

Wise Up in Time

Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory and Chittagong Steel Mills, the two major state owned enterprises lying frozen for quite some time now, have become the latest targets of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)'s critical scrutiny. A seminar was organised by the Centre marking the disclosure of the finding of a recent study on the dead duo.

Speakers at Thursday's seminar, an interesting medley of representatives of the present and past governments among other men in the know, seemed to have agreed to the solution of their immediate privatisation.

Although the private sector capacity for the ownership of such major projects is something yet to be tested for any robust optimism at this stage, the option looks infinitely better than further emaciation of national economy through their continued affliction in the public sector.

The brain storming session featuring men associated with the projects at different times radiated candour and the much-desired decency as manifested in Tofael Ahmed's praise of the previous government for their timely shut-down. However, one could not help noticing a buck passing tendency in most of them, especially those involved with the project right from the beginning.

Why did not they take the trouble of convincing the then governments about the inherent flaws of the plans? If they had problems in having way with their good offices, they could have pursued with their reservations through the media. After all, it was national economy that was at stake.

No matter what the 'inseparable elements' of these projects have to offer in their moral defence today, the fact remains that Bangladesh would have been richer for their timely opposition to projects that were not viable and destined to be doomed. Either they lacked in farsightedness and vision which actually makes a sad commentary on their competence or, the more sinister possibility is, they purposely fell for discrediting a government of the past.

Nevertheless, such open, intense and technical discussions are necessary sources of wisdom however belated the may look. While thanking CPD for throwing a shaft of light into the heart of darkness in our industrial sector, we hope, consensus among political parties deemed as sine qua non for the transference of the dead units to the private sector, will not be long in coming.

In for Another Tragedy?

This is about a residential hall of students on the campus of one of our better backed-up universities. And quite unbelievably so. Many of the hall's rooms have long been locked and no new students have been taken in to fill these in the 96-97 session. Reason: these rooms are no longer habitable. What about the whole structure? Well, the engineering department of the university had recommended the demolition of the whole hall building some eighteen months back. But Fazilatunnessa Hall for women students of the Jahangirnagar University limps on with a possible repetition of the Jagannath Hall tragedy haunting it.

The situation is so bad that panicking by the plasters constantly coming off the ceilings and the hall verandah subsiding to form an eerily undulating floor-level, students are choosing to stay away with relatives, in open contravention of this university's spirit as well as practice. Those having no such option open to them are staying in their hall rooms but with a sense of living with death.

All this and much more should be known to whom the facility belongs — namely, the university. And the sufferers know of the dangers to their peril. There is no reason why the whole university shouldn't know the facts of the Fazilatunnessa Hall, or for that matter, many parents of the JNU students. On the one hand this spreading knowledge of a residenceful of women students being forced to live a nightmare is not being able to unmake the bad reality by even an inch, on the other this is not going to earn a good name for the university. The university must move fast to abandon the building according to the urging of the engineers.

There were many compulsions to found and run a university on a perfectly residential basis at the time JNU came into being. A need to organise higher education far away from the din and bustle and, more, the turmoil of political conflicts and violence, was felt by all and sundry. From the beginning, as such, JNU had been somewhat different. Let this difference be reflected in the quality of education imparted there and the intellectual ambience that should be there — and not in the per-pupil subsidy figures and in the death traps like Fazilatunnessa Hall.

This Can't Go On

Health hazards due to criminal apathy stemming from hotel owners' greed for profit seem to have increased alarmingly. According to a report published in a Bengali newspaper recently 98% of the hotels and restaurants in the capital serve not only sub-standard, adulterated food but also drinking water, literally infested with germs and bacteria. This explains the marked increase in the pattern of certain diseases like typhoid, paratyphoid, dysentery cholera and jaundice of late.

But polluted water is not the lone source of worry for public health. Food stuffs, especially meat items served in most hotels are in horrifyingly objectionable state. Some hoteliers reportedly, serve meat of dead or sick poultry. At some places they are charging for mutton when they are actually serving beef. This is not merely a question of tampering with health norms but also religious stipulations. For all practical purposes, the poor customers are paying only to buy diseases. Apparently, these restaurateurs have formed a racket with the grocers and quiet runs the business.

To its credit, the Environment Directorate has, through constant monitoring, proved it beyond doubt that it is not through ignorance but by choice that almost all the hoteliers are cashing on the absence of consumer awareness. But then the buck cannot stop with the Directorate's simple confession of not having the law enforcing right against the culprits.

We expect the government to do something immediately about setting a minimum standard about the food and drink served in the hotels and also empowering its concerned agency with the right to enforce the law and bring to book those not complying with it.

Bangladesh: The Chime of Challenges

The future challenges of Bangladesh are lying within our national boundary and among ourselves. The sooner we realize our pitfalls and rectify, the better we enter into the global market.

mal allocation of resources and none is going to give anything. Consumers always intend to maximize their surplus by purchasing cheaper goods, notwithstanding the sources of origin of the products.

To many of us, the challenge is not worth pursuing since we are destined to lose because of our existing underdevelopment. The 'horror' stories make the feeling even stronger. For example, if Bangladesh economy continues to grow at the annual average growth rate of the last decade or so, it would require 50 years to reach Thailand's present status and 75 years to be at par with today's Korea. Thus, given the mileage to be covered up, one might find it worthwhile not to run or walk at all, come what may. It may be mentioned here that Bangladesh (and for that matter the whole South Asia) slipped behind Korea, Taiwan and Singapore only during the last three decades. For example, during 1960s, the per capita income difference between Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) and Korea was not as sharp as it emerges today. During the last three decades, reportedly Bangladesh's per capita income grew by less than three times as compared to Thailand's 25 times and Korea's 50 times. Thus, it was during the last three decades that we became laggards and they became leaders. The most pertinent question is: is there any short-cut and short-circuit ways of catching up with the Jones? Possibly yes.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya of BIDS (secretary of BEA) provided some historical anecdotes of growth rates of different

countries which, if taken seriously, might go a long way in healing our depressed dispositions. From 1780, it took United Kingdom 58 years to double their per capita income. Since 1839, the USA did the same in 47 years and Japan doubled its per capita income by 38 years (since 1885). Whereas, remarkably, Korea doubled its per capita income within 11 years and most recently China by less than 10 years! Unbelievable performance indeed! But how?

It was possible for two sim-

ments to eradicate mass illiteracy. About 29 million children of Bangladesh are out of primary school at the moment. Two-thirds of all under-five deaths are added to malnutrition — and half of the infants are born underweight. And lastly, there is only one doctor for 12,500 people of this country. With such a fragile human resource base, realities might betray our dreams of becoming competitive in the world.

The government's commitment of eradicating illiteracy by 2000 and health for all

doorsteps and by (ii) allowing foreign investments that help inflow of new technologies. Korea's experience should clearly be interpreted: protection was given to selected industries which portrayed potentialities of gaining international market. Inefficient industries got no public sector help.

Another important factor that goes to elevate competitive edge is the availability of physical infrastructure. The status of telecommunication, transport and electricity determines the capacities of economies to integrate themselves into the world market. For example, the completion of the Jamuna Bridge could turn the whole economy into a vibrant one and if along with it utility services pick up, there should be lesser problems in experiencing a growth rate of, say, 6-7 per cent. The utilities need to be removed from the bondage of the public sector.

If Bangladesh aims to double its per capita income within a short space of time then, needless to mention perhaps, there should be a bulge in investments (both domestic and foreign) in the economy. It is, perhaps, a futile exercise to cry for more investment without creating the climate for investment. Suppose, an investor visits Bangladesh to test the feasibility of his project. What does he observe? Sitting in the plane, he looks through the window and finds people cutting grasses and grazing cattle beside the run-way! Next he queues in the immigration and finds airport officials busy in checking out their relatives. He gets out and is given an awful reception by

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



ple reasons: 'perceptions were pragmatic and policies were right. The 'heroes' heavily invested in human capacity building and thus helped human capital formation. Labour was turned into capital to substitute scarce natural capital. And especially in Korea, it was not through massively subsidized university or higher education but by the spread of basic and technical education. In fact, basic and technical education used to claim the largest chunk of education budget. That is, perhaps, why Koreans tend to displace anyone anywhere as far as skills of workers are concerned.

Where are we now? Two-thirds of all of our adults are illiterate despite the commitments by successive govern-

should now be well meaningful than it used to be in the past. The huge population that the country tends to shoulder as liability should be turned into assets by massive investments in education (basic and technical), health (primary health care) to harvest a good crop from globalisation.

The availability of technology is the right answer to the question of cutting short the long distance. The urgency of the need for a technological breakthrough can hardly be felt in a protected economy since profit is, to an extent, determined by the level of protection rather than by the efficiency of production. A relatively open economy brings technology to the forefront by (i) allowing competitive commodities at the

Politics of Political Party

After watching party elections of Congress in the different states, I can say the species called ordinary party worker is extinct. Money and criminals have taken over at most places. Bogus membership has made a mockery of elections. None has the courage or authority to verify them, apart from voicing allegations, which have been numerous this time.

THE stakes must be high. Otherwise, it is difficult to comprehend the heat that the election of party president has generated both in Congress and the Janata Dal. It is true that the president allots tickets to the party candidates. But where is the fire? I do not see the polls round the corner, as Bhartiya Janata Party president L K Advani does.

In fact, both Congress and the Janata Dal would do their best to avoid an early poll. They know — if the recent byelections are an indication — that they will lose the most. What is happening in the two parties has little to do with election. Nor are they posturing themselves for it. They are simply caught in the gale of groupism. It is a battle to prove supremacy, who in the party has a bigger clout.

Laloo Prasad Yadav of Janata Dal had yet another reason: he wanted to divert attention from his involvement in the Rs 950-crore cattle fodder scam. He worked himself into control of the party. But after a time he realised that he could not do so unless he seduced it. Hence the bid to become the party president.

Whatever the calculations of different leaders in the two parties, they have damaged themselves as well as their organisations. Groupism has pulverised Congress and the Janata Dal to such an extent that it is difficult to pick up the pieces. Even when there is an effort to close the ranks, the bitterness among them is so much that they will work against their opponent in the party in the next election. The charges the leaders of the two parties have traded and the methods they have used during electioneering must have disillusioned even the most loyal party worker, not to speak of others.

Of what use is the party ticket if the voters are disgusted? The party president has

importance as long as his reputation is intact. Both Congress and the Janata Dal have dragged the leadership through the streets. I do not know how the election of A or B matters when the very fabric of parties has been torn asunder. The party flag flies in tatters upon the mast. From where does the elected president pick up the thread?

Congress probably is in a better position. It has a court of appeal in Sonia Gandhi. Whether she will prove to be an asset for the party in the next election is yet to be seen. But there is no doubting about her authority when Sitaram Kesari and Sharad Pawar, heading the two main groups in Congress, have accepted her as their leader. As for the Congress president, she could have occupied the office if she wanted to after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination six years ago. Whatever her status, she can always intervene to keep peace in the party and give advice on the distribution of party tickets when the differences surface.

Congress members already know how to win her favour. Former minister Vasant Sathe dragged her to a cultural function to be in her good books. The occasion was the facilitation of Bhim Sen Joshi for the heights he has attained in vocal music. Sathe made her sit on the dais by the side of prime minister I K Gujral. Other Congress leaders are not so crude. Still most of them queue up outside 10, Janpath, her residence. However humiliating it may be, Congress has a person whose authority the partymen do not question.

The Janata Dal has none.

Laloo Prasad Yadav has reduced it to an organisation, which respects nobody, follows nobody. The prime minister should have a final say, as has been the case in Congress. But the manner in which party working president Sharad Yadav stalled him from introducing the wom-

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

en's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha shows that the party knows no institution, much less respect. The ultimate loss is that of the Janata Dal.

If one were to recall examples leadership in Congress, Mrs Indira Gandhi realised quite early in her political career that she must combine the offices of Congress president and prime minister. She did not want to have two centres of power. However, she had to split the party in 1969 to achieve her end. Rajiv Gandhi, riding on the sympathy wave in the wake of his mother's assassination, had no problem. Narasimha Rao graduated the other way round. He became the Congress president first. The position helped him make the prime minister-ship. Both Sitaram Kesari and Sharad Pawar are traversing the same path. But when the chips are down, they will at least accept the supremacy of the party.

The Janata Dal, if it is to survive as a party, must do the same. It will have to discipline the state leaders. Already con-

as a force. Congress is too tainted because of corruption and the BJP is too bigoted because of its communal outlook. The Janata Dal has a chance provided it does not get lost among personalities and joins hands to fight on issues.

Against this background, Laloo Prasad Yadav becomes dispensable. He, with his image cannot fit into the Janata Dal. Railway minister Ram Vilas Paswan, also from Bihar, is

quite right in demanding his resignation. Laloo will always rock the party. This is a good opportunity to bring back former Karnataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde, who is instrumental in the defeat of Janata Dal candidates in the byelections in the state.

If we are talking about leadership, the organisational elections do not throw it up. They are only an exercise which the political parties go over periodically. They get importance when a party is divided. In Nehru's days, it happened once when he wanted J B Kripalani as the Congress president and Sardar Patel favoured Purushottam Das Tandon. Earlier, Mahatma Gandhi also tried his best to keep Subhas Chandra Bose from the office of Congress president. But he was elected despite Gandhi's. However, Bose preferred to resign.

After watching party elections of Congress in the different states, I can say the species called ordinary party worker is extinct. Money and criminals

OPINION

Let's Take a Hard Look at Ourselves

A Rahman

Most countries where cricket

is widely played, have, in due course of time, qualified to play in the World Cup series. Not until now have we heard of this resulting in nationwide euphoria or in a large section of the population going berserk as has happened in Bangladesh on Wednesday the 9th of April '97.

I would have thought that a nicely worded congratulatory letter from either the President or the Prime Minister would have been adequate recognition of a job very well done indeed. I was therefore surprised when the PM announced a car for each member of the team. What followed, cannot be expected anywhere else in the civilized world: the race by the ministers and anybody else who considers himself a VIP, to greet the team and to declare awards for them. Surely in the march of history, in the life of a nation, such an event cannot be of such great significance, and this is the reason why the events of 9th April and those that followed subsequently, worried me to an extent. After all, this was no mere staged political propaganda stunt, but also a fully spontaneous reaction of the people. Yet the same people do not react to the very grave and vital events that are taking place at the same time, events that we have far more effects on their lives and the generations that will follow.

Have we no courageous and responsible leader who will stand up and explain that there is serious cause for worry, and that this widespread need to perceive, in a greatly magnified manner, any real and tangible cause of joy, such as the achievement on this occasion by our cricketers, indicates a most unfortunate situation, a malady in the psyche of the nation, caused by an emptiness in our hearts, resulting from the lack of any real good or greatness in our national life with which we can identify, from the chronic discontentment and lack of happiness and joy in the lives of our people who find nothing to hope for, nothing to dream about, whose only thought is limited to ensuring a meal for the morrow. This is how our leaders have failed us time and time again.

When Spinoza found that he could not agree with those in position of authority, the Ecclesiastical Council, he accepted excommunication with all the somber formalities of the Hebrew curses, being utterly cast out from his family and race, rather than consent to maintaining a show of loyalty to those in power, and continued to write and preach what he believed in.

Voltaire, in spite of being imprisoned and exiled, and against very great odds, continued to write which literally roused France from her slumber, and taught her citizens to

think which eventually led to the French Revolution. The contributions of Rousseau and others are also well recognized. In contrast to the above, what has been the role of our 'recognised' intellectuals? They appear to have abdicated their responsibility totally. They give pleasant interviews on the TV and write nice little books and lengthy theses whose only purpose appears to be to exhibit the extent of their erudition, and when it serves their purpose, to gang up against anyone who is courageous enough to criticize those in position of power. Frankly, to the common man, this stinks of moral and ethical bankruptcy. You may not agree with me, but surely you must respect my right to disagree with you.

If one of the 'gifts' of our leaders of the last 25 years is a chronic identity crisis which appears to manifest itself as an acute need to prostrate ourselves before our heroes as mentioned above, it is high time our 'intellectuals' came forward to pay up their dues to the land that has nurtured them and provides their daily bread, let them teach us that if respect is to be given, let it be given to the eternal heroes such as the self-actualized men of A H Maslow, and others found in the realm of great literature. Let them teach about heroes who while remaining fully responsive to the world of facts, yet retain a detachment which comes from worshipping by ideals which they hold fast against society which cares naught for their hopes and fears, and that the gate to true religion is open to only those who are able to do so. Let them teach us about the higher reaches of human nature, of the beauty and goodness that this life is yet capable of, despite all its adversities, and that these are achievable in our lives. Let them help this nation to hope, and to dream again.

It is time we took a hard look at ourselves, it is time we decided to respect our selves and do the right thing; because only thus will we stop hurting our children and the generations that will follow.

the rowdy crowd awaiting outside. He tries to contact relevant persons but to his utter dismay, finds the telephone out of order. He visits Bol and observes load shedding! He decides to visit, say, Khulna but fails because of overhauls. Should that gentleman decide to invest few million dollars here?

These lead to the issue of good governance. Professor Wahiduddin Mahmood, the president of BEA, rightly continues to hammer on this point. Establishment of good governance requires three preconditions: (a) establishment of rule of law — property rights, upgrading judicial system; (b) depoliticization of administration; (c) close monitoring of the operation of market so that none can manipulate the market conditions in his favour, and also (d) tough administration with stable decisions; (e) frequent dialogues with opposition political parties (within and outside parliament) on major issues with a view to reaching consensus and (f) delving powers to local level institutions by making them alive. Participation of people in economic spheres should be ensured through revitalized local government institutions.

We are happy to note that few of the above mentioned preconditions are already in the agenda to be filled in, few are to take off the ground. In all, time is the binding constraint for us and we should spare no moment to put them in practice. Debates are good but prolonged debates on the same issues are debilitating. The future challenges of Bangladesh are lying within our national boundary and among ourselves. The sooner we realize our pitfalls and rectify, the better we enter into the global market. Globalisation is just a wake up call!

have taken over at most places. Bogus membership has made a mockery of elections. None has the courage or authority to verify them, apart from voicing allegations, which have been numerous this time. One Congress chief minister told me the other day that none had any illusion about elections. "But we see to it that we do not interfere in each other's territory."

The cadre-based organisations like the BJP and the two communist parties are better placed. However, they lose the advantage when the RSS dictates the BJP and the top communist leadership the functionaries below. The two parties would do well if they were to dismount the old men riding on their shoulders.

While on the BJP, I must offer my apology to its leader, Atal Behari Vajpayee. I said in my last column that he did not get up to defend the institution of prime minister when he was under attack in the Lok Sabha. Vajpayee phoned to correct me. I have checked the parliament proceedings and he did try to draw the members' attention to the respect and esteem that the office of prime minister demanded. But the voice of sanity was lost in the noise made. I, too, did not hear him properly.

To the Editor...

Publicity stunt?

Sir, Photograph of two policemen published in the front page of your daily (23 May) showed them at the peak of their professional immaturity. Apprehending two armed killers is a praiseworthy job, I do agree. But, just take a look at the photograph. Both the policemen have their punk-like (non-service pattern). I should say sunglasses on. The policeman on the right has made a face which may remind one of an action hero. Most eye-catching is that they are pointing the seized guns right at the photographer.

For God's sake, a person with minimum knowledge on weapon handling will never point a gun at somebody even if the gun is not loaded. It is a basic weapon drill taught at the very beginning of any weapon training.

Dear police, we, the people, pay you to render many services to us. Apprehending killers is one of them but making us laugh is not.

Mr Hassan Banorupa, Rangamati

Moral pollution

Sir, The World Environment Day was duly observed throughout the country on June 5. It is needless to say that our very existence is now threatened due to environmental degradation of the country due to population explosion, congestion, slums, poverty, traffic jams etc., etc. But a far greater threat that has developed the country is the moral pollution.

In the present day Bangladesh normal human values

have suffered the most devastation, and social ills and artificial values are eating into the vitals of the society. The individual member of the society is after enormous wealth with little efforts made. The basic principles of economic, social and cultural development are subverted, and 'powerful' or 'noted' members of the society are having their way.

It is often said that we are the poorest nation in the world (near the bottom of the list) because twelve crore of people are living in fifty-six thousand square miles of land space (eighty ninth country in size, and eighth country in terms of population) with no natural resources to fall back upon. But that is not the whole story.

In our school days, we came across a proverb, viz. "When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost something is lost; but when character is lost everything is lost". Moral pollution creeps in and is spreading in geometric progression. The history of the nations is replete with this phenomenon. The time has now come when the nation has to do some hard thinking for its own survival.

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Deadbody in Biman's wheel carriage?

Sir, The incident in which the dead body of a young man was discovered in the wheel carriage of an aircraft of Bangladesh Biman at Riyadh

airport stunned and upset us deeply. It proves that there is a great flaw in the security system of Zia International Airport. We know that all over the world, safety measures at airports are taken with great care and security remains ever vigilant. I don't know why we can't do anything properly. It is really disheartening. Those persons who are entrusted with the airport and the aircraft, where were they, when an astounding incident like a man climbing in the wheel carriage happened?

We frequently hear about passengers subjected to unnecessary harassment at Zia International Airport. Is it not preposterous that those on duty have time enough to harass people but not to perform their duties earnestly? This sort of mentality is deplorable and should be shunned.

The government must take stern actions against those persons whose lapse of duty helped to materialise above-mentioned incident. In the future, slackness in any form must be dealt with severity.

Nur Jahan East Nasrabad, Chittagong

How long?

Sir, Prior to 1971, DIT (now RAJUK) Avenue opened into Toyenbec Circular Road, but during the War of Liberation, it was blocked and, later, a wall was put up at its southern end, hindering free flow of traffic. With the free and fair elections in 1991 and in the second one of 1996, should that road be still kept closed?

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