

Why be Destructive?

BNP may have several reasons, some of them cogent also, to be boiling inside out over the way the party has been treated and the country run during one and a quarter years of a reincarnate Awami League rule.

There is a consolation though that in her freshly-announced agitational programme Begum Zia has confined herself to a rail, road barricade rather than calling for a hartal as such.

But in an unmistakable way her programme for bringing rail and road communication to a halt bears disturbing signals for the national economy and civic life for it is set on Sunday, with Friday and Saturday being public holidays.

A major political party should be credited with more wisdom than those impulsive public transport-related trade unions which often threaten vehicular strikes to be realising how badly rail and road blockade can tell upon the national economy.

Suffering Consumers

Consumer unfriendliness seems to be the only theme with the country's power sector. As if sufferings due to shortage of power and rampant corruption in the sector were not enough for the beleaguered tax-payers, the government has decided to raise the price of power for the second time this year.

If upping the price in the utilities sector is a necessity that the government cannot help in order to keep pace with the global economic trends, then providing service worth the price it charges from the citizens is an equally inviolable obligation from which it can never dissociate itself particularly in a democratic system.

The raising of power tariffs is not regrettably accompanied by a presentation of the overall picture in the energy sector. During the first hike of power price by 17% way back in April, the government did not even make a public announcement.

Imposition of economic burden upon people in the form of periodic and abrupt raise in the price when so much is left to be desired in terms of housecleaning in the utilities sector is a sure sign of alienation between the people and the government.

It is clear from the report that the increase in power price has had little to do with practical economics. Even if we play down the geographical and other considerations behind the price of power being cheaper in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and some parts of India, there remains other logic to contest this latest decision for a hike.

Truth is, much of the government compulsion in raising price stems from the huge and unabated losses incurred in the energy sector due to the flaws and loopholes in the system.

The government would be better advised to get rid these problems instead of weighing a poor people further down with price hikes every now and then. It is not fair to make the public pay for the systemic inefficiency of any particular sector.

Wake up

Casualties caused by criminal incidences is one of the surest items in the morning press these days. In the glut of sad stories of abject surrender by the victims to the agents of terrorism, the businessmen in parts of old Dhaka have taken a very welcome if not novel stance.

Terrorism and extortion have reportedly been a way of life with these people for a long time. Not only the sufferers, but the law enforcing agency also knows the groups and people who extort money from the businessmen by applying various tactics ranging from holding people to ransom to the rather novel system of blackmailing by portraying the victim as a terrorist.

As it is evident odd nabbing of crime kingpins here and there is not helping the situation in a society that is quailing under the threat of pervasive terrorism. There is no denying that it is not entirely within police's reach to curb terrorism; a social movement is the order of the day to combat it effectively.

We want to remind the party in power that whatever it said about removing terrorism before the elections has not been translated into reality. People particularly the business community seems to be as vulnerable to terrorism as any time in the past.

Just How Poorly are the Civil Servants Paid in Bangladesh?

It has been widely documented that they have no service standard, no stake for improving performance, and no sense of responsibility or accountability. How do they deserve a pay-hike in a society that claims allegiance to accountability and transparency?

THE Pay Commission has figured out that each government car — used for officers at the deputy secretary and above levels — cost the government Tk. 27,000 each month.

This proposal, the Commission maintains, will enable the government to save Tk. 19,000 per officer per month — Tk. 2 lakh 28 thousand per officer per year. Obviously, the total annual savings will run into billions of taka, as there are more than 1,000 such officers employed with the government.

Not a single day passes when scores of reports do not appear in newspaper pages suggesting large-scale bungs in some government agencies or offices, when helpless people do not cry out in wilderness seeking fair treatment from the bureaucracy or stark examples of senseless bureaucratic wastage do not defy wildest imaginations.

Just how colossal is the wastage in the public sector in the country? Take the example of the transportation cost for the senior civil servants. The nation — globally known for its abysmal economic condition and poor prospects for moving ahead — has to pay Tk. 27,000 per month per officer just for their transportation only.

It is a part of common knowledge that when it comes to unbridled corruption, notorious service standard, senseless abuse of power and privileges, and unchallenged wastage of scarce national resources, few bureaucracies on earth can beat the monumental records of the public service in Bangladesh.

Parishads have attracted the bulk of public commentary for political fears that these bodies without the benefit of any proper system of election may be manipulated by the ruling party to become captive clients.

While such fears may well merit serious attention, the larger question is why the grand rhetoric of local government reform once again appears to end up in such feeble and inconclusive progress? The question is of the utmost importance for an electorate eager for results and it is very much in the public interest that the proposed reforms and the Commission report as a whole be subjected to a thoroughgoing critique.

The following features of the sociology of the commission process are key to understanding the results which have followed:

To the Editor...

Govt should take up the matter

Sir, I was watching live transmission of mother Teresa's funeral from Calcutta on NBC, the leading American network. It was also simultaneously shown on many other European television channels.

As formal placing of floral wreaths began, President of Albania came first, as the mother being an Albanian (Meccedonian) in origin, followed by Ghanian President and then the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

Since then I was wondering, how could a premier network like NBC, watched by millions in America and all over the world, make such a grave error, or is it because the country being Bangladesh, nobody cares who is on the schedule? Now, the government should take up the matter, formally protest to NBC and demand apology.

Alarming Rail robberies

Sir, It is not funny to read in the newspapers the armed contingents travelling in the running trains to guard and protect the passengers cannot defend, guard and protect even themselves; and meekly surrender their arms to attacking hoodlums. Is this the meaning of the government propaganda that the law and order situation in the country is under control?

Death of four BUET students

Sir, The death of four student of Mechanical Engineering Department of BUET on Cox's Bazar beach highly shocked the people. These four students were a part of 50 students accompanied by four teachers at the Cox's Bazar beach as a part of their study tour.

Clearing House

Sir, A few years back, Clearing House sat twice a day to dispose off the cheques received from different banks all over Dhaka.

tion also came up with substantially higher payments for the civil servants, of course, basing their assessments on incomplete and flawed information.

Moreover, it is simply ridiculous to believe that even in financial terms, the civil servants of the country are being paid poorly. Fact of the matter is, even in financial terms the civil servants are paid most handsomely in this society.

Moreover, it is simply ridiculous to believe that even in financial terms, the civil servants of the country are being paid poorly. Fact of the matter is, even in financial terms the civil servants are paid most handsomely in this society.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Too Much 'Democracy', Too Few 'Powers'

by Hossain Zillur Rahman

A common weakness of LG reform agenda has been the imbalance in the attention given to issues of representation at the expense of issues of powers and jurisdictions. The current Commission Report as well as the new bills suffer from exactly the same crucial weakness.

Initial Goal of Total Change: Local government reform commissions invariably tend to be invested with an apparent initial mandate of total change.

Bureaucrats in the Driving Seat: The most striking aspect of commission sociology is the emergency of the bureaucrat members in the driving seat in the course of the commission work.

Consultation As a Side-show: From the outset of this Commission, explicit emphasis was put upon consultation as a major activity. Indeed, a questionnaire survey was launched and several rounds of high-profile discussions with intellectuals and activists held.

Sociology of the Commission Process: The following features of the sociology of the commission process are key to understanding the results which have followed:

Commission itself but only as a follow-up activity entrusted to a Secretary's Committee.

Too Much Democracy, Too Few Powers: A common weakness of LG reform agenda has been the imbalance in the attention given to issues of representation at the expense of issues of powers and jurisdictions.

General Versus Specific Powers: It is not the case that jurisdictions are not at all defined for local governments. A major aspect of the enfeeblement of local governments vis-a-vis administration is that the powers of the former are invariably defined in general but vague terms while the powers of the latter are enshrined in specific and precise terms.

Big Intentions, Small Results: Local government reform agenda. However, intentions may not be enough here. The specific sociology of the policy process which acts against the emergence of a meaningful action plan seems to be firmly in place. To this has been added the distraction of fears of political manipulation of the new tier of Gram Parishad.

Commission itself but only as a follow-up activity entrusted to a Secretary's Committee.

Too Much Democracy, Too Few Powers: A common weakness of LG reform agenda has been the imbalance in the attention given to issues of representation at the expense of issues of powers and jurisdictions.

General Versus Specific Powers: It is not the case that jurisdictions are not at all defined for local governments. A major aspect of the enfeeblement of local governments vis-a-vis administration is that the powers of the former are invariably defined in general but vague terms while the powers of the latter are enshrined in specific and precise terms.

Big Intentions, Small Results: Local government reform agenda. However, intentions may not be enough here. The specific sociology of the policy process which acts against the emergence of a meaningful action plan seems to be firmly in place. To this has been added the distraction of fears of political manipulation of the new tier of Gram Parishad.

OPINION "DCC's Radical Venture"

Kallyan Kishore Debnath

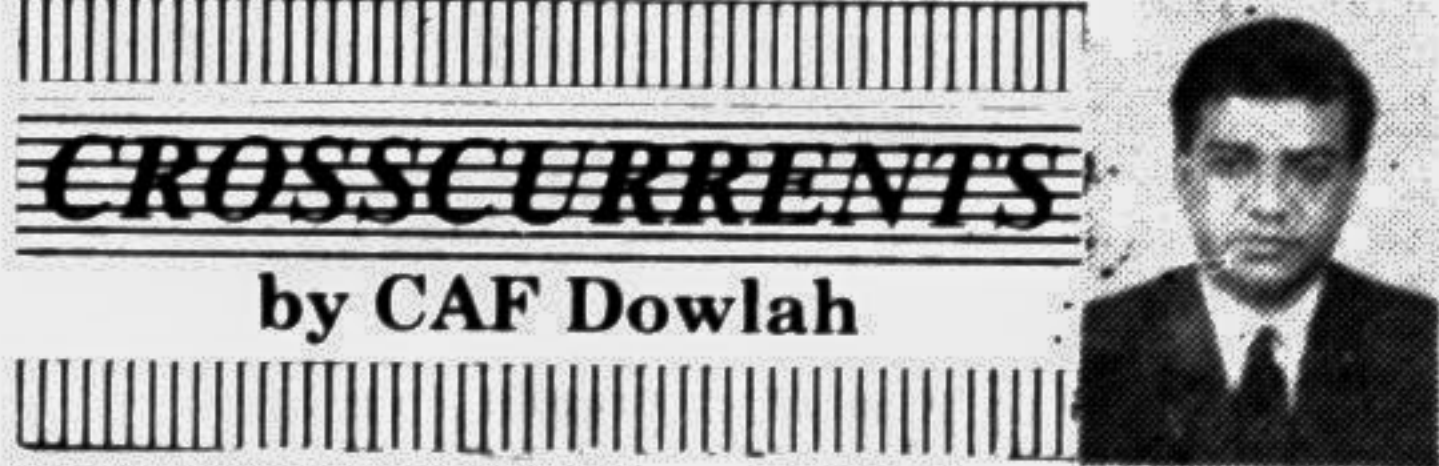
I feel pleasure to offer you thanks for the editorial published on Aug. 23 under the caption of "DCC's Radical Venture". In my opinion, the most important reason of our present crippled economic status is the failure to utilise our resources in a well-planned and appropriate way.

The scenario of the bureaucracy is probably more disappointing. The bureaucrats are taking the chance of political weakness and most of them are lacking adequate level of talent. Over the last two decades, what we have seen, the inefficient and corrupt-minded individuals have managed to get all important posts and rapid promotions and other facilities.

DCC's new health plan of extending its service to other cities is an honest attitude toward humanity, no doubt, but we should keep it in mind as well that our resources are limited. The more important task should be done first. A proper psychological assessment is also essential before doing anything. The authority must know what we, the city-dwellers, expect from the DCC.

When a doctor needs two hours to reach a hospital from his residence somewhere within this city and again two hours to reach home, when an already sick patient hurries his or her death by an accident on the way to hospital, what level of service we can expect from this doctor and for whom? But this is the existing reality in this city.

So, I would urge all authorities concerned including DCC to take constructive plans to ensure best use of our limited resources through accomplishing the most important home tasks of fundamental needs. It is not always good, even may be detrimental, to cross the limits of one's abilities particularly for those who are too weak to shoulder the burden of their own weight.



by CAF Dowlah

trade-offs between administrative power and financial gains — there is no reason to let them enjoy the best of both the worlds. Moreover, it has been widely documented that they have no service standard, no stake for improving performance, and no sense of responsibility or accountability.

Moreover, it is simply ridiculous to believe that even in financial terms, the civil servants of the country are being paid poorly.

And then, how about the telephone bills. Anybody who ever visited a government office — even for an hour — would know beyond any shred of doubt how frantically the government officers abuse official telephones for unofficial purposes.

And then, how about the telephone bills. Anybody who ever visited a government office — even for an hour — would know beyond any shred of doubt how frantically the government officers abuse official telephones for unofficial purposes.

And then, how about the telephone bills. Anybody who ever visited a government office — even for an hour — would know beyond any shred of doubt how frantically the government officers abuse official telephones for unofficial purposes.

And then, how about the telephone bills. Anybody who ever visited a government office — even for an hour — would know beyond any shred of doubt how frantically the government officers abuse official telephones for unofficial purposes.