

Questions about Ansars

There cannot be any question of condoning such an act of indiscipline and misconduct by the Ansars as the one we saw last Thursday. On the other hand, there cannot also be any question of treating the event just as a matter of breach of discipline. There is much more to the story than is evident at first. Any law and order agency, however remotely linked to the main ones, will have to uphold the highest standards of discipline and order. This is the first condition, and it is here that the Ansars have let themselves down, and for which they should, and will have to pay a very heavy price.

However, the event begs a question. Why did it happen? Any attempt to brush the revolt aside as the work of a disgruntled few will be just as foolish as has been the act of revolt itself. Let us not forget that members of any law enforcement agency do not choose a wildcat action as the first option. Nor as the second, third or fourth. They choose it as the last option. Therefore we would like to ask, why were the grievances of the Ansars so shabbily treated? If it is true, as they claim, that a sweeper gets more pay than a regular Ansar, then of course we are asking for trouble. Why was the matter not addressed in time? We have not yet been properly informed as to what steps the authorities took and in what sequence, and what sorts of dialogue was being kept going with the Ansars on this matter. If government's behaviour on other similar instances — like the nurses', be any indicator, then we can assume that it allowed the issue to reach the state where the Ansars felt obliged to take the matter in their own hands. We repeat our unambiguous 'no' to the action that the Ansars took. But we are equally unambiguous about our criticism of the government's habit of indecision, inaction and allowing things to go out of hand and act only when drastic measures are taken by an aggrieved party.

The Ansar issue must be resolved immediately, firmly and fairly. As it is, the act has taken its toll of government's credibility, which can be restored somewhat with quick and decisive action.

An Artiste of Commitment

He had in him an intimation of immortality even as he lived. Rarely did one expect that some day this paraplegic and unstoppable workhorse of a man would stop ticking. And yet on Wednesday Sheikh Lutfar Rahman — Lutfarda to all cultural workers of this land — breathed his last. And the machine that churned out refrains that bore mass movements and sustained them for over four decades stopped with that too.

Sheikh Lutfar was literally *non-pareil* as a contributor to that genre of revolutionary songs called *gano-sangeet*. Although the genre owed its genesis to IPTA — the Indian People's Theatrical Association of Binoy Roy and Jyotirindra Moitra — and the nomenclature to Salil Choudhury, Lutfar Rahman's creations bore a stamp of distinction all his own. And in them you could find all three strands preferred by the *gurus* — the classical-based ones fashioned by Jyotirindra Moitra, the western-influenced upbeat type composed by Salil Choudhury and the genuine Bengal folk introduced by Hemanga Biswas. And such was Lutfarda's greatness that in none of these strands his songs either were modelled on those masters' or borrowed even as much as their phrasings. In *Orey bishom doirar dhew uthal-pathal kowrey* or the one that set the boat of Bengali self-determination on sail *Orey majhi de nauka chhede de* he was not only true to the folk idiom but advanced the centuries-old airs to newer dimensions. On the other hand, in *Biplober rakto-ranga jhanda orey akashey*, the western chords and beats heightened the rousing effect as never before.

But, as *Amar bhaiyer* is Altaf Mahmud's magnum opus and a sure key to immortality, so is *Janatar sangram cholebe* is Sheikh Lutfar Rahman's. The words by Sikander Abu Jafar are such as come only in ages and the melody and the rhythm that Lutfarda couched them in should be still rarer.

He was a very good singer of Nazrul-geeti and other *raga-based* semi-classicals. And he also excelled in *keertan*. He was no mean composer of *adhunik* love-songs. But above every item of his personal achievement rises stupendously the image of Sheikh Lutfar Rahman — the artiste of commitment, one who lived and created solely for the society.

Buses for DU Students

Recently we ran a story that there are only 16 buses for 10,000 students. To add to the absurdity of the situation, six out of the 16 are out of order. While we fully sympathise with the students, we are not sure whether the University should really take upon itself the task of providing transport for all the non-resident students. A case perhaps could be made about those students living in far off place. The fundamental issue is resource versus the need of the University. As it is, a huge amount of tax payers' money is used to subsidise our University education. It will not be a popular move if further tax payers money is spent on providing bus service for the 10,000 students that the report talks about. Is there a possibility of an enterprising entrepreneur, or a group to put a transport system into place on a commercial basis? Maybe DUCSU, along with all the hall union bodies, can think of setting up a co-operative which will provide this service for a fee (cost, plus a marginal profit) to be borne by the students. This could be a worthwhile experiment for our student leaders to look into. With the help of hired managers such a co-operative could provide useful service, and yet make a healthy profit. And since the student bodies will be the owners of all the assets of this co-operative, there shouldn't be any risk of student factionalism crippling this experiment. There could be many side benefits to such an experiment, not the least of it will be an early exposure to private enterprise and a hands-on training on management. Any takers?

LIKE commodities in an economy, there exists demand for and supply of labour — the most important input to the production of goods and services. That the availability of an efficient and competitive labour force, on the supply side, as a sine qua non for the success of a strategy of labour-intensive manufacturing growth is perhaps, clearly manifested by the experiences of the countries now dubbed as East Asian Tigers. As far as effective demand for labour is concerned, the major determining factors are — sound macro-economic management and technological and strategic policy choices. Economists tend to argue that if the labour market continues to remain rigid and fragile, efficient use of this vital input through market determined prices is hard to come by and as a result, the situation might militate against the strategy of sustained growth and poverty alleviation. For example, if the labour market tends to hatch distortions, labour may not be allocated efficiently in emerging economic opportunities, real wage may fall out of line with productivity, firms might be encouraged to remain uncompetitive, and wrong signals might confuse skilled labour. Labour market problems, thus, continue to be at the helm of policy agenda in both developed and developing countries.

Quantity of Labour

Available studies (e.g. by World Bank, ADB, BBS) tend to show that, as in 1993, Bangladesh's labour force (people aged 15+) was estimated to be 52 million and is reported to be growing at about 3 per cent per annum. Of this labour force, agricultural sector is reported to absorb nearly 64 per cent and thus continues to be the largest employer followed by trade

Labour Market: Flexibility Needed

by Abdul Bayes

The labour market needs urgent reforms to correctly signal demand for and supply of labour. The reform is also needed to allocate labour inputs most efficiently so that the cost advantage is not eroded to give space to competitors in the international market.

and services sectors (15 per cent), manufacturing (14 per cent) and other (2 per cent). With about 1.6 million workers entering the job market every year, provisions for productive employment should constitute the single most challenge for a country like Bangladesh with almost half of its population groaning below the poverty line.

Bangladesh's labour market comprises a formal and an informal segment. The former is loosely attributed to the sectors with proper licensing, banking facilities, fiscal and monetary incentives and appropriate infrastructural networks while, the latter applies to those mostly uncared for by the modern amenities of economic incentive structures. Thus divided, as could be read from available statistics, Bangladesh's labour market is dominated by the informal sector. For example, of the total labour force, about 46 per cent is reportedly classified as unpaid family workers, about 30 per cent as self-employed, 15 per cent casual workers and only about 10 per cent under regular full time wage employment. Thus 90 per cent of the total labour force seem to reside inside the informal sector ring and are usually hired by the formal sector. The rate of open unemployment at 1-2 per cent should sound healthy, but inclusion of low-productivity works could contribute to this situation. Estimates of under-employment from available studies would indicate an equivalent of 26 per cent open

unemployment in 1993 and could rise to 31 per cent by the year 2000.

Of the formal sector employment, the government sector accounts for a little over one-third implying that the ripples of government's wage and employment policy might run down the corridors of the formal sector private employers.

One of the characteristics of formal sector industrial labour is that most of the worker are reported to come from marginal farming families owning a maximum of 1.50 acres. Ninety percent of the workers regularly maintain rural connections i.e. they are not permanently migrated to urban areas. One-tenth of the married workers live with their spouses due to inadequate housing.

Quality of Labour

At the end of the day, it is not only the quantity but the quality of labour that matters most for sustained growth and development. Taking the level of general education as a proxy for quality or efficiency, Bangladesh's frustrating experience would perplex the advocates of a growth through an export push. The Labour Force Survey 1989 shows that, in urban manufacturing, 46 per cent is reported to have no education while 40 per cent is reported to have education up to 10th class and only 15 per cent above that. Trade and restaurants seems to fare well with 26 per cent having no education and 52 per cent up

to 10th class and 21 per cent above that. Comparing the level with neighbouring countries as well as with those of East and South East Asia, it can possibly be argued that Bangladesh labour lag far behind and unless educated through formal or informal means, their productivity might continue to remain low. Apart from social imperatives, the urgency of providing higher general level of education should attract more and more attention of the policy makers. The current wage policy also seems to be a deterrent for skill upgrading of the workers. If wage is not linked to productivity i.e. if a skilled worker fails to claim more than an unskilled one of the same status, then why should some one invest in furthering his frontiers of knowledge and training? More productive Mr X must have a price which is higher than that received by low productive Mr Y, but Bangladesh's current wage fixation appears to hardly comply with the principle.

Public Sector Domination

It is jokingly said that a Bangladeshi labour in the formal sector grabs wage instead of earning it by dint of his hard labour. This allegation mostly relates to those in the public sector accounting for 35 per cent of the work force. Public wage policies and minimum wage regulations are alleged to have allowed wages to rise faster than productivity with its perceptible adverse impacts on international competitiveness. Bangladesh ranks

much above Sri Lanka and other competitors in terms of cost of production of homogeneous products. There is no denying the fact that such low productivity also owes to low investment in plant and machinery, power shortage and also to bad management of enterprises so much so that labour is not alone responsible for the total fall in productivity. On the other hand, it is being argued that rather than allowing Bangladesh's labour market to play its role, government's all pervasive interventions in the labour market excessively politicised the labour relations and contributed to a deepening distrust between labour and management.

Militant Formal Sector

The labour unions (3 per cent of the work force) are alleged to be militants and visibly derive their strength from their linkages with political parties. The government in the past (even now) responded to this alleged militancy either by (a) raising wages which enterprises were not able to afford to pay or (b) by overmanning employment levels, or by both. Let's see how at least factor (b) could affect the profitability enterprises. If for a given enterprise the output is 100 units and the number of employees is 50, then labour productivity is 2.0. But if the firm had a labour productivity of 2.5 in the past, then it could be reasoned that the labour requirement for 100 units should have been 40 (=100/2.5). Thus overstuff-

ing is 10 (=50-40). Available evidence tends to show that, in some cases, one-fifth of employees in the 'workers' category and a little over half in the 'officers and staff' category are redundant. If the redundants could be chopped off then, according to one estimate, Tk. 1.4 billion, would be saved which could make 12 loss making enterprises turn into profitable ones.

The Need of the Hour

The labour market needs urgent reforms to correctly signal demand for and supply of labour. The reform is also needed to allocate labour inputs most efficiently so that the cost advantage is not eroded to give space to competitors in the international market. Although the need for reform has long been in the air, very little seems to have been done in this regard. Without going into the details, few areas of weaknesses could nevertheless be identified. These are: (1) Doing away with centralized system or wage fixation and decentralising collective bargaining system i.e. placing the wage determination at sectoral level rather than at the centre for the whole economy; (2) De-politicizing the Union movement; (3) Stipulating more resources on account of labour's education, training and housing; and (4) Privatizing Public sector units with due compensation relocation of the existing employed labour. It should be remembered that a flexible labour market is a boon while a rigid one is a bane to the growth of output and employment in the economy. Let us stir our labour market with more flexibility.

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Cambodia: A Troubled Recovery

Despite Cambodia's lingering problems, many experts are not counting out the war-weary nation. Leah Makabenta of Inter Press Service reports from Bangkok.

Rouge

It is too early to tell what effect the Cabinet changes — especially the firing of Rainsy, whom many regard as Cambodia's most accomplished technocrat — will have on the nation. But for many outsiders, it seems that a year after the departure of a US\$2 billion UN peacekeeping mission that helped run the nation, organic polls and set the stage for a coalition government and a democratic constitution, Cambodia is suffering from political confusion.

Indeed, the ultra-left Khmer Rouge remains unrepentant and is waging an insurgency against Phnom Penh. The abortive July coup and recent hardline attitude toward the media also reflect deep-seated problems, of corruption, enmity and disunity in the coalition government.

US academic Frederick Brown prefers to use the 'half-full', half-empty glass analogy. Says the chairman of East Asian studies at Johns Hopkins University: "In the case of Cambodia, the glass is three-quarters empty, but you have to admit that it is one-quarter full."

It is a cautious optimism shared by former peacekeepers who served in the 22,000-member United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

"There are a lot of problems and they're making very slow progress," says Jerrold Huguet, population affairs officer of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia-Pacific (ESCAP). "But it's too early to say how long the government can carry on without collapsing or becoming repressive or engaging in civil war. I don't think all these issues are resolved yet."

An accurate assessment of the situation, like everything

else in Cambodia, is complicated by the country's bloody history and the severity of its impact on the people and culture, experts say. In the last 20 years, Cambodia has been traumatised by a massive US bombing campaign, genocide, civil war and foreign occupation — a state affairs ended only by the intervention of key foreign powers.

Sympathetic Cambodia watchers say the agreement signed in Paris in 1991 merely set off the peace and reconciliation process. This is still going on, they say, so perhaps the situation not so simple as it is made out to be in the media.

Huguet, who served in the UNTAC electoral component, says at least Cambodia now has a framework in which economic, political, social and human rights development can take place. He notes: "You now have a government which is probably in many ways an improvement on the previous one, but more important a government that nearly all countries in the world recognise and are willing to give aid."

"If there are problems now at least it's not because of international isolation or opposition from other governments," he adds the UN official.

Long starved of international assistance, Cambodia began receiving massive amounts of aid after the warring factions signed the Paris peace pact three years ago. Some experts worry that may change now that Rainsy has been fired, as Rainsy and his wife, who remains deputy governor of

the Cambodian Central Bank, have been telling diplomats in the past few months that they have full confidence in the government and that the donors should follow suit.

Experts say, despite Phnom Penh's problems, there is institution-building and capacity-building going on, more trained Cambodians are coming home from overseas and

the international agencies and foreign non-government organisations are there in force.

A group of former UNTAC peacekeepers who met in Singapore in August said the government was doing well, with foreign businessmen regarding the prospects of the country bright enough to increase their investments there.

Business executives in Phnom Penh cite the new Cambodian investment law as one of the recent positive developments that could stand some attention from the press, which they say is too preoccu-

SARPV: Disability Tips

by Shahnaz Begum

with the physical impairments of the person.

Disability is a Human Issue

In our country people with disabilities are leading their lives in inhuman ways and their basic human rights are being violated constantly. We focus on physical impairments when considering our disabled population, before counting them as human beings. This stands as exactly the reverse of the ideal of basic human rights: Equalisation of opportunity to participate in activities in all spheres of social life. People with disabilities are excluded from civil and political rights, e.g. the right to a self-reliant life, to freedom of self-expression, to justice, to protection from violence and oppression, to equality of economic and socio-cultural life (e.g. right to equal employment opportunities), to safety, to social needs, to self-respect, dignity and ego-needs, to education, to information which is unobtainable due to lack of accessibility and bad communications, to mental recreation and refreshment — in essence, rights to any developmental concern, though these are supposedly universally recognized as equal for all regardless of sex, race, language, religion, and impairment.

3rd December: Let it be Effective

In our everyday conversation and writing we always use the synonyms "inability" and "unable" for disability and disabled and similarly ability and able as the antonyms for disability and disabled. Not only are the general public accustomed to this misconception of disability, but also people with disability are indoctrinated in this social attitude. This example vividly depicts how acute the problem of disability is in our society. Such misbelief, ignorance, superstitions and negative social attitudes are hindering the development of disabled people as self-respecting and self-reliant members of society. It serves to keep them apart from the rest of society and also contradicts the ideal of equal human rights for all. So the 3rd December, "International Day of Disabled Persons" is a platform from which we will start our combat against all these inequalities.

Here we highlight some information which, we hope, will focus on the issues that Social Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable (SARPV) has learned from its four years of involvement in the field.

Your Attitude Makes Me Disabled!

As we have already mentioned disability does not mean inability. Inability is a permanent state whereas a disability can be overcome by both physically supportive and attitudinal aids. Disabled people are unable to achieve their full potential unless we overlook their special needs and treat them as "normal" people. Otherwise they will be unable to achieve. Where people with disability have had the scope to participate, they have proven their ability to become worthy. So, the problems of disability lie with social attitudes, not

local leaders, public or political figures, committed media people, intellectuals etc. From our experience we can say that integrated effort is a much more effective way to achieve a goal than independent efforts.

All can play a crucial role, from their respective positions, in demonstrating to society.

Accessibility: Let it be a Reality

In our country lack of accessibility is snatching the right to an equal social life from people with disabilities and is restricting them from a world of information, innovation and creation. This includes both the lack of accessible physical infrastructure e.g. inaccessible doors to kitchens and toilets, inaccessible houses and buildings due to lack of ramps and slopes etc. and lack of accessible literature e.g. absence of braille, sign language and inadequate print sizes etc.

In endless ways society is depriving people with disabilities. It would take volumes to illustrate the ways in which the society is depriving them, to show how human beings are violating the human rights of other human beings. So, lastly we want to say that the INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY DAY will uphold the rights of the people with disabilities and we call on everyone not to ignore this event.

A Development Issue, not a Welfare Concern

Taking action e.g. raising awareness and changing attitude to disparity caused by physical impairments, primarily depends on two factors, one is the nature of the action to be taken and the second, the coordination and cooperation from all corners of society. From time immemorial, family and society have always provided some sort of welfare, sympathy and charity-based services, but this only serves to make people with disabilities mentally crippled as well as physically. So, these services should be replaced by equity and development oriented actions, these are more compatible with the concept of social development. Then we need to implement the actions taken for the people with disability in a coordinated way, where everyone will cooperate with each other for establishing an egalitarian society. This will provide equal opportunity and full participation for all members of the society. This cooperation may come from family,

It should also be noted that at 12 o'clock midnight on 3rd December the problems of disabled people do not disappear like Cinderella's coach. The day is of course designed to raise awareness about the plight of disabled people and disability issues. But it also has other, equally important, aspects. It can and should be utilised as a barometer with which to gauge how much has been achieved one year on from the last "International Day of the Disabled". Has the general public's perceptions of disabled people changed in the past year? Has their level of respect improved and pity reduced in that year? Have more aids to mobility and accessibility become noticeable in our everyday lives? Are we thinking in terms of how difficult life is made for disabled people and how things could be improved in order to equalise the huge gap between opportunities available to able bodied people and those with disabilities? These, and many more, questions must be asked if the day is to mean anything at all.

To the Editor...

Let the patriots lead us

Sir, News report had it that three Malaysian football referees arrived to conduct and control football matches in Bangladesh, because the players and the clubs failed to find a local dependable neutral referee in Bangladesh. That is why BFF decided to import foreign experts to run our show.

In a similar scenario, Bangladesh just had Chief Emeka, Secretary General of the Commonwealth, to bring order and discipline over the long-drawn quarrel that our political leaders failed to settle themselves.

So, what is the conclusions? Be it football ground or be it running the country, we need a foreign 'wizard' to settle our problems.

Shame on our politicians and football stalwarts. It's time we get rid of them and make room for genuinely educated, qualified and patriotic younger leaders.

Let us not be guided by foreigners anymore. Let us be led by our own leaders, who must be selfless and dedicated. I am sure we have such people and it's high time they come out of their hibernation to take the responsibility and the 'risk' to lead the nation to economic

prosperity and social order.

From an opium-eating nation, China has come out like a Tiger. From a nameless fishing village, Singapore has emerged as the example for others to follow. We need real leaders. I believe we have, but they have to shed their shyness and face the challenge. We call upon all those who love this country and have genuine feelings for the vast poor majority, to come forward.

Khondkar Habib Dhanomdi R/A. Dhaka.

Fatty and mean politics

Sir, For the sake of the country, the time has come to melt the fat of some of our errant politicians, who, without realising it publicly, harm the country.

Coerced strikes and demonstrations are a sham. And when goondalism will end? Let us bury the past, and look ahead. Those who are unfit to lead should not be encouraged. Some leaders are using the forces of evil to gain their undesired ends.

Pity our simple folks are misled by oratory and war of words.

For how many more years Bangladesh will have to learn lessons? The rhetorical ques-

tion is: Were we, or are we, fit to be free?

Not with this type of leadership; another internal revolution is necessary. Who will take the lead?

A furious citizen Dhaka.

Why this difference?

Sir, It is not known why the BTV authority is so much reluctant to recognise the fact that the Almighty Allah has given His holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) the right to recommend his followers as well as others for awarding Allah's forgiveness and blessings. There are many religious documents in favour of this fact. The Radio Bangladesh in the 'Dua' after the Azan broadcasts — "War Jukna Shafaatahu Youmal Kiyamah" (bless us his (Prophet Muhammad's) recommendation on the hard day of judgement). But very unfortunately, the BTV has discarded the above mentioned line from the 'Dua' after Azan.

The Bangladesh Television is a national media and both Radio Bangladesh and BTV is functioning under the control of the Ministry of Information but why this difference in the 'Dua' after Azan?

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