

Privatisation Snags

Kazi Zafarullah, Chairman of the Privatisation Board has minced no words in criticising 'white collar' labour leaders, bureaucracy and politicians for the ginerly pace of the privatisation process. Our Tuesday's front-page report on the subject provides samples of their stone-walling spanners on the wheel. CBAs seem more interested in retaining their privileges than serving the workers' cause. Some bureaucrats in the sector corporations are 'in league' with trade union leaders to perpetuate corruption: 'pocketing the salary of phantom workers'. There is also a degree of expedient inaction to avoid a likely grilling for selling the 'SOEs below their real value'. Workers might take recourse to opposition support when failing to stem progress of privatisation in certain units. For instance, in the Karim Jute Mills (KJM), they have rallied round the union backed by the BNP to lead them as their CBA. This is where the wisdom to forge bipartisan understanding going beyond political vicissitudes has to dawn on the political parties to carry forward the process.

The AL government is politically sincere in its offer to the workers of the SOEs that they have the first priority to buy the units. Obviously, if they fail to form cooperatives to take charge of these by putting the money upfront, the units will be open to sale for the others. While it is time the trade union leaders gave some active thought to the prospect, the bureaucrats may think of ways to help implement it through international assistance because it does not militate against free market operations. To announce the option and rest on the oars thinking that the ball has been set rolling in the direction of the critics to play with will be far from helpful.

The consultations going on with the workers' representatives to secure their cooperation in the privatisation programme bear potential for confidence-building but these need to acquire substance. Our suggestions are that with adequate media support let the following messages be put across to organised labour: (a) privatisation will cut down on subsidies to the public sector releasing money for credit distribution to the private sector; (b) international help will be forthcoming; (c) it is better to be members of profitable organisations than spend a lifetime in losing concerns; (d) redundant workers will get jobs elsewhere after being re-trained under well-aided and appropriately supervised programmes.

Some Emergency!

Dhaka Medical College Hospital has truly turned into the proverbial Pandora's box. From corruption to mismanagement you name any evil, and the place will not disappoint you. One of the more recently spotlighted part of its morphewhite face was the emergency unit. Only the other day this paper ran a poignant tale of patients' sufferings in this section.

A substantial part of the story deals with the agony of the patients and their attendants due to the unfeeling behaviour of the staff from the doctor down to the ward-boy. Doctors are mechanically insistent on the production of the so-called ticket that seems to have become more important here than Apollo's bough for a netherworld bound Aeneas. Apparently, the ticket is more important than the suffering person. Some of the cases reported by the correspondent who had been an eye witness to this Jeremiad of the sick and injured were pretty serious. But that did not have any impact on the doctors who either smoked nonchalantly or grumbled at the excessive load of work.

We understand the emergency unit of the DMCH is understaffed. But is that any excuse for being callous about those who are dying for medical attention? One of the staff in fact gave out to our correspondent that a number of people have actually died over the years due to delay or nonavailability of treatment. This is simply criminal. Any body coming to Hippocrates' profession cannot be so unscrupulously evasive no matter how heavy the odds.

This problem of attitude that seems to be endemic in majority of the Bangladeshi doctors is something which no logistical reinforcement will ever cure. Those who are in the medical profession must have compassion for the suffering humanity above everything else. They cannot allow situational inconvenience to get the better of their commitment to service.

The hospital director however, as the report said, is not pessimistic about the crisis in this particular unit. He feels better days are round the corner. The question is: How long have we to wait for an improvement?

National Amnesia and Paltan

Nineteen years is a long time for one who is not yet even twenty-six. Now that Paltan Maidan is back again as the site of massive political course, one may curse oneself for having never even felt that this fountainhead of all our political resistance to the machinations of Pakistan and its communal lackeys was absent — non-existent — for that long a time. This trait in us all may be symptomatic of most of our collective ills — this national amnesia.

Paltan Maidan! The nursery of the Bengalee People's matchless and unbreakable democratic struggle! At the outset Paltan rallies rent the sky with cries for politico-economic crisis. Things moved and years passed and Paltan oratory electrified the nation with the first seeding of the nationalist idea of the Bengali-speakers rising as one entity against deprivation and discrimination and for human dignity and recognition as a people.

Nursery it was for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to be groomed by the political realities of the time into that sculptor of human minds and movements and unity that yielded Bangladesh. But Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani is more inextricably linked with the legend of the Paltan Maidan. It was at Paltan Maidan that he whipped and cajoled the mind of the masses to act and rise against injustice and the mean tricks like communalism that perpetrated it.

Let Paltan Maidan rise like Phoenix and bring evermore good to this nation.

It is a supreme irony that Diana, the Princess of Wales, was hounded to her death and is now alive, large than life — thanks to the media. And the signs are that she will continue to grow in stature.

And what makes it such a fantastic story in print and visually? We live in an age of instant communication and pictures are transmitted to our TV screens instantaneously. The *paparazzi* had been after Princess Diana for long. Since her divorce from Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, rather than disappearing into oblivion Diana started projecting an independent image across the world screens. More and more she devoted herself to charitable causes. Humanitarian causes were high on her list of priorities. Indeed shortly before her death Diana dressed as closely as possible with a military looking outfit was spotted trotting the fields of Bosnia-Herzegovina campaigning against land mines.

And then there was romance. This set the *paparazzi* in hot pursuit. Here was romance between the mother of future King of England and heir to the mighty Harrods of London Dodi El-Fayed, an Egyptian. There was talk of matrimony in the air.

The entire story will never be

told. The story with all its twists and turns is still unfolding. What has been established as a fact that on the fateful night of the 31st August after changing their plans for venue for dinner — largely to avoid the *paparazzi* — they dined at the Ritz hotel of Paris, reportedly owned by Mohammad El-Fayed, father of the friend of Princess Diana. The couple is reported to have changed plans and taken a chauffeur, who is reported to be a member of the security of the couple. And now it is reported insistently that the driver was drunk, with three times the permissible alcohol level. The blood test has reportedly shown effects of drug.

Nearly a dozen *paparazzi* have been arrested following the fatal crash near Place Alma.

They were caught taking pictures of the dying Princess.

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After the Death of the Princess

What kind of impact will the events surrounding Diana have on the British monarchy? It is agreed by all that the monarchy will have to change to adapt to the changed circumstances. Diana was keen to bring out the Princess from their closed environment into the open air much like the other British children. The chances are that the pace will be speeded up.

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Earl Spencer, the brother of Princess Diana, who has

emerged as a forceful figure through the drama, has launched a one man assault on the media and has accused the press of driving his sister to death. Feeling the wrath of the people the owners of the media have taken a defensive position.

The emotional funeral will not be easily forgotten. The mountains of flowers piled high

assembled crowd to near tears.

Protocol was thrown to the winds. Her Majesty the Queen, Prince Philip, the heir to the throne Prince Charles and the two Princes William and Harry stood motionlessly as the gun carriage carried the body of Diana to its final resting place in the heart of England. An unprecedented speech by Earl

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