding without prior notice, is another main reason for the jute mills' sustaining heavy loss.

9) In order to expand jute trading in foreign market, all the officers of the Bangladesh diplomatic missions abroad may be instructed to explore the possibility of jute and jute goods from Bangladesh. An incentive bonus scheme may be introduced for the best explorer.

10) In the face of the competition and threat from synthetic fibres, already spread in the world market, alternate ways and means to be found out and intensified effort made for diversification of our jute products.

Of course, it is encouraging to note that our young scientists in this field are not sitting idle. They have already invented 'Geo-Textile' products with low grade jute, and 'Paper-Pulp' with green jute. Their achievements should be handsomely rewarded. But still, we must not allow any complacency to creep in and frantically try to explore the world market with diversified products from our higher grade jute. Then only we can be able to ensure a future for our jute — maybe a golden future for the golden fibre.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Of Plague and politics

Sir, In our country, generally political activities warm up as the temperature slides down with the onset of fair weather prior to winter season. We are now passing through such a weather and, as expected, witnessing a number of political programmes launched by the oppositions and the government. The activities are in the form of strikes, barricades and large gatherings aimed at mass contact. I do not question the wisdom of such activities undertaken by the parties. Nor, do I want to dwell on economics of strikes and mass gatherings in terms of manhour losses and missed output. However, I would like to make a point on the wisdom of holding of mass meetings at this time when we are all living under the dread of plague which has already taken a heavy toll of lives in India.

It is evident from the avail-

able information on the dreadful disease that rats and fleas play a small part in causing epidemics of plague. They are initiators only. Main carriers of the germs of the disease are infected humans who, unless careful enough, can spread the disease to an epidemic proportion. A large number of people can become vulnerable to contracting the disease if they come close to an infected person because germs are transmitted when one coughs, sneezes, or spits. Imagine the great risk of the disease being spread among thousands of healthy people if only one infected person happens to be present in a mass gathering as is now-a-days being organized by the political parties. Meetings aimed at mass contact between politicians and people can turn into masses contracting plague and causing epidemic of the disease (leaders being far off on the high dias may escape the

germs).

I would, therefore, urge the political leaders to postpone holding of public meetings till the threat of plague is over. Many winters will come when leaders will be able to hold mass meetings. But the public should be spared now. It should be remembered that, after all, it is not only the fair weather but also a large number of members of the public who are needed to make public meetings a success.

A concerned citizen
Dhaka

Bangla gazals

Sir, Recently the Gramophone Company of India has released a cassette titled, "Ganer Ek Asharey" which contains Bengali version of some popular Urdu Gazals sung by one of the outstanding gazal vocalists of the sub-continent, Ghulam Ali. Noted artist Asafuddowla has directed the songs.

This is for the first time Ghulam Ali rendered gazals in Bangla. The gazals are soothing and enthralling. Ali's Bengali accent is quite clear and touching. Among the gazals, Meg Eshey Chhuwe chhuwe Jaye, Pose ki money amakey kokhono, Chupi chupi ratdin

are the most popular ones. Asafuddowla has directed the songs quite skillfully and Tejendra Narayan Majumder performed well in music direction.

The cassette — "Ganer Ek Asharey" should be a special addition to the collection of the gazal lovers.

M Zahidul Haque
Asstt Prof. BA, Dhaka

Gruesome

Sir, The news item which was published in different dailies on October 3, 94, about the violent death of a teacher of the Home Economics College at Azampur, Dhaka and her daughter, a student of the Mymensingh Medical College, shocked us deeply. It has been reported that their bodies were found gruesomely severed at their Lalmatia residence.

We just can't accept these sorts of macabre incidents which might never have happened if human beings acted a bit more rationally. These crimes should not go unpunished, the killer/killers must pay the price for their evil acts.

Nur Jahan
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