

Heal PG Hospital

The Institute of Post Graduate Medicine and Research (IPGMR) or PG Hospital is in limbo for a month as the nurses there are on an indefinite strike to 'realise their demands'. Fine, they had their apprehension and complaints. But not at the cost of suffering patients whom they have been holding hostages to their grudge and caprice since August 12. Can we ask them what wrong these patients and their attendants have done to them? Are not they professionally pledge bound to be by the sick and suffering at any time under any circumstances?

What is worse these agitating nurses are continuing with their strike even after being reportedly assured that the naming of PG hospital after Bangabandhu will not bring any change to their job status. While there is no denying that there exists certain grayness as regards the job status of the employees of a government facility like the PG hospital when it effectively turns into an autonomous body as Bangabandhu Medical university, there is no scope for allowing resentment over it to spill into the sacred service of nursing.

From reports available there are reasons to suspect that the cause of the present crisis at the IPGMR Hospital is more than a mere sense of insecurity felt by a section of the staff. We would like to remind both the government and the opposition that their dual failure has virtually broken down the health care system in this country. It is the vicious and pervasive nature of our politics that has brought the entire health care system to this pass.

It would not be too irrelevant to say a word or two about the whole naming business. Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf seemed to have had his shirt on fire when he renamed PG Hospital as Bangabandhu Medical University. Pray, what this post haste has led to? What glory has it brought to Bangabandhu's name if this whole idea of strike as reports suggest, has originated from protesting the act of renaming PG Hospital? We think the health minister was wrong in his decision which has brought insult to Bangabandhu.

There is no doubt that the country is in a dire need of a medical university as it is in urgent need of some immediate improvement in the health care sector. But will indiscret political passion be of any help in this matter?

We urge the nurses to resume their work immediately. The concerned ministry should do whatever needs to be done to remove misgivings. We counsel it to be more professional than passionate in its approach in future.

'Curse' of Bumper Crop

In a year of bumper harvest, some amount of price decline is inevitable. But in our country bumper crop appears to come as a curse for the farmers. What an irony! On the one hand, we do everything to make our farmers produce more, and then when they do, we fail to provide them a fair price resulting in a huge financial loss for them. First was the bumper *aman* harvest. This was followed by a good *boro* crop. This resulted in a low price for rice leading to a loss of few thousand crores of taka income for our poor farmers. Now comes the crunch on jute prices. There has been a bumper jute crop of 60 million tons. Our columnist Shahed Latif estimates an average loss of Tk 100 per maund amounting to an estimated loss of Tk. 3,000 crore of disposable income for our farmers.

With losses on both the rice and jute harvest disposal income in the hands of our farmers went down dramatically leading to a weakening of effective demand overall. We agree with Shahed Latif's conclusion that low farm income is the root cause of the current economic slump. Without the usual demand for goods and services from our industrial sector, which usually used to be spurred by demand from the agricultural sector our economy cannot show the buoyancy that is it capable of. We urge our government to seriously take the suggestions made in his piece published on Wednesday last.

What we fail to understand is: why has the government been caught so unprepared by the bumper jute crop, and why also the farmers were allowed to lose so much money in *aman* and *boro* crop? We understand that in a free market economy, there should not exist any subsidy. But on the other hand, all advanced countries extend some sort of price support for the agricultural products in some form or the other.

On the one hand, we ask our farmers to do their best to produce more. Then we do nothing when their efforts lead to great losses due to fall in prices. We will never be able to go for higher level of agricultural output if we do not ensure a fair price to the farmers. Failure to ensure a fair price to our farmers not only destroys the agricultural sector, but also destroys our industrial sector by depressing demand.

Let Dhaka Breathe

Ramna Park, Dhaka's only functional lung possibly, is shrinking frighteningly. Created over 20 years on a land measuring some 68.5 acres, this once truly beautiful tract of sylvan shadows and the home of tall green robed senators is slowly but surely heading towards nothingness in order to make room for a swelling population and the caprice of myopic townplanners.

Hotel, tennis complex, mosque all have chipped away from its spatial existence. But the authorities do not seem to deem this damage enough. Otherwise how could they possibly think of snatching more space from the park to accommodate new constructions? Already allotment of two more acres for the extension of the Kakrail Mosque has been heard. Then there is this grand plan of a cultural complex at the same place. The film people are also reportedly pressing for a similar facility and we are afraid Ramna Park will be the target of the planners if that demand is smiled on by the authorities.

We vehemently protest this trend of mindless expansion of the metropolis at the cost of the Ramna Park. Already Dhaka's record in air pollution is second to none. Eating more of Ramna for the nutrition of new plans of construction will further worsen the situation. We need trees, many trees to breathe oxygen into the air.

We urge the government to shelve all plans of requisitioning space from Ramna Park.

Is the Turkish Welfare Party Facing Closure?

Necmettin Erbakan hosted an unlikely guest in his holiday retreat on the seaside. The guest was Jean Marie le Penn, the French leader well known for his racist views, which include unflattering comments against Turkish workers in France.



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

THE Constitutional Court of Turkey decided to put off consideration of the Welfare Party (RP) request for postponement of examination of the demand by the prosecutor of closure of the RP. According to the prosecutor's decision the matter will now be examined on 4 September, the last date set by the authorities. Yekta Gungor Ozden, the President of the Court stated that by September 4 the Court will take a decision in this regard.

The RP is facing closure on the basis of a case filed by the Court of Appeals in May last on the charges that the party is the focal point of anti-secular activities. If the party is closed, as it appears a possibility, the party Chairman Necmettin Erbakan is expected to be banned from active politics for five years. He is 72.

RP submitted its defense statement earlier this month. The statement made the following important points: 1) Since the Court of Appeals case for

banning the RP ignores the law on the political parties, the Constitutional Court should turn down the application because it is not procedural. 2) The audio and video tapes and newspapers excerpts in the indictment do not constitute evidence. 3) Claims that the party is the 'focal point of anti-secular activities' would prove pointless since the party's activities do not constitute any criminal offense, and 4) The RP believes that the Constitutional Court would carefully take into consideration the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 10 on Freedom of Expression and Article 11 on Freedom of organisation.

After the passage of the bill regarding 8-year compulsory uninterrupted schooling starting from the primary level, the

most important issue is the question of closure of the RP. It may be recalled that a coalition composed of the largest party in the parliament RP and the True Path Party (DYP) led by Tansu Ciller resigned although technically it was never defeated in the Parliament. Indeed the debate secular versus anti secular generated so much heat that Erbakan was literally forced to hand over resignation to President Suleyman Demirel. The largest circulation Turkish daily Hurriyet with solid secular credentials has been pub-

lishing a series of articles giving background to the events leading to the resignation of the government of Erbakan.

The key date was 28 February when at a meeting of the National Security Council the military representatives presented a resolution proposing abolition of the religious Imam-Hatip schools and merging the 5+3 year education system into a continuous 8-year system. It is a revolutionary change in the education system. The then Prime Minister Erbakan is reported to have re-

sisted the pressure to sign but finally yielded.

The passage of the bill has

led to the formation

of a coalition led

by Yilmaz of the

Motherland Party (ANAP) and the coalition partners are

Democratic Left Party (DSP) of

Bulent Ecevit, Democratic Tur-

key Party (DTP) of Husamettin

Cindoruk and supported by

Republican People's Party (CHP)

of Deniz Baykal. Opening of the

schools is less than a month

away and the government has

pulled all stops to mobilise

funds that run into millions of

dollars.

The government enjoys

support from big money and

donation has been pouring in to

help the government meet the

huge burden.

RP is sensing the danger re-

lating to the closure of the party. Necmettin Erbakan hosted an unlikely guest in his holiday retreat on the seaside. The guest was Jean Marie le Penn, the French leader well known for his racist views, which include unflattering comments against Turkish workers in France.

Should the RP be closed the party is bound to surface under another signboard. The pro-Kurdish DTP has faced closure repeatedly and survived through the strategy of appearing under a different name.

As the fate of Welfare Party (RP) hangs in the balance the political parties are making calculations on post RP scenario and the votes that they are expected to grab from the defunct RP.

OPINION

Diplomacy and Professionalism: Stop the Rot

Abul Kalam

A front-page report in *The Daily Star* (3 September 1997) by M Anwarul Haq, captioned 'Officers from other cadres being posted to Foreign Ministry', highlighted the predicament of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the leading decision making apparatus of our foreign policy establishment. As students of diplomacy and world affairs and having also been associated with the training of the MOFA fresher groups since the mid-1980s many of us in the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, feel particularly concerned about the report. Both the esteemed daily and its adept correspondent deserve deep appreciation from conscientious segments of the society for highlighting such an issue of extreme national concern. As there has been no denial so far from either the MOFA or from any other government organ, the veracity of the report could hardly be doubted. Hence there is an overwhelming sense of anguish that the quality of foreign policy decision making and that of the country's diplomacy may be at stake.

The report also specifically mentions the selection criteria of what looks like favoured infiltrators from other ministries into the MOFA. indicates some of the complications already created and touches also on the professional performance side of these outsiders.

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MOFA "is gradually being affected with consequent effect on morale as officers from other cadres are being posted to the ministry in large numbers." He mentions that in the last five months alone, 7 officers of the rank of deputy secretary have been brought from other services into the MOFA and appointed as directors in the headquarters. In addition, 12 assistant senior secretaries have also been brought from other cadres and appointed on deputation to various positions in the MOFA headquarters.

Worse still, some 35 other applications for transfers to the MOFA are also learnt to be in the pipeline, applications that are known to be "strongly recommended by influential quarters" and awaiting approval by the higher authorities.

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Writing about selection criteria of these outside cadres who landed into the MOFA, the report suggests that there was no strict criteria in inducting

cadres from other services into the MOFA. Initially, facing a shortage of personnel, the MOFA itself asked the Establishment Ministry to send 15 qualified officers from other services for appointment on deputation. A viva board accordingly was set up with senior officials but the board in the interview found a few officers "suitable" for induction. Afterwards, what seems mysterious, several officers were inducted without following any specific criteria.

Some of the follow-up complications appear obvious and are already visible. Presently, as Anwarul Haq writes, there are 44 sanctioned posts at assistant secretary level in the MOFA headquarters. With the entry of the outsiders, the existing MOFA cadre posts are nearly filled up. As it seems, continued inflow of officers on deputation will create a problem of surplus staff shortly, adding to the routine problems in re-positioning existing BCS foreign service personnel. As Anwarul Haq rightly points out, 17 assistant secretaries are now on training and they are expected to be posted once their training was over. Moreover, the 20 officers who recently qualified in the 17th BCS as

demically unqualified to be in those positions. Their only merit is favouritism and introducing internecine rivalry to cover their incapacity and to hold on to the chair.

These personnel fail in their discharge of duties and the incumbents/sufferers are forced to go to the ministry seeking redress of their grievances. It is again on the basis of the information supplied by these DGs and directors that the decisions are made and the line/agency/institute are asked to rectify that on that basis. But to, here again these DGs tend to delay implementing the decision and continue with the injustice and wrong they created and raising the level of conflict within the system.

They then blame the ministry for all the nonsense they created in the process. I think the head of the line agencies should be censored for their favouritism and unlawful actions whenever they are identified. I think in this way these lethargic and incompetent people can be got rid of — once for all and peace will prevail in the organisations and institutes they headed — including many injustices of which they are the architects.

Meanwhile a national daily of Dhaka, writes in favour of BNP, has said in one of its recent issue that it is very important and significant when after 21 years AL has come to power. India now wants to hand over Talpatti to Nepal. Bangladesh-India relationship is also cordial. After the Water-Sharing treaty and the CHT peace talks, can we think about Talpatti?

Mentioning a source of a Delhi-based newspaper of India, a Bengali daily has done a feature in their July 3 issue saying that it is time to start talks on Talpatti with India. Talpatti which is the prolonged part of Bangladesh is going to be established. Indian authority has taken the matter of combined-survey to reach a solution of its royalty. Survey of India says the Indian authority is now on a steadfast decision after completing their recent survey that Talpatti is Bangladesh's.

May be farmers cannot turn overnight into politicians, but the politicians will have to learn to farm in their own exclusive and posh farmland known as the Jatiya Sangsad (the Parliament). Until the JS starts working in the normal fashion, change of regime might be unstable, as usual.

We do not want to comment on the debate. What we actually claiming is an immediate attention of the government about Talpatti, so that the favourable political situation may be properly arranged. Anyway, the question may arise as to why this demand in this instant?

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Wheghment of petroleum products

Sir, Upon the recent government action in refining price of the petroleum products there has been much debate in the opposition political parties

auspices and in the public in general where the price hike

has been viewed critically predominating with dissatisfaction over the government action.

The published articles mostly tend to help to protect the interest of the petroleum consumers and buyers. But one aspect of the issue is missing in the expressed opinions which is

weighment of the petroleum products at the retail outlet points.

It is very much important to ensure correct weighment to protect the interest of the consumers in any given price situation.

It is very much necessary to ensure that the consumers will get the correct measure of the products when they pay for the same.

There is at least one government body — the Bangladesh Standards & Testing Institution (BTSI) which is entrusted with the task to monitor and ensure the quality, weighment and pricing of consumer goods but the activities of this institution

is by and large inadequate to safeguard the consumer interest in the country. The negligence of the cited authority is more

commendable in case of distribution of petroleum products where the products are often adulterated and largely mis-

labelled.

It is surprising to find that

all of the fuel pumps are giving

sumption 2 and 1 lac tons respectively) as against rise of Tk 20 per litre in of kerosene and diesel (16 lac tons) is a case of unjust and inequitable transfer of financial burden to a section of the people.

The six-million-dollar question is: what is the market price of oil now? Is it USD 18.04 (as reported in the Dhaka dailies on 21.8.97) or is it USD 30 to 32 as the government says? Has it come down to USD 18.04 from USD 25 per barrel in January? Will the government come out with a categorical statement on these points?

In this age of open market economy which the present government supports let the state monopoly in oil import and sale be broken relieving the nation of the burden to pay for inefficient management of yet another SOE, as the writer so rightly suggested in his article.

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Modes of transport in Dhaka city

Sir, Due to high lead level in the air and acute traffic jam in Dhaka city, it has become essential to phasing out the environment-unfriendly modes of transports like two-stroke tempo and autorickshaw from the city as well as to restrict the use of man-pulled cart, cycle, rickshaw and rickshaw vans, motor-trucks in the city's main roads as far as possible, especially during day time. In order to achieve these, we may now think of using modes of transport such as, electric tram, LRV (Light Railway Vehicle) which is otherwise called improved type of electric tram, natural gas-operated and battery-operated motor vehicles. These are completely air pollution-free transport systems.

Light Railway System is also treated as an alternative to the tube or sub-way (an underground railway). To ease the acute problem of traffic jam in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, Indonesian government is going to take in hand soon a project of Light Railway System connecting the northern and southern sections of Jakarta by a well-known consortium including a company headed by President Suharto's eldest daughter. A similar project of LRS connecting southern and northern sections of Dhaka city (Sadarghat to Mirpur/Uttara via Tejgaon, Firmgate) may be planned and undertaken in near future.

While visiting Indonesia would the Prime Minister take an opportunity to discuss the matter with president Suharto's daughter Siti Tutut Hardiyanti Rukmana for implementation of the same in Bangladesh?

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