

DMC Anesthetised Again!

Within three days of its reopening, Dhaka Medical College has been put on course of yet another unscheduled holiday. The reason is recurrent tension and trouble among the students. The source of trouble this time is different though. While dispute over food during a jubilee celebration of the institute led to the sudden and undesirable closure on July 10 following violent clash between rival factions, fight for the possession of a room in one of the halls of residence triggered off the latest one last Wednesday. Three students are receiving treatment with bullet injuries. What a shame! Politics has suffered pollution and dissemination so much in the recent times that the best of intellectual promises have to indulge in internecine bickering over petty issues every now and then.

It might sound like an observation and concern far removed from reality in the light of the already vitiated milieu of our student politics, but we have been sufficiently inspired recently to stand on a new acre of optimism thanks to some utterances of the new government. Like every unprejudiced mind, we would also like to start by believing that the Awami League government headed by Sheikh Hasina is really committed to the cause of keeping the educational institutions free from the negative sides of politics.

Depoliticising the academic arena, at least to free it from the image tarnishing spell of violence, is one of the sweetest and newest promises we have known so far from the highest executive seat of the government. But to arrest the steady qualitative deterioration of student politics, the party in power has to tear itself away from all sorts of provocative activities.

However, the recent flare-up at DMC has apparently betrayed the loud assertion of Awami League's will to say no to politics of violence. Although it always takes two to make something happen, the AL will do well to remember that prestige and privilege of being in the power has robbed itself of the advantage its oppositions have — launching popular negative campaign by holding government responsible for any trouble at every possible opportunity, according to the tradition of our politics. Nevertheless, we want and expect the parties in and outside the power to refrain from the practice of vitiating student politics.

Dealing with Trafficking

A report based on information gathered by local and foreign organisations and carried in a Bangla daily says that several hundred women and children are being smuggled out by traffickers through different routes of our border daily. Even if this sounds a bit exaggerated, there is no denying that trafficking of women and children continues unabated. Neither a government nor a private organisation, according to the report, has kept an account of the number of women and children smuggled out so far, only the cases filed in relation to such trafficking have been estimated at 500 and 300 for the years '93 and '94. During the time from January to March last year, 103 women, 106 men and 69 children could be freed from their traffickers.

Even these figures alone are enough to point to the gravity of the problem and the government's indifference to it. One cannot help feeling a sense of revulsion and outrage when one knows where and how these hapless victims of traffickers end up. Their dreams are smothered in Indian and Pakistani brothels or on organ transplantation tables, in Pakistani families as servants or in the Middle-East, for children, as camel jockeys. Lack of seriousness on the part of the government and negligence of duty or even collusion by law enforcers have made the traffickers' job far from challenging. If the traffickers are caught, the police apply the Passport Act under which the penalty is a maximum fine of Tk 100 or in default seven days' simple imprisonment.

Clearly the criminals and the police make a mockery of the relevant law that, if applied, might have acted as an effective deterrent. Now that a new government has taken over and is pledge-bound to stamp out terrorism from the country, can we ask the authority to consider trafficking a problem on equal footing and hit at it with similar urgency? Both crimes are issues of law and order intertwined with social stability or the lack of it. The home minister has made his stand clear with the senior police officers on the issue of terrorism. He could do the same in relation to trafficking.

A Test for BR Bosses

There is a junction railway station in Bangladesh where, within its yard, an average of seven persons have been run over by trains and about 30 injured every year over the last five years. This is incredible. The first year's toll should have sufficed to prompt authorities to find the cause and take steps so that this wasn't repeated anytime ever after.

Bonapara is not the biggest junction in the western zone, that honour goes to Parbatipur. But it is decidedly the most crowded for many reasons. It is the biggest of the three railway entry points to North Bengal across the Padma and Jamuna. This also is a very important transshipment point for both goods and passengers. And pedestrian traffic in the area finds it convenient to use the yard to cross from one highway system to another. All told, it is always a milling crowd there and most of it are busy jumping over the railway tracks, for want of an overbridge. The concerned ministry has been moved many times over the years and railway ministers have come and gone making promises of an overbridge never to be fulfilled.

The BR is ailing for long. It has been a quarry for mining wealth for far too many people. The railway has suffered as a result. Overstaffing, tickless travel, corruption, sabotage by overland transport operator lobbies and pilferage on an inconceivable scale have joined to bring the system and the organisation to a point that the World Bank is not proving a friend either.

These, however, cannot make out a case for not giving Bonapara its overbridge. Rather the missing overbridge is as good a cause of why BR still isn't on the recovery path. Big things involving policy decisions may wait for some time. The Bonapara overbridge cannot. Let this be a test for the changed leadership of the ministry.

Environmental Economics: Time to Teach and Learn

Over-play with environmental issues might deter economic growth of a poor country like Bangladesh but downsizing its importance might jeopardize the growth potential too.

THE office of Environment and Social Development of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) recently hosted an inception workshop on capacity building in environmental economics in member countries of the bank. Besides representatives from Bangladesh, the workshop was attended by participants from five other member countries. The basic aim of that workshop was to thrash out ways and means of popularizing environmental economics amongst academics, planners, policy makers and teachers of respective countries.

It may be mentioned here that over the years, all over the world, there is a growing surge in interest in environmental studies in the wake of growing threats on sustainable development. Bangladesh is no exception to that syndrome. The inexplicable relation between environment and poverty is well documented in existing literature. Both the rich and the poor, allegedly, exploit resources to maximize individual welfare gains to a limit to geese the very existence of future generation by inviting environmental hazards. Unfortunately, it is the poor who have to pay a heavy price arising from environmental catastrophes. It is, therefore, in the best interest of the society at large, and

particularly of the poor, that environmental studies are carried out awareness about sustainable development is sufficiently raised and appropriate policy measures are afoot so that over-exploitation of scarce natural resources is disdained.

In Bangladesh today, there are concerns galore over environmental implications of different aid sponsored development projects, and a volley of academic papers are already in the market to convey the message. At the national level, a separate ministry in the name of Forest and Environment has been created a few years back. The National Environmental Management Action Plan (NEMAP) is now, reportedly, under active consideration of the GOB.

All of the above mentioned steps are, arguably, positive developments in the realm of environment. However, environmental economics as a subject *per se* is yet to grow popular in Bangladesh. Disconcertingly, academic institutions, especially universities, do not tend to treat the course with due weight. The reasons for the apparent apathy are, perhaps, not far to seek. Like any other commodity

— academic courses have their own demand and supply. Quite obviously, in a regime of growth-first strategy of development, subjects such as environmental economics have very little chance to flick to teachers and students. Conversely, in a world of environment friendly development strategy or where an euphoria

comes mandatory, the demand for EIAs should generate supply of environmental economists in the country.

What ADB wants, we believe, is to build endogenous capacity in environmental economics to respond to the upcoming high demand for environmental economics in respective member countries. At the nascent stage, attempts would be made to hold workshops, seminars and dialogues to raise awareness about the importance of environmental economics. These should help uplift the technical know-how of concerned officials, bankers, private investors and other interested persons who are supposed to monetize the environmental impacts in the project profile in every stages of its implementation. It is not only within a country, but also environmental economics can play a pivotal role in forming regional co-operation in environmental problems. Another application of environmental economics usually flagged is in guiding policy formulation. The valuation techniques relate not only to project level but also they help to monetize the environmental implications of alternative sectoral and national development



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

of sustainable development persists, environmental economics should generate some demand.

The demand for environmental economics is relatively much higher in countries like Indonesia, PRC, Sri Lanka and Thailand. One of the prime reasons for a rise in demand there is due to the fact that in those countries, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is mandatory for any development project — private or public

— to claim a clean go. It implies, *inter alia*, that the demand for technical hands with expertise to assign monetary value to the losses and benefits of environmental factors should also be high. A large number of academic institutions and research organisations are working on EIA in those countries and environ-

mental consequences of economic activities can be expressed in monetary terms, they will be much better understood by decision makers.

According to a BCAS study, half of the sample institutions in Bangladesh have environmental courses in their curricula. The science oriented subjects relatively more towards environmental studies. Environmental economics is barely taught and if taught at all, it is with less rigour. The Centre for Human Resources Development (CHRD) of Jahangirnagar University is very soon going to launch a drive towards upgrading the capacity in environmental economics in Bangladesh. The centre hopes to reach planners, policy makers, teachers and students across institutions. Time has, perhaps, arrived to realize the virtues of environmental economics. Needless to mention, however, that over-play with environmental issues might deter economic growth of a poor country like Bangladesh but downsizing its importance might jeopardize the growth potential too. We would like to take a side in between. Neither too much nor too few.

Civil Service in Bangladesh

by Md Mizanur Rahman

The recruitment policy should be wide open as to ensure a constant supply of fresh talent of the country. There should be no barrier of age, sex, caste and religion in the selection process. The provision of viva-voce as a measurement of quality should be followed by a general standard in the questions asked to the examinee or it should be abolished.

DEMOCRACY and free market economy, the twin ideologies, now deemed to have attained an unanimous acceptance — have become the catchword in the firmament of today's world politics. In an arena of international cooperativeness and competitiveness, it is now a must to arrange the state machinery for coexisting with the changed world order.

Human institutions everywhere have their roots deep in the past. Bangladesh inherits its administrative system from Pakistan through British rule. The British intruders founded the cornerstone of the today's administrative system in a manner that it could facilitate their very purpose of surplus extraction from this self-sufficient repository of enormous resources. During internal colonialism of Pakistan — which was still very much in the British style — performed the same what Britshers did.

In the wake of nine months of bloody and armed struggle, Bangladesh achieved its much-desired independence. Following the independence, with its revolutionary zeal and enthusiasm, the government embarked on a multi-functional campaign to refurbish different sector of the society i.e., its economy and administration. But because of the very real strength of antiparticipatory British founded bureaucracy, no reform measures has gained its momentum. Despite the establishment and attempts of the innumerable

committee and commission to reform the civil service — the strategic system of an administrative system — the institutional and structural continuity is going on without undergoing any substantial change till this day. After nearly two decades of autocratic military regime, the nation experiences phenomenal change in Bangladesh politics.

Following a relatively free and fair election, Bangladesh on the basis of all-embracing consensus has switched over to a new system of parliamentary democracy. Immediately after that the government is at the cross-roads for implementing new policies and programmes in response to the global changes. In a democratic form of government it is pledge-bound to translate its electoral demands into reality. That is why the government has to depend largely on its civil servants to have the work done.

Coming to power the previous government, like the previous one, promised to set up a transparent, efficient and an accountable public administration which is now at its serious juncture it has ever faced or met. The performance of Bangladesh civil service — unlikely the former ICS and CSP

which were considered to be the most distinguished civil service in that contemporary world — has dwindled a lot. More recently, the dominance and despotic power of a certain general cadre has already been challenged by a conglomeration of the specialist cadre — Prokrishi. Above all, corruption, inefficiency and mal-administration are rampant in today's civil service — one may certainly claim that the whole civil service is in a mess now.

In a bid to overcome the loopholes of current inept and corrupt system of civil service — bureaucratic reorientation comprising its overall structure, culture, conduct standard, attitude, manner — needs to rearrange/reorganise for ensuring its productivity. Furthermore in a democratic practice vis-a-vis market-oriented economy, where dominance of private sector is in the offing, the civil service should be achievement-oriented performance-oriented and goal-oriented. Against this backdrop the underscore of a suitable recruitment policy, career system, performance evaluation system cannot be overemphasised.

The recruitment policy should be wide open as to en-

sure a constant supply of fresh talent of the country. There should be no barrier of age, sex, caste and religion in the selection process. The provision of viva-voce as a measurement of quality should be followed by a general standard in the questions asked to the examinee or it should be abolished.

The performance appraisal system should be based on merit and previous performance record of his or her responsibility and duty. Here initiation of MBO system can be introduced. In the field of career system, the system of position clarification in lieu of rank classification can make the civil service more effective and efficient. Rationalisation of civil service by pursuing the above measures and providing the necessary modern equipments like computers, fax, telex, internet, E-mail and other logistics can make the civil service more effective and efficient.

Any administrative reform,

explicitly civil service reform, can only be implemented efficiently if they have a high-level political support and enlightened public opinion behind them. It is no less necessary to win cooperation of bureaucracy on the issues, where bureaucracy has a stake in maintaining the *status quo*, high level political intervention is necessary to give effort to the reform.

In the newly-independent countries that emerged from the colonial rule, the primary task of civil service reform is to drastically reorient the administration from

regulation to the service of modern state. The emphasis is more on adoption and re-orientation of the attitude of bureaucracy than more structural modernisation and development.

Moreover in a democratic polity, bureaucracy must be subservient to political will by the representative and participatory system of management. The revolutionary system of decentralisation can buttress/prop to make the bureaucrats accountable at all levels of administrative unit.

More concretely, the system of decentralisation of policy-making authority in the field and a bottom-up planning machinery should be established for having an accountable, transparent, and efficient system of public administration.

An interplay of a vibrant Parliament, an independent Judiciary and a neutral Executive Agency, above all a free and a responsible press can play a decisive role in making the administration public-oriented and an accountable one. Unless and until we can understand the need for democratic system by practicing frequent election involving adult franchise — the politics of rhetoric and rigmarole will not be eliminated, let alone other ills within the state machinery.

The writer is Assistant Director, Training Division of BARD, Comilla.

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.

Justice Shahabuddin and our expectation

Sir, The appointment of Justice Shahabuddin as the country's President is a welcome development. We are thankful to Awami League for proposing his name and to BNP for giving positive endorsement to his appointment, although it could have been in the fitness of things if AL could hold a *priori* consultation with BNP in respect of the appointment. In any case, we the people of the country feel reassured with the prospect of having a president with such a proven measure of integrity, solidarity and straightforwardness. With politicians running amuck all around and national interest at stake, a man of Justice Shahabuddin as the President is the

to suit their own partisan purposes. If we recall the caretaker government issue, we see volumes after volumes written by our intellectuals and speeches after speeches delivered by the politicians (even by respected leaders like Dr Kamal Hussain and Mr Rashed Khan Menon) urging the then BNP government to step down, although they knew it very well that without relevant constitutional amendment, the incumbent could never do so. What was

the 12 crore people of Bangladesh as well as its economy were made captive into the dreaded hands of vandalism and terror for long two years. And our fresh journey for democracy which started in 1991 took a U-turn back towards the square one, bulldozing over the graves of the martyrs like Nur Hussain, Dr Milon, Zehad and scores of others. The irony is that all these were done in the name of democracy. Now that we see the convicts are adoring the citadel of it, i.e., the Parliament and the alleged murders are trying for occupying a seat in.

There are hundreds of similar instances of flouting the Constitution as well as the rules and regulations of the land, and all these are happening right in front of the hapless people of Bangladesh. It is indeed an insult to our people's sense of righteousness and pride. We want Justice Shahabuddin to rescue us from this unbearable state of affairs and restore back our national pride and prestige to the level where he himself pushed us up back in 1991.

Vox Bangladesh
Lalmatta, Dhaka

Board of Revenue, in accepting, in his recent budget speech, my long-standing request for reconsideration and not imposing income tax on banks' interest. Suspense (interest not earned and, following the directives of Bangladesh Bank, not taken to profit and loss accounts of banks) I had been consistently impressing upon this point in various writeups, articles for press, presentations and seminars to, until the budget speech, but to no avail. I feel greatly encouraged by the wisdom and grasp of this technical flaw in our two sets of contradictory existing laws by the finance minister and his team by insertion of Section 28 (3) in the Income Tax Ordinance of 1984.

But I must point out that justice, however, has only been half-done by adding a fresh proviso to Clause (XVIIIAA) to Section 29 of that Ordinance. By Section 28(3) interest suspense has now been judiciously kept out of the tax net but, at the same time, insertion of the said proviso negates the whole thing by equating interest suspense with provision for bad debts made in the books of account of the banks thereby taking the matter back to the proverbial square one. It must be realised that a bank's claim for provision made in its books of account has absolutely nothing to do with its interest suspense not incorporated in its books of account as the amount of provision made in the books of account does not include interest suspense. The two elements are two different things and attempting to counter or balance one with the other is not only inappropriate but wrong.

I sincerely hope that this point will further be considered by the finance minister and his able team and the legal lacuna, which is still lingering, put right once and for all and full tax justice given to the banks.

Mushtaq Ahmed, FCA
128, New Eskaton Road
Dhaka-1000

Gratitude to the Finance Minister
Sir, I wish to express my deepest and heartfelt gratitude to the finance minister, ably assisted and briefed by the Finance Secretary, Chairman and Members of National

she was elected as MP in the last June 12 poll. The two seats became vacant as the PM vacated those retaining her Gopalganj seat. From Khulna the PM went to Gopalganj and from there she attended several other public meetings at Shariatpur where another JS seat became vacant as the Awami League MP Mr Razzak vacated that seat. In these meetings the PM made various promises for development of these areas.

Two questions have arisen out of the trip of the PM: how could the PM use the state helicopter for going to Khulna and Gopalganj? How could she utter various promises for development of those areas prior to the by-polls in those constituencies?

In the past Sheikh Hasina, as the leader of the opposition, criticised the leaders of the then governments for using the state machineries for party affairs. She was also very critical about pre-election promises of the leaders of those governments. Now is she behaving in the same manner? The voters expected a different behaviour from the "Jono Netra". However, as before, the PM attended a meeting at Khulna and another at Gopalganj with the local government officials and leaders to discuss national issues just to give her trip an official touch.

But unfortunately, it is quite clear that the trip was made mainly to cover the by-polls campaign at the vacant JS constituencies. If the PM is not careful then the nation will have the opportunity to witness many such official trips in the by-polls areas in the coming days. Whereas, the people of the flood-stricken areas in the northern and the southern Bangladesh expected the new PM beside them.

May we hope that the PM will act up to the expectations of the voters please.

Abul Haranat Mohammad
28, Green Road, Dhaka

Crybabies

Sir, Too often after, it seems, we have these 'crybabies' accusing others of 'wrongdoing', when these others have in everyone else's opinion achieved a victory fair and square. Latest case in point is Janet Evans, the swimmer *prima donna*. Janet Evans, herself the darling of last

Olympics when she won three gold medals basked in the glory of her victory and the whole world shared it with her. This time around, however, Evans did not win anything. The decline was remarkable and everyone noticed it. To make matters worse for Evans, an Irish girl named Michelle Phillips won three gold medals. Evans quickly started to spread some vicious rumours against Phillips and accused that Phillips was on drugs.

Does this story sound familiar to you? Look no further than the first row of our Jatiya Shangshad opposition seats and to the left at the Speaker as he faces the MPs.

Abu Azam
20 New Eskaton, Dhaka