

## A Courageous Decision

A report in the national press said recently that some 16 teachers stand to be transferred from the hallowed Government Laboratory School. This is being done on a policy of transferring teachers of government schools serving at the same place for over seven years.

Almost all sectors of our national life have been suffering from a broad spectrum of diseases, most of them chronic. But no other sector has half as rotted as education with as few of old diseases. Many, if not all, of the afflictions contracted by education can be traced in terms of decades. As with problems in judiciary, social criticism has stayed back from looking at teachers as having some part in the rotting game. Teachers were, historically, and till today are equated with judges who are above suspicion, inviolate, so to say. Problems in education were blamed largely on the fickle-mindedness of successive governments who would change educational policy and structure, philosophy and content every other year if only they had their way. Some educational decisions were so bad as to spawn large-scale, almost universal corruption. And some decisions were responsible very directly for inculcating in the pupil propensities antithetical to learning, thus churning out thoroughly uneducated persons. People, not to speak of governments, were averse to recognising that perhaps teachers had their share in the bad affair. This looking away has been doing a lot of harm to the practice of education.

The decision to transfer those teachers of government schools who have been enjoying a *geostationary* situation past seven years in the hope that this would cut down on corruptions of private tutoring and admission—time earnings on the sideline is simply a courageous one for the imputation that is not quite correct. The government is understood to be sweetening the *harsh* action with the plea that transferred, these great teachers would help bring the standards of the government schools in the country to some uniformly high level which is incontestably a noble thing to desire.

To say that this wouldn't by itself heal education of its motley diseases is a truism bordering on the meaningless. No one action could do that. Let us see this as one problem less if that is what it comes to and nothing more. The decision signifies a removal of some blinkers preventing identification of some serious problems. This way it is an important ground breaking decision, and implemented fairly and efficiently, this would surely help the cause of education.

## Environmental Health

In the five years since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro has the world's environment marked any improvement? Far from that. Carbon dioxide emission has increased by 10 to 40 per cent in some developing countries and as many as 1.5 billion people—around one-third of the planet's total population—live with a highly risky level of air pollution. Had the 178 nations, who signed the Global Environment and Development Plan in 1992, gone by the commitments they made then, the world would have become a better place to live in by now.

Environmental groups are naturally very critical of both the rich and poor countries for their track-record on environmental management. The Washington-based Worldwatch Institute has even done better in that it has made specific suggestions for nations to approach and address environmental problems and cited instances of success that could be emulated in action programmes for areas where progress has not yet been made. One of its suggestions concerns the formation of a group with eight environmental heavyweights — to be named as E-8 — much like the G-7 to pool their efforts together. The proposed E-8, with 56 per cent of the world's population and 53 per cent of its forests and a share of 58 per cent of the global carbon dioxide emission, is expected to bring both developing and developed nations together.

The Worldwatch notes with satisfaction the achievement made through the Montreal Protocol in reducing the production of CFCs by more than 75 per cent world wide. While similar tough and legally binding treaties are a must for doing away with industrial and other practices contributing to environmental degradation, the extra funding required for addressing the special problems facing the poor nations and also for their switching into new technologies has to be ensured. On that count, the rich nations have hardly done themselves any credit. But without this the world cannot hope to regain its environmental health.

## Eliminating a Crime Source

This is perhaps not the right time to put in a good work for the policeman. The Yasmin rape and murder scandal is still taking a hefty toll of his image. When that seems unlikely to start dying down in another couple of years, the Seema case has stoked the fire of a burning shame and pushed the policeman's honour beyond easy redemption.

The above is enough to cloud the whole picture of the state of that service piercing which it would be difficult to see any good development that was supposed to be taking place there at the initiative of the home minister and in the surge of state-power slipping out of well-used hands.

In its latest good work police arrested in Dhaka the BCL leader Shamim Ahmed on Tuesday. This has something new in it to qualify itself for comment. On August 25 last year police arrested the same person in connection with campus violence. But BCL cadres pounced upon the police posse that had nabbed Shamim and took him away, out of the law's way.

Now, five days to full six months, Shamim was arrested by police. When he gave police the slip the government was only two months old. It was transition time then made the more volatile by campus eruptions. And Shamim was no regular prisoner or convict. To track him down with such persistence calls for a pat. Please keep this up and let the young white-shirt criminals know belonging is not good enough as a sanctuary.

# Of Pay and the Pay Commission

by Mohammad Nurunnabi Chowdhury

*The feeble justification of egalitarianism for higher pay of the low-paid employees is untenable. The doctrine of egalitarianism is applicable to the whole society, not to a tiny group in the government. It is better for the public exchequer to pay what the market dictates.*

The efficiency and integrity of the government. All 20 grades of pay were retained in 1985 pay-rise. Pay scales at the top were doubled and at the bottom and middle, more than doubled. The principle of higher rise at the lower levels and lower rise at higher levels were followed in pay revision of 1991 also. The consequence of the past two pay rises was to narrow the gap between the pay of officers and staff. The second consequence was the denial of pay to key officials to which they were entitled in consideration of their qualification and contributions they were called upon to make.

### A Compensation Policy, Not Adhoc Pay Revision

It is a piece of wisdom in compensation policy to pay everyone in the bureaucracy adequate, if possible decent, salary and pay key-decision makers handsomely. Nearer home, in Malaysia and Singapore, this policy is implemented with great success. Economic progress in these countries is rated as a miracle, which is not unrelated to a body of efficient and honest civil servants. We can, this time around, put all civil servants at or above 1969-70 levels of pay in real terms. Let the key officials from grade nine and above be put at that level at least and the rest slightly above. The unbundling of the fringe benefits such as whole-time transport, income-tax exemption, house rent etc. into monetary benefit work out to Tk. 38,000 including pay of grade one officers against Tk. 54,000 at 1969-70 real terms (Tk. 3000xCLI of 17.99). Exchange of whole-time transport, tax-exemption, house rent allowance etc. for cash is suggested because they are uneconomic. The costs of maintaining them are disproportionately higher than return to their beneficiaries. Whole-time transport, for example, costs public exchequer more than Tk. 20,000 for a service which can be secured at half that cost privately. A rise of less than 50 per cent of existing pay secures 1969-70 level salary. Some improvement over 1969-70 levels is desirable. Salary should not be made to stand still even at the end of nearly three decades since 1969.

The introduction of house-rent allowance was a bad innovation. It drives the government willy nilly to the responsibility of providing accommodation to all civil servants. This is extremely uneconomic if not entirely impossible to achieve. Colossal waste of government resources can be saved and yet government employees can acquire their own accommodation with added salary at a much lesser cost. Government is a poor owner-tenant as compared to government property and its upkeep. The magic of private property does indeed turn sand into gold.

Now take a look at the lowest pay. The present initial pay of the lowest grade is Tk. 900. That comes to Tk. 1350 if the 1969-70 pay is adjusted for CLI of government employees. The pay package is already higher than Tk. 1350. The Pay Commission may like to merge house rent, medical and conveyance allowances with pay and made a scale with a certain percentage rise over the existing pay package. That rise may be given across the board right up to the highest grade of staff. A 40 per cent rise on present pay package of Tk. 1610 will raise it to Tk. 2254. That is a 67 per cent gain over 1969-70 level in real terms. That compares to no gain in real terms for the key officers.

In the pay revision, financial implication will be critical for implementation. Ninety eight per cent of the government employees are at the low ends of the pay structure below Grade 9. A small rise in the pay scales of these employees will cost the government a great deal whereas a big rise in the pay scales of key officers, on whom the time of the government is dependent, will hardly be noticed. Fortunately, this permits the needed correction in the pay structure without any difficulty.

### Private and Public Salary

Existing salaries in the private sector of a country is also relevant in the revision of pay. The comparable pay of a menial government employee in the private sector — an unskilled worker — does not exceed Tk. 1500. Private sector employee workers without pension and on a hire and fire basis. The feeble justification of egalitarianism for higher pay of the low-

paid employees is untenable. The doctrine of egalitarianism is applicable to the whole society, not to a tiny group in the government. It is better for the public exchequer to pay what the market dictates.

### Keep Public Enterprises Outside Government Pay Scales

Public enterprises were covered by the pay revisions of 1977 for the first time. That was a mistake. These are independent legal entities having their own resources and own budgets outside the government. Their sole objective is productivity and profit. Their personnel should, as they used to, earn their pay with reference to productivity and profit. To take away their power to decide on the pay of their personnel is to drive a nail in the coffin of autonomy. The workforce of a public enterprise must fend for themselves from their own production and profit and must produce adequate return on investments. They must not continue to be paid, come what may, as the employees in the civil service. They should also not be debarrd from getting higher compensation than the civil employees, whenever they deserve that. Security of service and pay without reference to achievements have disfigured public undertakings and contributed to their malfunctioning. Go to any public sector banks, their employees could not be more bureaucratic than government employees and more unhelpful and their achievement — an enormous pile of self-bred bad debts. The industrial and commercial enterprises in the public sector have existed neither for production nor for a fair return on investments but for themselves and for their allies. Government pay scales made them feel like government employees and act like government employees, neglecting their commitment to production and profit. Public sector employees should not, therefore, be covered by revised government pay scales this time around.

### Rationalisation of Pay Scales

The experiences of the last two decades indicate the need for further rationalisation of the pay structure. Multiplicity of pay scales invites persistent demand for multiple pay scales for a post and automatic promotion to higher scales. An Assistant Secretary working in the Pay Scale of a Deputy Secretary is an anachronism. It must stop for the sake of clarity in the line of authority. Another development which needs a close review is the grant of highest grade to some heads of department. The preeminence of the Ministry is compromised by this development. The doctrine of pay and status not going together is unacceptable. Look at the working of the government. They do not go to get their pay. Pay Commission will be well advised to solve this administrative impasse. Further, the existing 20 grades can be compressed into some 12 grades or so. Some grades have become redundant already. The post of

### Reasonable Pay Scales Can be Indexed to Cost of Living Each Year

The system of periodic ap-

pointment of Pay Commission to readjust pay scales, eroded by inflation, is neither a rational measure nor a needed one. More reasonable and practical way of readjustment of pay is to do it every year by indexation with reference to inflation. That, of course, assumes that pay scales in the base year are well balanced. This is not the case now. One hopes that the fourth Pay Commission's efforts will make them well-balanced. To wait for five years or more not only puts government employees to financial hardships, it causes a heavy financial burden to abruptly land on the government resources. It was observed to have fueled inflation, too, in the past. A quiet annual indexation should be beneficial to all sides and to the economy. Pension should be revised at the same rates as pay. Both stand on the same footing for revision and deserve the same treatment. Pension in future has also to be revised at the old rate when fringe benefits merged into pay.

It is usual to compare the lowest pay to the highest pay in our country. The comparison is unwarranted because wage is determined with reference to what a person contributes not with reference to highest and lowest pay. A chief executive of a US company may receive \$9 million a year and the lowest-paid employee a mere \$36 thousand. Pay determination in our private sector is not dissimilar. If we must compare the two pays, the real comparison is between the lowest entry-pay to highest entry-pay and lowest end-pay to highest end-pay. We may compare the proposed lowest entry-pay of Tk. 2,260 and the highest entry-pay of, say, Tk. 7000. The ratio works out to 1:3. The ratio of the highest end-pay of class IV employees, say, Tk. 5,000 and highest end-pay of Tk. 54,000 comes to about 1:10. The ratio of 1:10 is in keeping with the demand of the low-paid employees in the past. They first demanded a ratio of 1:20 and later 1:10. The government of the day obliged, incorrectly though. We must gradually break away from fuzzy ideas of governance. We have to be hard-headed realists and ensure socio-economic progress and at a faster rate than others to catch up with them. This nation cannot settle for less.

The author is a former Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh.

# POLITICAL KILLINGS IN BANGLADESH

## Need for Investigations and Prescription

by A R Shamsul Islam

*There is no alternative to institutionalising democracy in Bangladesh to fight against many maladies including political killing.... We cannot afford to remain inattentive to the need if we are to stand as a respectable people in the comity of nations.*

and Liaquat Ali were gunned down. Later on, Naxalites attacked on so-called class enemies and the Leftists crackdown on whom they branded as capitalists' agents lent a new dimension and velocity to political maimings. Bangladesh was born amidst this tradition of political killings.

(2) There is a rising absence of democratic spirit and tolerance amongst many of the political leaders of this country. Their activities often lag behind sincere commitments to the well-being of the downtrodden masses. They have little aptitude for public accountability and transparency. They are in no mood to brook opposition of any kind. Even in the constructive criticism of their policies they smell conspiracies against the state and nation. (3) The emergence of extra-constitutional regimes consuming a large part of Bangladesh rule has fanned the flames of political killings to retain their illegally captured power. More sad is that even the constitutional governments have dipped their hands into political 'blood-baths'. (4) Believably there is no dearth of foreign countries lying in wait for dividing political criminalities obviously to extract their countries' political gains heedless of international norms. It is also a widespread public censure that many a political party in Bangladesh is more or less lacking of this or that foreign power.

(5) The deepening social, political and economic despairs have rudely demoralised the youth to leave them easy preys to unconscious politicians apt to use them in the nefarious game of political massacres. The rich material dividend for committing a political marauding indexed by highups of the society has rather elevated it to a prized occupation. (6) The energy of the youth forlorn of abundant healthy outlets in our society perhaps discovers a sort of chivalrism and job satisfaction in the killing of big hauls!

(7) The fundamental problems of the people like illiteracy, unemployment, birth explosion, price hike of essential commodities, etc. do not figure prominently in the political programmes of the parties. Their ultimate goal appears to capture power by any means. To meet it they are prone to create crisis out of the prevailing social and economic unrest studiously aggravated by them. This crisis issue generates tension and hysteria which hatch up political clashes in succession rounding off wounds and killings. (8) The fundamentalist political parties are brutally committed to wiping out anything enroute. (9) Corruption and black money fraternise with

political killings. Corruption rides highways and any dutiful traffic sergeant trying to control speed of corruption automobiles meet with an instantaneous runaway. Black money acquired through corruption provides necessary investment for recruiting worst assassins.

### Glimpses of Political Killings

To unfold the chapters of political killings in Bangladesh is to feel aghast at the appalling barbarity.

During Awami League's first regime 1972-75 the people weary of the ravages of the war pined for respite and the need of the hour was to start reconstructing newly independent Bangladesh. Violence led to a scrap. Unfortunately even in this critical juncture of history political killings between the opposing parties and within same parties were perpetrated in no mean number.

The party activists of ruling Awami League, newly-formed JSD, Sarvabha and Leftist parties were locked in mutual confrontations. Even the Rakkhi Bahini, a newly created paramilitary force, were responsible for political murders. Siraj Sikdar was killed in police custody for an alleged attempt to flee away according to a government handout which appeared skeptical to the public. Obviously the then broken economy law and order coupled with conspiracies within and outside the country drove the rulers to become tough.

Then came the most tragic and heinous killings of the Father of the Nation President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his brother-in-law minister Abdur Rob Seraniat and his nephew Sheikh Moni all with members of their families on 15 August 1975 by a small band of disgruntled army officers alleged to be in league with the public. Obviously the then broken economy law and order coupled with conspiracies within and outside the country drove the rulers to become tough.

Ziaur Rahman's military and civil rules 1975-81 witnessed scores of political killings. Col. Taher was hanged by a military court. About 20 abortive coup attempts were hurled on Zia's life. Following a futile coup by some airforce personnel, considerable number of soldiers were hanged, as per official record available, by army court pronouncements. In the end the 21st coup killed President Zia.

Army chief Ershad wielded sceptre for nine years since 1982. Though he vaunted in dramatics saying that he had not stained his hand with blood, many political victims perished under his wrath. Nur Hossain, Dr. Milan are two of many victims. In the account of political killings the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami party has lavishly contributed both in number and novelty of operation.

After the successful mass upsurge of 1990, the credible and fair election, conducted for the first time by a caretaker government, lifted the then most uncompromising charismatic BNP leader Begum Khaleda Zia to the highest state podium with the brightest public hope of the emergence of a true democratic society free from violence and bloodshed. But woe to nation, political hackings remained to continue unabated. Many were killed, mutilated.

Winning another free, fair election in June 1996, conducted by a second caretaker government, Awami League surged back to power after an interval of 21 years. A halt to political violence and killing is a crying need of the time to install an atmosphere of tolerance, transparency and democracy, essential prerequisites for national progress. It bleeds our heart that the orgy of political killings is not contained. Further, the death of detainees in thana hajats has caused concern. Brandishing of automatic weapons between different parties and factions of the same party portends anything but good omen.

### Aftermath of Political Killings

Political killings in our country weighs heavily on changing existing order. There is no gainsaying that our society has not been cast in a mould to depend on system. Rather, the affairs of society and organisations are made to swing according to temper and taste of the personalities. So when they fall under political blitz society and organisations receive a jolt that sometimes break their order, ingredients and force. Political slidedown, economic downgrading, social slump come as a backgear sequel. Killings of Sheikh Mujib and Ziaur Rahman bear testimony. In some measures, to these distressing findings. This is not untrue in case of political murders in other countries too. Political killings in its train can also bring devastations of worldwide magnitude. A single murder of Archduke Francis, heir-designate to Austria, on the street of Serajevo in 1914 set the whole powder-magazine

of Europe ablaze and the world almost totally in totality was plunged into the whirlpool of First World War (1914-18). After a fanatic gunned down Israeli Prime Minister the ongoing truce implementation process in the strife-torn Middle East seems to be threatened with a rebuff.

### How to Combat the Evil?

Bangladesh has paid enough for political killings and it can no longer afford to indulge in this crime. The whole nation irrespective of faith, religion, party affiliation must realise the ultimate consequence of perpetrating mutual exterminations and is under the necessity of arriving at a national consensus to do away with this self-destructing political culture by evolving out cogent ways and means on top priority basis. Of such a volley some may be as follow: (1) Political leaders must learn to think in terms of national interest. They should cultivate the sagacity of subordinating their personal and party interests to the interests of the people and the country. (2) The fundamental principles of constitution, fashioned after the spirit of Liberation War, must be agreed upon by major, preferably all, political parties and these must be respected by them without fail. (3) Communalism of any kind in any form must not be allowed to raise its head. (4) The use of religion for furthering narrow political gains must be shunned.

(5) The political parties should be committed to preaching and practising democratic norms, tolerance to others' views, accountability to the public, transparency of their acts and deeds to the masses. We have bitter experiences that there is no guarantee that a political party voted to power by free, fair elections will behave democratically. Hence the first and foremost requirement is to institutionalise democratic culture. The language of difference and protest by different parties should not on account be undemocratic or indecent. The vile habit of character assassination of any person, let alone political leaders, should be abandoned. Tongues should be cleaned and cured so as to render it antidotes to personal or party slandering and vilification.

(7) The government in power should learn the lesson that to oppose government is not tantamount to oppose state. (8) Military or civil (aided by army or civil bureaucrats) coups to seize the rein of government must be brought to a permanent halt. The jackals and estranged self-seeking political leaders encircling the usurper autocrat

rulers should be marked by the people to throw them to the political stables at the first opportunity to create a precedent of socially discarding the unprincipled base politicians. (9) Exemplary punishment must be inflicted upon persons guilty of political murders to strike terror in the minds of similar culprits.

What a tragedy it is that self-confessed assassins of Sheikh Mujib were rewarded instead of being punished and were protected by infamous indemnity laws which now stand cancelled. Together with the trial for Mujib's killing other trials for killing of four national leaders in jail, Siraj Sikdar, Col. Taher, Ziaur Rahman, General Monjur, etc. should be held without further delay to safeguard against political killings in future.

(10) Student politics should be kept away from being aligned with politics of national parties. There goes a credible condemnation that many of the student political leaders are 'paid agents' of national political parties and leaders and the former are entrusted with the task of moving the student forces at the latter's commands regardless of the interests of the student community. (11) A social crusade against corruptions should be launched. (12) The government must be rapidly attentive and accommodating to views and demands of the opposition and on the other hand the opposition parties should eschew the unethical practice of provoking the government to extremities with a view to fishing in troubled water.

There is no alternative to institutionalising democracy in Bangladesh to fight against many maladies including political killing. This is of course an uphill task vis-a-vis the prevailing social and political rot of the country. Still we cannot afford to remain inattentive to the need if we are to stand as a respectable people in the comity of nations. It is our dire necessity to practise democratic culture in our day-to-day activities, every walk of life so that its spirit is ingrained in our bone and marrow. Politicians will certainly differ in thoughts and themes. But to express them they must not offend others' feelings. They should not lose sight of the truth that it is not the maddening confrontations but the meaningful conferences which alone can resolve disputes and put the country on road to progress to which the politicians are supposed to be most committed. The activists of the political parties will also be strictly educated likewise. Since inception Bangladesh has unfortunately promoted an environment where political violence and killings germinate and tend to be permanent. This is a menace to the existence of a nation with human values. Having achieved the aforesaid objectives we can rightly hope that the nightmare of political killings will lose all weird footings to haunt us.

The writer is a former Principal of the Government Women's College, Pabna.