

Fuel price hike

Consumers likely to be hit hard

WHETHER or not the Prime Minister approves the latest recommendations by the Energy Ministry to hike fuel price, the reasons stated for the latest hike, only a year after the last one, make us wonder why the decision was not taken earlier. We had heard many times in the past about the huge losses incurred by the government -- almost to the tune of one thousand crore taka in the current year -- for not hiking the price in accordance with the international market. But we have also seen that the governments in the past did not have enough courage to take any firm steps fearing it would give their political opponents an upper hand. We hope the present government would not behave in a similar manner.

In case of preventing smuggling of fuel to India where prices are higher than ours, we ask -- wouldn't checking the border more vigilantly be a better option than hiking the price?

Meanwhile, taking the concerns of the authorities into account, we would like to be assured that just as they increase the price, when it goes up in the international market, they would bring it down as well if and when the price comes down internationally. It would be unethical and unfair to the local consumers if the high price remained steady in the domestic market when the price shows a downward trend globally. We hope the newly proposed Energy Regulatory Commission would be able to play a significant and, most importantly, an independent role in monitoring the price.

Secondly, we strongly feel that increasing the price is not the only solution. Stringent actions would have to be taken to reduce wastage and pilferage of fuel, especially in the government sectors. Though most of the pilferage occurs during distribution and marketing and a nexus of officials in the concerned organisations are responsible for that, no one has been caught or punished so far. At the same time, we would like to recommend to the government to promote fuel efficient technology in order to get optimum utility of fuel in the country. On the other hand, the government can also reduce the high import tax that Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation pays to them. Through these means the government might be able to cover the losses to a considerable extent and the sufferings of common people could also be reduced at a time when cost of living has already gone up.

DCC tender trouble

Let the probe body work without fear or favour

ALBEIT a day late, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Government (LGRD) and Cooperatives yesterday commissioned a five-member committee to probe into alleged irregularities in collection of tender schedules for a Tk 93 crore road repair project of the Dhaka City Corporation. The committee has been mandated to complete its investigations and submit its report within ten days. Earlier on Sunday, Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka told a press briefing that a committee would be instituted the next day in consultation with LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. The delay plus the fact that the LGRD ministry was not notified about the probe committee formation till Monday naturally gave rise to suspicion and speculation. Meanwhile, different news dailies reported that the mayor himself was under immense pressure from the ward commissioners not to institute an inquiry into the tender scam. As top DCC officials either expressed ignorance or inability to speak about the formation of a probe committee, strong doubts were voiced about the possibility of subverting inquiry into the heinous episode.

Surely, formation of the committee yesterday put to rest all such speculations and suspicions. Now, the question is whether the committee would be allowed to function freely, without interference from any quarters. On many occasions in the past, we have seen activities of such probe committees greatly hampered by interference from political and influential quarters. Besides, the 'benefited sections' in such scams somehow managed to conceal crucial information from the investigators. It can be said beyond doubt that similar efforts would be made this time around as well. The ward commissioners, whose musclemen allegedly engineered the confiscation of tender schedules, could resort to any means to mislead the investigators.

There lies the challenge. The government and the DCC ought to make sure that the probe committee carries out the investigations without any hindrance. Our suggestion is, as it has been in case of any such probes, that whatever the committee comes up with at the end of their ten-day investigations should be made public.

MD ASADULLAH KHAN

NO wonder, we live in violent times. The incidences of rape, murder and extortion no longer strike our senses much. We have learnt to live with them. But when such gruesome acts are committed by supposedly cherubic kids next door, one is shocked beyond measure. On October 27 morning when people learnt that in a terror-infested country, one more innocent person was added to the list of victims, many of them immediately attributed this killing to family intrigue or property feud. But detective police has in the meantime unearthed that the senseless murder of Swapan Goswami, a young teacher of Government Laboratory School in Dhaka, was an act masterminded by some tender aged students of his school in association with his gangster friends who are in a sense school dropouts. The people got to be shocked and horrified.

The killing was masterminded by S.M. Shabbir Rahman Shantanu (14), a student of class VII and son of Moshir Rahman, now Senior Assistant Secretary of Land Survey Directorate and Apon (14) studying in Class VIII who was expelled from examination for adopting unfair means. Both of them were angry with Swapan Goswami, an honest teacher, and held him responsible for their failure and expulsion and decided to kill him. The mystery was revealed from the confessional statement of Rifat, another accomplice in the killing and student of Dhanmondi Model High School, during interrogation after arrest. The group after an initial meeting in Apon's house in Nilkhet area contacted Zillu and Biplot, both teenaged but presumed to have attained notoriety of becoming professional killers in the meantime. Zillu demanded the licenced pistol of Shantanu's father other than taka one lakh as fee for the execution. During interrogation Rifat told DB Police that Apon contacted him for killing Swapan Goswami out of

vengeance and he contacted professional killer Zillu for the purpose. To complete the task with total success, Rifat contacted another goon Jony, son of Nurul Ahmed Bhuiya of Ahmed Nagar in Mirpur, and an active member of Zillu group. The crime manifested in the savage killing of Swapan Goswami by the tender aged boys is a pathetic reminder of the barbaric underworld activities now spreading among the kids who are supposed to be the most innocent. The macabre murder perpetrated by boys of an A grade school has left the citizenry reeling. It's hard to believe and harder still to comprehend that such brutality could be committed by men so young and so tender for such flimsy a cause. But it is true. The majority of heinous crimes in the country are being committed today

raped by the same culprit and the alleged offender had knowledge about it. And that prompted him to kill her to cover up his crime. In Dhaka city, about a year back Simi, an innocent girl after being teased day in and day out, was provoked to commit suicide by some young hoodlums in her area. The brutality perpetrated on Trisha, Mahima, Purnima, Shilpi, Nurjahan, Tania, Bushra, Naushin, Riday and Dawn by hoodlums all in their teens shame everyone. On the other hand, the heat and outrage generated by the barbaric killing of Bappi (8), a student of Class III in Dhaka city by his cousin and his gangster friends all aged between 14 and 18 are far from ebbing months after the incident.

Newspaper reports and human rights organisations have been

stabbed, women get raped and jilted boy friends out of desperation on refusal throw acid on girls they want to make love with. More importantly, for well-known criminal gang leaders, a generation of cheap labour for contract killing is now available. Shantanu hired Zillu with a promise of paying one lakh taka for killing his teacher Swapan Goswami. Taking a life could be so easy for these hardened criminals who are still in the prime of their life.

How could children be killing so dispassionately? Experts offer a raft of reasons from psychological abnormalities to cultural decay but they hasten to add that generalisation is not possible because each case is unique -- each young criminal has his own gene, his own family background and his response to many forces in modern society that

criminals come from families where parents have little time for them.

Noticeably, these days we are living in a mechanical society where children are growing up with loosening parental control. Absentee parents mean they don't get the nurturing, guidance or supervision to instill in them a set of values and proper behaviour code.

By the time children reach the age of five, they start acquiring a sense of compassion and empathy for others. And they have begun to be taught the difference between right and wrong and that hurtful actions have consequences. Many youngsters though fail to acquire those early curbs on conduct. Later on when children really stray off the right path and face punishment for criminal offence, indulgent parents use their influence to bail them out.

hold of it. These kids were being raised by more and more disturbed parents and this lack of parenting has bred misshapen and mischievous personalities. Away from home, these kids look to their friends and peers for a sense of approval and belonging. And peer pressure is so strong that they override inhibition and diminish any feelings of guilt. Violence becomes contagious.

Unquestionably true, violence is always fueled by easy access to arms. Unless the pistol was handed over to Apon or Biplot by Shantanu, Swapan Goswami would not have fallen victim in such a tragic way. In curbing violence or murder resorted to by youngsters, conscious citizenry are calling for stronger laws and punishments in the same footing with adults. They also feel that there should be deterrence in other ways too and they hasten to quote instances from abroad. In the California state of the U.S., parents can be held responsible for the criminal activity of their offspring. Sometime back, Los Angeles police arrested a woman whose 15-year old son had been charged with participating in the rape of a 12-year old girl by a dozen members of a street gang. If she is convicted of violating the parental responsibility law, she faces a maximum penalty of a year in jail and a \$2500.00 fine. In our country punishment for lack of parental responsibility must be enforced.

In the present situation the government should further step up its battle against crime. Secondly more money should be poured into education sector and more employment and other opportunities for the youngsters should be opened. They need to know that the society cares about them. Moreover and most importantly, parents should take a hard look in the mirror. For the values of today's youth are merely the magnified reflections of their elders.

MD ASADULLAH KHAN is Controller of Examinations, BUET.

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by those perceived as the most innocent -- the youth. Sure, the youth have never been angels and adolescence is often a time for rebellion and rage. But these young criminals, operating individually or in gangs, seem to come increasingly from the affluent and middle class families and the crimes they commit seem to be more widespread and vicious than ever before.

Recent incidents of such horrendous killing, rape, abduction and extortion by youngsters chill the bone. Newspaper report indicated that in September last Shahnaz Khatun Shahina (18) an SSC examinee of Puthia in Rajshahi was abducted by some party activists all aged 18-20. They raped her in turn before strangulating. As for the motives for the killing, the source quoting one of the girl's relatives said Shahina conceived after being

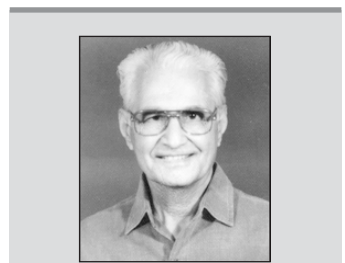
hinting that the crime rate among the youth has skyrocketed but, shockingly, till now there is a total lack of any in-depth analysis as to why such trend continues to rise so menacingly in the country. Presumably, this country is no stranger to violence. Even so, it has to be recognised that Swapan Goswami killing has breached the line between adolescent and adult behaviour. This killing was an act of such horror and such barbarism that there is almost no person in the country who does not feel personally ashamed and outraged. Surveys indicate that the crime rate among the youth has gone up by as much as 80 per cent. People by now know that not only in metropolitan Dhaka the situation in the countryside is also getting serious. Everyday in the cities and also in remote villages businessmen get robbed, commuters get mugged and

encourage violence. And the present generation of youth is passing through one of the plastic moments in history where old value systems have crumbled.

The youngsters born in the late 70s or more correctly right through 80s, grew up in a world full of scams, fraudulence and corruption. In a society fast changing they want ready success and believe they can use any means to achieve their ends. Ambitions soar and then cravings for owning cars, houses and exotic life styles play in their mind. They can't accept failure and suddenly find that brute force has a premium. There are no icons left today they can adore for values. They stray into crime to make a quick buck. They strike terror often with such dare devil ferocity and grisly means that even the trained and equipped policemen look at them in awe. Many of these young

But lack of parenting at the right time in a youngster's life could be quite damaging for the family as well as the kid himself. In the present case under examination, Shantanu saw affluence in the family. Otherwise how could he promise to pay one lakh taka to the killer? But father or mother had little time to care for the ward. Although Shantanu was admitted to a reputed school in the city, he drifted away from studies early. He failed in Class V and possibly after a lot of persuasion even when he was in class VII he failed in two subjects and was not promoted to the next higher class. His father was not at all worried at his son's predicament. Even if it was so much necessary to keep a pistol to save his fortune and life, he should have been careful about keeping it in a secured place so that his son who started showing symptoms of derailment could not get

Which crisis comes first?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

WE should be discussing the larger, bigger and tougher crisis of the society and State that we face in Pakistan. It is in fact a series of crises concerning the permanent problems of mass illiteracy, diseases, poverty and technological and social backwardness of the people. The purpose of this urgently necessary discussion is to agree upon the approach, ways and preconditions of solving them. Instead the Pakistanis are forced to concentrate on the immediate political mess in government-making in Islamabad. Which is why the people are generally talking of the latter and not the former. It is a pity, though unavoidable. For, it has to be conceded that the larger issues cannot be tackled unless the present political logjam is broken.

Since we have to have a political system and a government running it, we should look at the problem in perspective. It is optional to discuss it in terms of personalities or look at the institutional roots of the political impasse the country has reached. Talking in terms of personalities is a tricky business, much scapegoating takes place by the foibles or inadequacy of this or that person.

If people continue thinking in terms of personalities, most of the blame can be put on Nawaz Sharif's politics and methodology on PPP's corruption causing the army to take over. But remaining concerned with personalities can also mean reaching the conclusion that most of the

political mess in Islamabad and the four provincial capitals is the blunderbuss handling of General Pervez Musharraf. In this way, history becomes a jumble of accidents due to deft or inept individuals. One suggests it is much better to look for institutional roots of crises: after all, Army Chiefs have had to intervene four times to smash a nominally democratic system and each time succeeded in bungling things up. It is preferable to discuss the question from an institutional angle. The question then is: what is it that makes the Army take over whenever it can and to go on back seat driving politics when it does not take

resources at the disposal of the executing agency, the government. One has had occasion in this space to link poverty removal to human rights with emphasis on the word 'right'. Symbolic actions now being suggested by WB, IMF and the Pakistan government of throwing some money at the needy are not enough. It is not a policy. It is shirking the responsibility. A binding legal right to gainful employment of all adults has to be recognised; it should be enshrined in the statute book including the Constitution, and acted upon. Charity is not admissible. If the state cannot provide jobs, it should pay a social security enti-

ment to enable every citizen to survive in a progressively civilised manner. Pakistanis have had no democratic or progressive government. Why? because there has been little or no occasion to build democracy from the grassroots up. The British bequeathed a colonial administration and an inexperienced political class, originating in landed aristocracy with virtually no vision for the new state. It is true it comprised institutions of formal democracy. But since there was no democratic politics, only slogans of Islam and anti-Hindu sentiments -- exacerbated by Kashmir dispute that has spanned unending rhetoric -- formal democracy collapsed within a few short years. Power was cornered by a bureaucratic coterie headed by Ghulam Mohammad, Iskandar

Mirza and Ayub Khan. It has stayed there: Pakistan after 1953 has seen only deceptively democratic governments that were manipulated by bureaucracy or military or open military dictatorships. Pakistanis have to liberate themselves from this straitjacket.

The kind of wrangling that is taking place in Islamabad obscures every politically worthwhile purpose or problem. Nevertheless, what is happening in Islamabad and the provincial capitals is a fact of life. And governments of sorts are needed. Either General Musharraf succeeds in bamboozling the politicians into producing a government

ermment around so far in more than a month after the polls. What the polls verdict was is clear: it had rejected pro-Musharraf candidates for the most part. The entire state machinery has not been able to produce a simple pro-Musharraf majority in the National Assembly in a month and at least one provincial Assembly threatens to have a provincial government that will be chiefly anti-Musharraf. That is the Crisis.

It is odd that nearly everyone in Islamabad, and certainly the three main alliances -- GNA, MMA and PPP --, are obsessively worried about which parties to form the government and who will head it. There is almost no word about what the desired government proposes to do or what its foreign and economic policies will be, although both Pakistan's economic conditions and its satellite status in external affairs cry to high heaven for change. One suspects that most aspirants and strugglers for power are content to carry out General Musharraf's policies. They are moved by the brave music of distant drum.

The Musharraf government is trying to square the circle of a minority becoming a majority in the Assembly and calling itself a democratic government. The logjam should have been broken if the cabal of Generals were prepared to make some real concession. Apart from the MNAs-elect who are actually political merchandise awaiting buyers, the party having received most votes indicated it could join up on certain conditions, as the proposal has been or a chunk of it may still join up. But the difficulty is that the Generals refuse to bend and appear to rely on horse trading their way out of the messed up situation. Let's wait and see. But such a government or its more forbidding alternative -- some version of Martial Law -- will be just another trauma for Pakistan. They will mess up some more, maybe irretrievably.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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over? The task before thoughtful Pakistanis ought to be to evolve a political system that can produce a government which, without wasting its energies and time on trivialities or grand-looking things, starts to tackle major national problems. The dire need of Pakistan, from any worthwhile viewpoint, is mass education to lift the country by its own bootstraps. It is not simply a nominal mass literacy drive that is desired. It has to include big institutions of excellence in higher education of both physical and social sciences as well as humanities, at one end, and massive secondary, instead of merely primary, education in technology, vocational training and of course the basic humanities, on the other end. The purpose of training people for science and humanities

simple village healthcare unit on Tehsil/Taluka hospitals and good district hospitals, most of which should also be teaching ones for both doctors and paramedics. In addition there have to be institutions of excellence in curative medicine and for various sciences for imparting training to workers for hygienic information, family planning included.

One has put the problem of poverty third here. Not that it is any less important. It is because these three tasks are closely related and need to be tackled simultaneously. They will require a root-and-branch change in priorities as well as methodologies. Each individual has to be looked after. But he has also to participate in the efforts to improve his own lot by producing as much as he can through increasing the

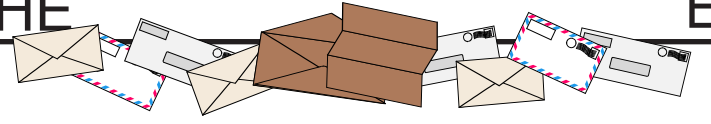
that will accept him and his reforms; or some version of a Martial Law will have to replace the current government for keeping the current military-made policies in operation. The first required task for democrats is to create awareness of the need for a government that would actually tackle Pakistani people's needs and transform Pakistan from a third-rate client state of America to a self-respecting, more prosperous and more democratic Pakistan. Still, whether or not the country moves ahead to some such thing, the present mess up has to be cleaned up.

The basic fact creating the difficulties today is that there is a military government with a clear agenda of its own, wanting a new elected government to carry it out. There has not been such an elected gov-

ernment around so far in more than a month after the polls. What the polls verdict was is clear: it had rejected pro-Musharraf candidates for the most part. The entire state machinery has not been able to produce a simple pro-Musharraf majority in the National Assembly in a month and at least one provincial Assembly threatens to have a provincial government that will be chiefly anti-Musharraf. That is the Crisis.

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



"Saluting the Nation Builders of Tomorrow"

This letter is in response to Abdul Hannan's letter, "Saluting the Nation Builders of Tomorrow" (November 13), where he says, "the only ambition of these students (English medium school graduates) is to go to America for higher studies, build up a bright academic career to get in to a lucrative job in America with an attractive salary, settle down permanently with American citizenship and contribute to building America as a prosperous nation."

I would like to know the basis of his argument. Is there any data to support his view? Was there a survey that revealed such interesting results? I'm certain Mr. Hannan has a credible source. He wouldn't be generalising now, would he?

NM Wisconsin, USA

I would like to thank Mr Abdul Hannan for having the courage to say a bitter truth. It is indeed true that all the English medium graduates are interested in going abroad and settling there.

I know, every one wants to prosper in life and I don't find anything wrong in going abroad for higher education. But I have serious objection if these students plan to stay there. This country fed them, nurtured them and educated them to the best of its ability. And the first chance these English medium students get, they leave the country, never to come back. And we the naive, ever hopeful people honour them organising events like "Saluting the Nation Builders of Tomorrow".

When will we ever learn? Shamsad Jahangir Dhaka

I'd like to thank Mr Abdul Hannan for raising such an excellent point.

Why honour these English medium students who doesn't have any intention to repay and serve this poor nation? Does these students consider this country to be their own? How many of these brightest of the bright have the intention to sacrifice a life of luxury and serve the poor people of this hapless country?

My son studies in an English medium school. And I know that I have failed as a parent as I see him getting prepared for TOEFL exam knowing fully well that this would be the last exam he appears for in this country, which is his motherland.

Gulsher Chowdhury Gulshan, Dhaka

Death in army custody

Am I alone in thinking that if listed criminals (?) could be bought to justice, so ought those responsible for the death in their custody?

Khairul Chowdhury New South Wales, Australia

23 people have so far died in army custody and we are happy that law and order has improved significantly!

Ahmed Shafi Green Road, Dhaka

Operation Clean Heart

At this stage the set objectives of the ongoing operation are coming under increase questioning for more than one reasons. Cleansing of the heart requires many things, most importantly the willingness to get cured. Simply, the endeavour to diagnose and get treated is not enough. We have seen it all happen time and again. The cancer will resurface soon after a little while. The rotten cells have gone into hiding or who knows may have got shelter from big muscles! Can't the authority print their identity now? Results-- they will be exposed,

citizen soldiers will arrest them even after this operation is over. Rehabilitation into the society and protection from the high-ups will be difficult. The results of past such operation are the same -- temporary and short lived. We are missing a golden chance to elevate ourselves from the most corrupt status. Why do we have a narrow vision and approach to such problem?

Tanzia Chowdhury Dhaka

Colonialism and War on Terror

To claim a divine, or any other, right to occupy an already occupied land on the basis of an old book and religion, or on any other basis, is a height of absurdity and arrogance. To subsequently deny that one is conducting wars and defences of colonial occupation and expansion is a height of mendacity and demonstrates a profound lack of intel-

lectual and moral integrity, as does the constant depiction and portrayal of the victims and desperate, bloody retaliators as the instigators and perpetrators of the whole hideous, nasty and tragic mess.

These are the facts that are a significant, justified and undeniable cause of much Muslim anger and hostility towards Israel, its Western allies and others, and will continue to be so until honesty and some semblance of justice prevails. Addressing such root causes would be a far more effective and felicitous way of spending the vast amount of money, effort and resources directed at the various Wars on Terror.

Of course such colonial arrogance, brutality and mendacity are nothing new as the existence, denials, recalcitrance and ignorance of Australia and other newer nations demonstrates. Contemporarily, however, they place Israel in such company as India, China,

Russia, Sudan, Iraq, Turkey, Indonesia, Guatemala and others. Definitely not very honest, enlightened or developed company.

John Finch Australia

Smelly water

We are the inhabitants of South Jatrabari (Pubali Area), Demra, Dhaka-1204. For about a month we are getting water from WASA having foul smell. It normally happens when the supply water gets polluted by mixing with underground sewage waste or the like. WASA's water supply is the only source of drinking water and also for domestic use. Some people have already fallen sick after drinking this water.

We earnestly request the concerned authority to take necessary steps in this regard and provide us safe and clean water. Md. Zahurul Islam South Jatrabari, Dhaka

Tremor in Chittagong

According to the reports published in a section of press another tremor occurred in the port city Chittagong in November 2. We have also learnt that Chittagong experienced seven tremors in the month of October 2002.

We are really frightened. What is in store for us? According to geologist's observation, mild and frequent tremors are the sign of a major earthquake. We have also learnt that Bangladesh is situated in an earthquake prone zone and a serious earthquake may strike in future and its intensity might be eight points in the Richter scale!

What a horrible prospect! Earthquake is such a natural calamity that people cannot be warned beforehand. Still we have to take some precautions. What is government doing in this regard?

Nur Jahan Chittagong