

Pay-hike ... If it had been Linked with Productivity

Why This Uncertainty?

Much of the cool draft of optimism energy minister Nooruddin Khan blew the other day in a recent conversation with a vernacular daily over the relieving role of barge-mounted power generating projects turned into sultry and dreary squalls of annoying uncertainty by an update of the same paper on that scheme.

Our wistful longing for a change in the scenario in the wake of yawning gap between country's demand and supply of power and its inevitably discomfiting and debilitating effects has reportedly given way to serious bureaucratic indifference. A project that was hoped to inject four hundred mega watt of extra power into the national network has been reported to be unable to become operational before the next peak demand season.

Our question is how this can at all happen? The government took a decision to tackle a national crisis on an emergency basis. How can people within it dare drag feet over it?

And this is not a new syndrome threatening to chip away from the projected effectiveness of the decisions. It is taking a decision to tackle the problem only to let all the good work go down the drain due to a lack of tenacious pursuance needed for the timely implementation of any project.

The problem seems to be lying with the Power Development Board (PDB) or agency entrusted with the job of striking the deal and delivering goods in this case. Some people there do not seem to be treating the matter as professionally or clinically they should have. And this is where the energy ministry has to play a more effective role. Unfortunately the impression has been that the ministry and its officials are not on top of it. Lot of the initial delay in finding out where the shoe pinched and the failure to come up with a comprehensive picture at the very outset of the problem paved the way for this impression. If the power sector has to effectively meet the crisis it is reeling under now, the problems and their solutions have to be pursued in a forthright and dynamic manner.

Vigil against Mastani

Some days back there appeared in the morning national press a stirring little news. The fish vendors of Shantinagar Bazar in the city have formed a body to thwart extortion in the bazar. The organised vigilantes gave themselves a high-sounding and, nevertheless, inspiring name — the *Mrityunjoy Squad* — the death-defying activist team. That our society is now veritably a hostage to *mastani* or the extortionists' blackmail is in a big way the result of absence of popular resistance.

How is it that our people are stooping so low? There are three very obvious reasons. The ruthlessness of the extortionist criminals. They brook no challenge and with the barest sign of a threat to their sway they react harsh and big to drive panic into every heart in the vicinity. This is possible because they have whole gangs and hoards of arms at their command. Reason two relates to what has now become a very familiar word, courtesy the vernacular press, namely the godfathers or protectors. Three, the bullied and black mailed ones cannot unite and mount concerted resistance chiefly because a majority feel it is better to give a bit of a tithe than to be embroiled in a life-risk tussle.

The *Mrityunjoy Squad* has come past these barriers of fear and selfishness and dared the extortionist of the bazar. This is indeed so heartening! In the three days after the coming of the *Mrityunjoy* there has developed in the bazar a contrary approach that it was better to leave the extortionists to the police who are the right and adequate quarters to take on and eliminate the thugs. Resistance like *Mrityunjoy* develops only when police and such law-enforcing agencies prove not quite up to the criminals. Such as now. And then again when accosted by such a ruffian demanding money, you have all the rights in the world to say go to hell — without needing to keep some of your rights for the police to ensure.

Let *Mrityunjoy* go ahead, always careful not to overstep its self-imposed mandate.

A Nice Way to Begin

Kudos to the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) for the manner in which it has got a move on about dismantling the unauthorized joints of the political parties at different city roads and street corners. One wishes the parties themselves had enough civic sense and respect for the law to have done away with these constructions that have had existential rationale only before and during the elections, if any at all.

What was heartening about DCC's demolition decision was that it chose to start the 'operation' by razing down one of make-shift outfit of the ruling Awami League. In a country where every good and wise government decision runs the risk of being interpreted as an inroad into democratic right, this one gesture of impartiality looks certain to undo any such allegation.

This spirit is what we urge the party in power to replicate in other spheres as frequently as possible. This country has reached a dead end of misunderstanding, mistrust and non-cooperation between major political parties and their protagonists. Reasonlessness and self-destructive opposition has reached an unbearable point. Some one has to show the grace in this country that at the moment is clouded by confusion and mistrust. And the onus of leading by example lies squarely on the party mandated to run the country.

While crediting DCC for the initiation of a laudable action we want to remind it that a lot is yet left to be desired as far as its performance is concerned. Taxpayers' view of its performance is still very dim. People do not expect it to perform miracles. It is the most rudimentary responsibilities about urban maintenance that the people expect from it.

Bringing a touch of smoothness over Dhaka's ribbed or ridged roads, keeping the city clean from an increasing burden of filth and stopping unabated pilferage of public places by land grabbers are some of the challenges it has to address immediately and effectively.

WHO took away the emperor's clothes is never told. But the story that he went round the city named without anyone pointing out that he had no clothes on is practically in every children's book. However, in the case of Central government it is known who gave away even the leafy cover that hid the nakedness of administration's coffers. This was done by none other than the government's own ministers.

The ministers, who negotiated the pay hike with the employees' unions, were ardent exponents of their demands. They fought on the side of trade unions. They were even more generous than those who were agitating for more salary. The ministers were not bothered about the burden their action would put on the exchequer. Their efforts was to placate the employees' leaders.

The bill comes to roughly Rs 13000 crore. Strange, this is the figure which finance ministry officials quoted long before the negotiations. No, it was not their hunch. Their thinking was simple: They had provided that much money in the budget for the raise in government servants' salaries. They thought their job was simply to let the think of the states, which are now under pressure from their employees for parity with central hands. If the money for the hike at the centre and in the states were to be calculated, the amount would come to a whopping figure of Rs 40,000 crore. And still there would be many categories of public servants

who are left out. They too want part of the bonanza, which is being distributed freely. Some of them are already up in arms. Murmurs from the private sector are also audible.

I find no justification for the raise in salaries. The dearth allowance of employees has been pegged to the cost of living. Every time the price index has gone up, the employees have been given extra money to cover the rise. Then why increase in the salary?

Why the government did not put up even a semblance of fight against the revision of salaries is understandable. You cannot defend when you have Trojan horses within. Ministers were more vocal in the support of employees' brief than the latter were. It seems nobody has seriously pondered over the steps on how to raise so much money. More imposts, more prices and more inflation, that is India's simplistic solution — the soft state as we are. Already the government has increased import duty indiscriminately. The next cut may be in the allocations for education and health, already suffering because of paucity of funds.

The hike in salaries may have made some sense — and may have been more acceptable to the public — if it had been

You cannot defend when you have Trojan horses within. Ministers were more vocal in the support of employees' brief than the latter were. It seems nobody has seriously applied his mind to the repercussions. Nor has anyone pondered over the steps on how to raise so much money.

linked with productivity. In fact, the pay packet is getting heavier and the output of civil servants lighter. None from the government side even raised the question of more efficiency at the negotiating table. How could this have been possible? This is understandable because the ministers did not want to annoy lakhs of government servants, who constitute a substantial chunk of the electorate. A populist step as it is the different political parties in the

But I am not surprised over the government's reluctance to reduce the number of employees. I had a bitter experience when I was India's High Commissioner in London a few years ago. I wanted to trim the staff of 250. Some officers told me privately that they did not have enough work. The Supply Mission, for instance, was there from the day the High Commission opened. I suggested it be closed as the initial flood of purchases had become a trickle.

saving of \$1 million (Rs 5.5 crore) annually. But I faced opposition from practically every tier of the bureaucracy. The Expenditure Secretary in the finance ministry, Mr Geethakrishnan, was in London at the time. I discussed the proposal in detail with him. He wanted his No 2, Mr Gopal Tandon, to visit London to examine the proposal further. The justification for which I could not understand. He also asked me why I had not recommended any cuts in the strength of the Indian Foreign Service personnel. I told him that their turn would come in the second instalment, which I had already initiated with Deputy High Commissioner Salman Haider.

The way the proposal was stalled for seven months, till I left, is a good example of how determined bureaucrats can defeat all efforts to economize. My appeals even to the Prime Minister and Finance and Foreign Ministers were to no avail. I am convinced that one of the major reasons the Indian government cannot cut its expenditure is that the bureaucracy has come to develop a vested interest in a large apparatus.

It is ironical that the same bureaucracy carried out the whims of Mrs Indira Gandhi's son, Sanjay, during the Emergency. Desire for self-preservation, as admitted by a number

of public servants before an enquiry commission, was the sole motivation for their behaviour. Fear turned them into willing tools of tyranny. Is there no other way they can work?

When I announced the closure of the Supply Mission, the Foreign and Defence Secretaries tried to interfere. They questioned my authority. I informed them that the Supply Mission had already been closed and that all personnel had to leave in the next few weeks. I then received a telex message from New Delhi asking me to let certain officers continue as their children's schooling would be interrupted.

As it happened, only two persons left before my departure, following the fall of the V P Singh government. I was generally kept in the dark about officers' postings. No vacancy was kept pending as I had asked. In fact, to my horror, a post from the India Foreign Service was upgraded for the appointment of a minister in the political section.

The three defence services also had too many officers. I discussed the matter with the Air Chief when he was in London, and wrote to the Army and Naval chiefs of staff. Nothing came of the effort. My attempt to amalgamate six Indian nationalized banks operating in Britain, into two, also met with failure. I am convinced that the number of government servants will go on increasing. The tragedy is that you can neither fire them nor can you make them work.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

United Front are happy to go along with it.

The Pay Commission's recommendation to cut the bureaucracy by 30 per cent was a sensible proposal. That too was brushed aside. Again, it was considered an unpopular measure. There was no discussion on this point with the employees' representatives, although non-official experts have pointed again and again that the bane of government is its bloated bureaucracy. Anyone can see that it is coming apart from the seams as are our cities because of over population.

Practically every ministry has a niche in the High Commission where its senior officers, by turn, get posted to enjoy a cushy tenure. An employee from India is given, apart from his salary, a foreign allowance, furnished accommodation, medical benefits and free passage for his wife and dependents every two years. Some officers are entitled to a washing allowance as well, a perk from the days of Raj.

The proposal which I forwarded to New Delhi, was to reduce the staff to 180, axing nearly seventy posts. It meant a

OPINION

'Intellectual' Ruminations: Rejoinder from Silent Majority

by Maqsoodul Haque

This refers to Nadeem Qadir's article, 'Let Bangladesh Not be South Asia's Algeria' (Published more than a month ago — DS Aug 30)

Nadeem's article fails to coherently deliver a non-partisan view to the serious challenge we face and indeed our very existence is threatened with the rise of religious extremism or fanaticism. 'Fundamentalism' and secularism are words most callously used by our politicians who have come to the helms of power in Bangladesh in its twenty-some years of existence and has frustrated very ordinary citizens, who would much prefer to see an alternative mind set, an alternative thought process besides the one that has been propounded by the Awami League, BNP, Jatiyo Party or the Jamaat-e-Islami over the years in the run up to our collective future. I am of course speaking here for the neutrals, the silent majority who have been the pawn of our ruthless politicians.

We have inherited in this last quarter century a morally corrupt political system, a bureaucracy that is completely alien to its people and a cult of 'intellectuals' — an infinitely minuscule part of our population — and ultimately the most damaging group of individuals who it seems, have nothing better to do than to offer unsolicited advice to the rest of the citizens. Nowhere else will you see this monstrosity. When is the last time you heard of American or French or English intellectuals, dishing out their minds with whatever warped or esoteric ideas they have? This elitist cult have a say in most matters with the media helping their megalomaniac offerings in form of 'statements', yet it is tragic that with so many 'intellectuals' around, Bangladesh

seems not to have found any answer or solution to its problems. Are we to look upon these 'intellectuals' or our politicians to fight fanaticism? The answer is NO, because fanaticism and divisions on religious line is the most convenient ploy used by our politicians and their 'intellectual' collaborators to whip up a frenzy whenever things go wrong in their handling of day to day affair. The outrages in the month of July, August and leading on to September, I believe was more a cover-up to absolve the Government's responsibility for its economic failure and the endemic lawlessness — that of course is another story for another day.

For a start, I believe we have to ban use of the word 'fundamentalism' as it creates misunderstanding among the majority of the population of Bangladesh — the members of the Islamic faith. The word is a politically incorrect expression of the Western media stemming from its innate anti-Islamic racism, which has unfortunately found acceptance in our popular culture, while the rest of the world seems to have abandoned it for more correct terms like 'extremism' or 'fanaticism'. Fundamentalism is after all a belief in fundamentals. It can be anything from your fundamental belief in a political system, nature, science or more essentially: GOD. Fighting this so-called fundamentalism is also a fundamental belief as much as subscribing to Awami-fundamentalism, Jatiyotabadi-fundamentalism or Jamaati-fundamentalism. What a Muslim finds most annoying is one never hears about Jewish fundamentalist, Christian or Hindu fundamentalist — one only hears of fundamental-

ism, which by implication means somebody with a cap and a beard, sword or AK47 in hand. The use of the word 'fundamentalism' in the context of Bangladesh denotes a closed, parochial mentality and cannot help in our struggle for an open, free thinking, free expression, democratic society — where none regardless of his belief can be persecuted.

There is no sane man around who will not agree that religious fanaticism has been the traditional enemy of Bangladesh and having said that, I believe there is none who will disagree when I say, that in twenty-five years we have not been able to come up with an acceptable strategy to fight this menace. Our glorious liberation war was fought, essentially as a resistance against the Pakistani mentality of looking down on Bengalee Muslims of the then East Pakistan as a race of 'Hindu illegitimate'. By some strange quirk of fate the Pakistanis discovered 'Pucca Muslimans' from amongst the same illegitimate lot, Bengalee volunteers and workers of Jamaat-e-Islami, who formed the core of the murderous Razakars of Al-Badr and Al-Shams, to aid and abet their 'pure Muslim' brothers from what was West Pakistan in those days, to conduct one of the worst genocide of this century. The systematic rape of Bengalee women in 1971 was a tactical and psychological ploy used not only as a weapon of war but also to promote a campaign of 'ethnic cleansing' or 'ethnic purification' with the idea of creating a breed of 'Pucca Musliman Pakistanis'. The rape of Bengalee women was considered *Jatye* for the Pakistanis believed 'Is-

lam was in danger'. The aspirations of a free Bangladesh was seen as a Hindu plot. The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, put that inglorious misuse of religion for politics of exploitation in the back seat — or so we thought.

Where are we today in 1997 — during and after our silver jubilee celebrations? It's the same hate mongers, the same petty use of religion taking up most of our time. We are blissfully unaware of the fact that the fanatics are more organized and more extreme in their resolve, than they were prior to events leading on to 1971. We continue to ask ourselves where we went so wrong, why did this happen — importantly, what are we to do?

Secularism is a philosophy that is more misunderstood than understood — and it becomes all the more exasperating when the citizens of Bangladesh appropriated with the responsibility of educating an uneducated mass contribute to that very confusion. The Bengalee race is a blend of the best of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, this is evident from the way we dress, what we eat, our culture as also our religious rites. Most of our rituals are a blend of the three and therefore it is no denying that we have inherited some elements of paganism. I believe all of it is harmless as this has been a cumulative cultural tradition for thousands of years, much before the belief in a monotheistic GOD emerged anywhere in the world. If we are to restrict religion to what it is — a personal matter — it is possible to be a Muslim, a Hindu, a Christian, a Buddhist and still be secular. Our 'intellectuals' have unfor-

tunately used secularism to expound, apparently, 'atheistic' belief, a very modern belief system — which has never been our tradition, and therefore the fanatics have been merciless in condemning them as *nastik* or *murtads*. In rural Bangladesh where our so-called 'secular forces' do not exist, the grassroots level of cultural and political awareness has the Mosque and Madrasah as its epicenter, where thanks to a syllabus — a legacy of our English colonizer 'divide and conquer' remains the driving force, with the hard-line *mullahs* calling the shots with impunity. Just as much our city-bred 'intellectuals' have failed to educate us about 'secularism', the rural *mullahs* have failed to teach us Islam. Both these divisively parasitical mind set have a lot in common, therefore what our 'intellectuals' tried to do, was to 'divide' in the same manner, the same division, the same confusion — and yes the same hypocrisy!

The Shikha Chirantan a supposedly secular symbol of our liberation war is a case in point. No effort has been made to explain this symbol in our cultural context and some of them who think it is patriotic enough to die for the Shikha Chirantan, haven't the faintest clue about what the fire is all about. The Government has no official description — and whatever has been reported in the press are pretty much on partisan lines. An eternal fire symbolizes the fire that is alive in the heart of every citizen, a fire that asks us to keep the struggle on, the struggle that will lead on to emancipation in our quest for a exploitation-free society — not necessarily the remembrance of the martyred — as we have grand memorial in Savar for that explicit purpose. To equate this symbol to 'fire worship' is vulgar and the only way we can make this an acceptable symbol is to have similar fires all over Bangladesh — not Dhaka alone. After 1952 the fanatics had equated the Shaheed Minar for the language movement martyrs to 'pillar worship'. Now that we have similar Minars all over Bangladesh, that propaganda is no longer valid, nor do we hear or have threat for their demolition.

Nadeem's article credits the Ekattur Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee (the committee for the elimination of the 'killers and collaborators of 1971') — hereinafter referred to as the Nirmul Committee — for their yeoman's service to ensure that the fanatics now have three as opposed to eighteen seats they previously held in Parliament. On face value, Dalals or Collaborators would have never evolved if we did not have the Ghatoks i.e. killers, that have since been pardoned and are safely ensconced in Pakistan. Logically we are to pursue the killers and eliminate or *nirmul* them before we can touch the collaborators and make them suffer the same fate, before this so called committee can meet with a semblance of success.

The suspicions of this generation becomes all that more pronounced when we note that if at all, it was the Nirmul Committee's heroic idea to 'eliminate' the 'killers and collaborators' of 1971 — why then did they go for a 'public trial' of the Jamaat chief Golam Azam? Having done that — why has the 'judgement' of the 'public trial' i.e. death to the Jamaat chief not been carried out? The least the Nirmul Committee could have done was ask for volunteers to form a suicide squad for the purpose. Rather they served the purpose of a covert and indirect public trial for the Jamaat and its chief Golam Azam — a man who was literally pulled into limelight from political oblivion by them.

Democratic elections as conducted in 1991 and 1996

To the Editor

Seema's rights

Sir, Seema Chowdhury, an 18-year-old girl, was allegedly raped by four policemen in Roazan police station, Bangladesh on October 9, 1996. Following an initial investigation into the case, the four police accused were arrested and charged with rape. Before the case came to trial, Seema was placed in so-called 'safe-custody' in Chittagong Jail, where she died in suspicious circumstances on February 7, 1997. On July 14, 1997, the four policemen were acquitted by a trial court of the charge of raping Seema Chowdhury. The judge reportedly deplored the fact that government lawyers had presented weak evidence and witnesses, effectively allowing the police to get away with rape.

The police, the court, the jail administration, the hospital authorities and the Home Ministry were all responsible for failing to protect Seema Chowdhury's fundamental human rights.

Amnesty International is calling on the government of Bangladesh to investigate the failures of the authorities concerned to protect Seema's human rights, and bring to justice not only those who raped her, but also those whose alleged negligence caused her death.

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'Names for Identity'

Sir, I was baffled, reading a letter written in this section by one of the fine citizens of our society, suggesting that we should bear ethnic names not Bengali ones. What a great way to preach! She opined, we might face a debacle on our liberty and our freedom if followed otherwise. Now all I want to say

is names are there to identify someone or something. Be it Islamic or Bengali, hardly make any difference. On the day of judgement, all mankind will be arranged in groups and they will be called by their names. God being omnipotent knows who is his real follower and who is not. Mere names won't make slightest difference, only the devoutness will count. So don't be sanctimonious and please don't make an issue out of nothing.

More I read the letter more I plunge into perplexity. It's really beyond my comprehension what distinguishes Bangladeshis from Bengalis. May be I have to pull a vague analogy out of it. May be it is somehow related with the perennial dispute between Hindu-Muslim! I guess I have hit the jackpot. Here, I suppose, the writer is trying to inoculate us with an amalgamated dose of twisted nationalism and fundamentalism.

Brotherhood doesn't grow on ethnic beliefs. It is the humans qualities that attracts people together and that is where real friendship grows. So please don't make this kind of subversive comments which metaphorically imply non-Muslims are enemy of ours.

Our country is traversing through the malaise of inequality, inefficiency and deprivation and nonetheless political unrest. So please don't fraught it with other strident problems. It is time to contemplate on better issues and think in a more constructive way.

Ashique R Khan
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Ways of Roads and Highways

Sir, The streets in the city of Dhaka like in many other cities and towns of Bangladesh develop pot-holes soon after they

are constructed or repaired. The reasons that I could glean out are:

1. The contractors often find it convenient to have a small pot hole left behind which in course of time would collect rainwater and spent engine oil leaking from vehicles (thanks to the ever vigilant BRTA) which are the greatest enemies of bitumen — the material with which the roads are coated.

2. These factors eventually cause cracks on the road and develop into major scaling of the roads necessitating major repairs, including carpeting.

To do away with this perennial problem, the Roads and Highways Department should, in all earnest, think of awarding carpeting/repairing contract with the rider clauses that maintenance for a specific period will be done by the contractors.

All maintenance will then be ensured by the contractor who in his own interest will see that the job done is not shoddy leading to minimum maintenance requirement. Again he will also adhere to the adage 'A stitch in time will save nine' by doing the necessary repairs on the onset of any problem rather than wait for the total annihilation of the road leading to inconvenience to the public and unnecessary expenses by the government.

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Spoon-fed Industrialists

Sir, The leather industry was allowed to treat a portion of its working capital as Term Loan and the same was ordered to be replenished by banks as working capital. Who authorised these mills to convert working capital to be long term? Why should the govern-

ment be a party to such unauthorised use of money? Is the government so weak that it has to limp on its feet and beg the industrialist to earn foreign exchange? Necessity is the mother of all inventions. How long our government will support the weak industrialists?

Some frozen food factories have been authorised to draw Tk 40 lakh each to meet EU countries requirements, which I think is a very high amount.

The EU requirements are very simple, and in the past years, why have frozen food exporters not re-invested their profits into modernising their industries? Why is government doing about this?

Today, like export sector is earning foreign exchange, there are many mills which are saving government huge sums of foreign exchange. Now if these industries do not also modernise their units and eventually close down and we start importing again.

I would like to suggest our government to stop spoon-feeding the industrialist. Our government should only ensure that there is no anomaly in policy, and duty drawback should be promptly made. Government may agree to give subsidy on power, gas to exporters for a limited period. But under no circumstances it should interfere in working of Bangladesh Bank. I am surprised how the Governor of BB allows and acts on such directives of the government.

Recently our minister also confirmed that the government will give easy loans if our exporters have to compensate EU importers by the recent cancellation of GSP certificate. Is it fair? Is it equitable?

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