

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 complains. 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 indiscreet 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

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

The passage of the bill has not only put the formation of a new government led by Yilmaz of the Motherland Party (ANAP) and the coalition partners are Democratic Left Party (DSP) of Bulent Ecevit, Democratic Turkey Party (DTP) of Husametdin Cindogruk 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 up 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. Le Penn was approached by Erbakan reportedly for assistance from the European parliament should RP be closed. Erbakan has dispatched his foreign policy adviser Abdullah Gul to the US seeking support.

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

As the fate of Welfare Party (RP) hang 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.

Just to recap, Anwarul Haq cites some informed (though unidentified) sources to state that professionalism in the

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.

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

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 mysteriously, 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

foreign service cadres, are also expected to join the MOFA in a couple of months. A stand-off situation is then likely to be created in the ministry and sate the rot.

The most crippling effect would be on diplomatic professionalism. The morale of the existing set of MOFA officers is likely to be moved, as Anwarul Haq points out, with a glut created by recruits from other services and "their own chances of promotion and overseas posting on due time may be affected, further eroding their morale and affecting performance."

What is more important from the point of view of the country's permanent interest, is the efficiency and effectiveness of the foreign service personnel in their pursuit of foreign policy objectives or of diplomacy. To these ends they need both specific skills and expertise. In terms of grounding and leanings, utopia and vision as well as background training during the probation period, they are groomed for their ultimate assignments in projecting and promoting the country's interests abroad. Others with different set of background and from different ministries do not simply fit, except their own,

into the system of decision making expertise and subtlety which are required for our diplomatic personnel. Is it not natural that having viewed these outsiders into the MOFA, performance-wise, the existing folks of the ministry would be resentful and dissatisfied?

Only last year the government decided to re-start training programme of the foreign service personnel in a full-fledged Foreign Service Academy and housed it into the premises of the prestigious Shughandha. The President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed himself graced the occasion of formal inauguration of the Academy as Chief Guest. The commitment was then to re-build the image of professionalism and virtuosity that ought to be hallmark of our diplomacy in the post-Cold War era. Many of us who were associated with the programme since its inception admired the government's decision then, but now feel as if that the cause is betrayed.

It is almost a disbelief that while the MOFA is being presided over by a ranking political personality such as a respected veteran, who also held the same position of the nation at its very creation, such an anomalous situation could be allowed to develop. There is also a very bright and young

Oxonian State Minister who could, as well, help avert such a situation emerging that would have serious ramifications for the morale and job performance of his team of subordinate staff members.

Appalling still, the MOFA is supposed to be under sharp vigilance and guidance of one of the most capable diplomatic professionals of the country, and one wonders whether he has been a willing party to the kind of predicament the MOFA is currently left with or is it that no body really cares about what is going to happen to MOFA's professionalism or to the country's prime institution of diplomacy any way?

Perhaps the problem deserves urgent attention from both the Head of State and the Head of Government of the republic. Specifically, both the state dignitaries should intervene to halt the rot, prevent wilful politicisation and/or privatization of the nation's elite foreign policy decision making apparatus — order an withdrawal of the outsiders from the MOFA and help build its profile of institutional excellence and proficiency.

The writer is a Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

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.

Sir/Madam

Sir, I notice that all the letters to the editor begin with the word 'Sir'. Would I be correct to guess that *The Daily Star* has no female editors, or is it that you are stuck with tradition?

To break the gender bias in your 'Letters to the Editor' section, I suggest you take out 'Sir' at the beginning of the sentences. That way we are not strictly addressing a male editor. But if you must have some kind of addressing at the beginning, it would be more civilised to begin with 'Sir/Madam'.

Munir Razaque
USA

There are many editors in the sense of those who 'edit' others writings. But there is only one editor who is responsible for running the whole paper. At the moment, the editor happens to be a male. As and when we will have a female editor, letters will no doubt be addressed to 'Madam'. Till then you will have to live with 'Sir'. — Editor

A princess' death: another view

Sir, In a fairy tale, the death of a princess always evokes sadness. When that princess is a glamorous figure in real life, the passing figure gets all the more poignant. This has happened in the case of Princess Diana. The world-wide range and the intensity of the grief felt over her demise in excruciatingly tragic circumstances may seem unprecedented. The tragedy gained added dimension because of her association with humanitarian causes like relieving sufferings of victims of AIDS, leprosy and land mines and championing campaigns for reducing their incidence.

In the vortex of high-flying social and cultural ethos of the inordinately rich of the West, which only the people living under the aegis of their life styles are likely to understand, the huge dimension of the popularity enjoyed by the princess may gradually fade with the passage of time. In view of her inexorable trust with death, the memories connected with her association with humanitarian causes may have a more lasting existence. This unique privilege of fortune may not perhaps be enjoyed by some of the charismatic women of the past, such as Jacqueline Kennedy. The cases of some surviving figures like Elizabeth Taylor who is similarly dedicated to the cause of research

against AIDS are still open. Our heart-felt wounds, however, would have been somewhat assuaged if any equally charismatic figure could shed tears for the millions of outraged women who were victims of the barbarous Serbs in Bosnia.

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Mid-term polls?

Sir, Opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia has hinted that mid-term polls might pull the country out from the political stalemate prevailing since 1991. If it does, it is good news for the over-exploited citizens to escape from the tyranny of the political culture now in the process of flowering, without watering and the use of fertiliser; in fact without the right type of farming.

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

Also, during the next general elections, whenever it comes, the difference in the total number of votes gained (not seats) by the two main political parties should be around 20 per cent, to ensure stable governance. The marginal limit, adding or subtracting the small fries, has to be within 15 per cent, not less.

From a recent public poll, it seems that the public is losing faith in the politicians and politics in general. This is not good news for the political giants. The voters might like to switch allegiance, just for a change (a typical Bengalee characteristic). That is why during the last general election, although the Awami League won, the public kept BNP as a standby (37/34 per cent votes).

These are pointers for the political leaders. They have to come up to expectation. There is no alternative; the state has to be run by the politicians. Politics is too much in the limelight; it has to recede into the background, and merge with it, so that the nation can work without distraction at the respective profession and build up the country. Those who cause delays should be accountable.

A Husrain
Dhaka

South Talpatti

Sir, In this region, we see that China and India have changed their attitude and agreed to reduce troops from their borders. Both are trying to be friends. Same thing can be mentioned about India and Pakistan. They already have met twice — at Maley in the Maldives and at Islamabad in Pakistan. And it was quite different from any other of their previous meetings. Both sides are optimistic. Besides, India now is ready to give transit facility to Nepal. Bangladesh-India relationship is also cordial. After the Water-Sharing treaty and the CHT peace talks, can't 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.

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 Bangladesh. Why?' There is a sinister motive behind the handover story, says the Bengali daily.

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 used properly. Anyway, the question may arise as to why this demand in this instant?

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Promotion and appointments

Sir, Recently, a lot of criticisms are seen in the newspapers about the irregularities in promotion and appointments in senior positions under different line ministries. Often the tendency is to blame line ministries for these irregularities. I am a sufferer myself and can cite examples from agricultural sector. The present government has undone many mischiefs and wrong-doings of the past and present at these agencies and institutes under the ministry of agriculture under the dynamic leadership of the present minister of agriculture.

However, still more needs to be done. As the actual situation is like this — most of these institutes and departments under the ministry of agriculture are being headed by persons who are not only inept but also ac-

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, 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 censured 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 end to many injustices of which they are the architects.

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Whegment of petroleum products

Sir, Upon the recent government action in refixing price of the petroleum products there has been much debate in the opposition political parties 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 weightage of the petroleum products at the retail outlet points. It is very much important to ensure correct weightage 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 (BSTI) which is entrusted with the task to monitor and ensure the quality, weightage 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 misweighed.

It is surprising to find that all of the fuel pumps are giving

lesser volume of fuel to vehicles which have in-built fuel measuring meters. The degree of marking up of fuel dispensing meters of filling stations vary from one filling station to another. Most of the filling stations in the country give below 70 per cent of the standard measure of petroleum when a few distributors give a relatively better measure in selling; may be up to 90 per cent of the correct measure which is well-known to the vehicle drivers. For this, the drivers queue in some filling stations where they get a relatively better weightage avoiding the others even if they are located very closely.

With this petroleum product measurement anomaly, the consumers are being denied the lawful value of money paid when the sellers are making illegal profit. Such profiteering should be arrested immediately and BSTI should launch and maintain vigilance in this regard in the public interest.

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"Was the Petroleum Product Price Increase Necessary?"

Sir, The article written by Mr Kazi U Ahmed on the above-caption published in *The Daily Star* on 24th August, 97 really reveals a deep insight into a very hotly-debated issue of the day. The writer deserves appreciation and thanks for his well-written article with erudite observations. The analysis of the situation is masterly that bares the realities out of a jumble of confusion created by generality of statement and opinion given by the government in fragile defence of price-hike of the petroleum products.

Contrary to the government assertion the fare charged by diesel bus service in the capital itself has already created financial burden of additional fare for not-too-rich travelling public (Metro Bus fare in Motijheel-Uttra route, for example). Auto-rickshaw fare does concern the lower and middle class people in the urban, suburban and even in the rural areas. The argument that the government will bear 60 per cent of the petrol price hike and only 40 per cent falls on the auto-rickshaw and private car owners is open to serious questioning. Whatever amount the government pays as incremental price, it goes back to it through BPC and hence the government is not at all affected by the recent price-hike.

It is only the 40 per cent of the consumer of petrol who is forced to pay more. Admitting that the price of petroleum products has to be raised because of international market forces the rise in the price of petrol by Tk 7.30 and octane by Tk 8.35 per litre (annual con-

sumption 2 and 1 lac tons respectively as against rise of Tk 25 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 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 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, specially 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, Farmgate) 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' Hardianti Rukmana for implementation of the same in Bangladesh?

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