

Badruddoza's Iftar

Hints at leading a civil society initiative

BADRUDDOZA Chowdhury has come out of the shell he had drifted into following his resignation from the Presidency within seven months of assuming that highest office of the state. What's more, he has announced an intent to explore possibilities of galvanising a front or a platform. According to the outlines he laid bare at Saturday's Iftar party, he wishes to do this through consultations with civil society representatives followed by a dialogue with politicians.

The observations the former president made, the concerns he voiced and the fears he expressed about pervasive corruption, lack of rule of law, inefficiency, and overall governmental under-performance are shared by most people. There is, however, nothing new in what he said: all this has been in the newspapers and very much a matter of common knowledge and under constant public discourse. Even his move to mobilise civil society opinion has a ring of familiarity when viewed with a hindsight of Dr. Kamal Hossain or Gen. Osmani's initiatives. The former president has only urged civil society representatives to respond to the situation by advancing their suggestions. He himself has not given any road map.

Yet, Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury's observations have considerable import. For, these are not only timely, but coming from a veteran politician whose contributions to the BNP in its initial stages have been second to only that of President Ziaur Rahman, they also have a relevance, credibility and force of their own.

What merits special mention is his pointer to an additional power centre whose 'rise people are also questioning'. This is the first articulation of the aberration by any major figure in the country. As such, this matter of public concern should be addressed by the government with all the seriousness it deserves.

We don't want to pre-judge what Prof. Badruddoza's political move is likely to be. In fact, we don't like to be seen as being judgmental at all on the issue. At this stage, we have very little to comment on as to its future impact. But what we would certainly like to assert is that there has been a tremendous amount of disappointment with the major political parties of the country. There is hardly any doubt people want to see political alternatives emerge to the two tested political parties -- the BNP and Awami League. Isn't democracy about freedom of choice?

Murder in a hospital

Wasn't it waiting to happen?

A Jubo League leader, hospitalised with bullet wounds, was finally shot to death in the hospital bed where he was lying following an operation. The killers did not hesitate to enter the hospital and murder the man in front of his relatives and, of course, the doctors and nurses.

The appalling crime has to be taken note of for a number of reasons. There had been an attempt on the life of the victim, but there was nobody to ensure his security. People can very legitimately question the security perception of the law enforcers who could do virtually nothing to save the man, despite his surviving the first attempt on his life. On the same day, the owner of a roadside restaurant was murdered in the city. In this case also, the killers committed the crime in front of the employees of the hotel.

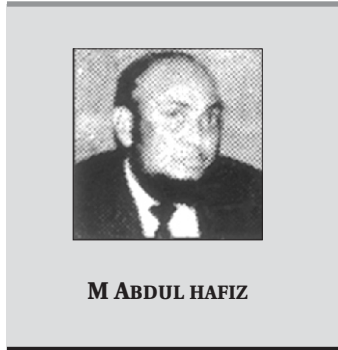
Now, the killing of a man undergoing treatment in a hospital cannot be treated as an ordinary crime. It is a clear indication of the fact that professional killers and extortionists have a free hand and they bother little about the presence of law enforcers. It is also reflection on the government's claim that extra police squads have been deployed in the city to combat crimes in the days before Eid.

One very noticeable aspect of the crimes is that most of them are related to extortionism in some form or the other. So, it becomes obvious that police vigilance during the month of Ramadan, which aims to curb the activities of extortionists, has chinks in the armoury.

The psychological impact of such crimes can be enormous, as people will begin to feel unsafe even in a hospital.

Police must swing into action and arrest the killers before people's confidence in their integrity and ability is further eroded.

'For whom the bell tolls'



THE flavour of Eid is already in the air. The mood of the folk is that for the celebration. And the time is heady indeed. The dress-rehearsal of the celebration is underway in a series of Iftar extravaganzas and brisk Eid shopping -- of course, open only to a fortunate few. Strangely, the charmed circle also includes the clerics of particular hue -- now aligned with ruling alliance -- who in blatant hypocrisy attend at least the fiestas in VIP pandals and posh hotels in defiance of their professed values of siam. Only the well-fed people are fed over and again on these occasions. Because they are the ones to celebrate.

The shopping malls of the city have worn a festive look and are frequented by trendy young men and chic women for their classy collection of brand names. They will once more

get a chance for the brazen display of their profligate lifestyle. Undaunted by prohibitive price tag of over one hundred thousand takas they will not stop short of now-fabled 'Lehenga.' Never ask where the money comes from for the fortunate few and who are they, after all. We, the lesser mortals should only be interested in their being there -- nothing more, nothing less. Why unnecessarily stepping into a forbidden zone where

dory in the country except whatever slur has been smeared on its face by a nagging opposition. But even if the opposition has played its part of "cheap politics on human misery," the ground reality does not conceal the hollowness of the government claims of alleviating people's suffering whether it is with regard to their safety and security or a constitutional right to get the essentials of life at affordable price.

hike which is still rising even the city dwellers find the situation a nightmare. In *monga*-hit northern area a mother lashed by hunger is reported to have sold her own child. People have succumbed to death or disease by filling in stomach with inedible things. Driven by hunger, disease and unemployment the hard-hit people of the area have been herded off towards relatively solvent urban centres to swell the number of

a kind of social equilibrium cutting down the number of super rich and dirt poor is an overwhelming imperative for a much needed balance in the society and the survival of the polity. Unfortunately the thrust of the politics in our country has always been to create distinct classes: patronised and deprived.

Unless universal, the happiness

PERSPECTIVES

Only an honest admission of how the country's teeming millions are today faring in their struggle for bare existence may perhaps open a window of salvation with the people's collective wisdom... It's certainly not the time for claims and counter-claims and for blames and counter-blames. It is solemnly a time for introspection ...

things beyond our comprehension can happen? The sky is the only limit where unfettered hedonism is the way of life.

However, at the other end of the spectrum an ever-growing underclass of our society gasps for mere survival and is considered spoiler for the celebration ahead with their ugly appearance. The policy of the establishment also seems to be to sweep all the sleazes and ugliness under the rugs. It does not even recognise the existence of any blackspot in the society. For the establishment, everything is hunky-

The coming celebration has only sharpened their sense of deprivation.

For the teeming millions in the country battered by grinding prices of the essentials of life, the celebration only compounds their problem - the problem of kindling smiles on the face of their near and dear ones while confronting the most basic problem of getting their both ends meet. Any celebration is but a cruel joke in a country steeped in thousand miseries and particularly at a time when near-famine condition stalks the northern districts of the country. Lashed by an unprecedented price

destitutes there. In the meantime, terror, extortion and lawlessness rule the roost in this country. What's left with the people to really celebrate?

The socio-economic disparity is nothing new in this country. In an inherited socio-economic system from our colonial rulers we lived with such disparities for ages. Although all political movements in this country were launched, among other things, to bridge up the gap between rich and poor as much possible, the gap only widened. Yet we seldom yearned for a doctrinaire equality; neither was that possible even in socialist system. But

on Eid or any other occasion can hardly get in itself. It is something to be shared with as many as possible. Or else even the fortunate will not be spared of the compunction that results in from monopolised happiness. They will be haunted in their sub-conscious by the human beings reduced to a bundle of bones by hunger, those sunken eyes and jaundiced face they see around them. With those images haunting one it is difficult to go merry-making even during the Eid without certain qualm.

It is pointless to cover festering wounds of our society with sophistry

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and mendacity. Let the authority gather courage to call spade a spade. Let it unburden its conscience by laying bare the facts. There is no disgrace in admitting that the people are indeed experiencing silent famine in the country and there is skull duggery with regards to relief materials. The government's insistence or self-proclaimed 'achievements' and its ability to prolong its rule will not take them anywhere. It will only smear them with ignominy.

Only an honest admission of how the country's teeming millions are today faring in their struggle for bare existence may perhaps open a window of salvation with the people's collective wisdom. Nothing else matters more for a people for whom the bells are already tolling. The society is withering away and polity is on the brink of disaster with chaos reigning supreme in all sectors of governance.

It's certainly not the time for claims and counter-claims and for blames and counter-blames. It is solemnly a time for introspection preceding a massive rescue operation for the society and polity. Let the polemics over politics be over with the hatchet buried.

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Tackling religious militancy: Pakistan experience

ZIAUDDIN M. CHOUDHURY

THE Government of Pakistan has recently come down with a heavy hand on several of the country's religious organisations on charges of breeding terrorism in the name of religion. The offices and several hundred educational institutions or Madrassas, run by these organisations have been sealed, banned and the organisations themselves outlawed. The Pakistani agency in charge of the operation claimed that the organisations were extremist outfits; in the name of religious education the seminaries run by them were busy producing militants. It is ironic that a decade ago a different government agency of the same country was itself helping some of these organisations to produce the very elements that the government is now trying to snuff. But that is a different story. Important thing is that the government of Pakistan has awakened to combat the breeding grounds of religious militancy and the threat it poses to the country's political stability.

Not too long ago in Bangladesh police had discovered explosives and other items unconnected to "religion" in several Madrassas in the country. I have also seen news reports very recently associating Madrassas run by some religious organisations with training of militants. I am not aware if these reports are getting the attention of the quarters that need to be mindful of these activities, and be wary of their consequences to the government, and the country at large -- not to speak of the international repercussions. It is

also possible that we are still at denial and are continuing to delude ourselves that a "moderate" country such as ours does not have any extremist groups among us. May be we do not want to find out if there is a tumor in our body politic for fear that it will tarnish our image of good health; for fear of the surgery that we may need to remove the tumor.

subscribe to the principles of the types in Pakistan. The sole objectives of these institutions are to enlist and train impressionable youths for religious militancy with a long-term view of destabilising the country and ushering in government of their choice -- one run by religious bigots that we saw in Afghanistan. If we think that we are nowhere near Pakistan was or is now,

Madrassas were set up in the Abbasid period (Golden Age of Islam) for pursuit of rational sciences, and that *Ijtihad* or independent reasoning was a special feature of these institutions. With demise of Muslim ascendancy in science and literature, and rise of orthodox Islam the road of *Ijtihad* was closed. The radical trends gave birth to religious schools founded on

these institutions are called Quomi Madrassas). Modern sciences are not taught. The preferred languages are Arabic, Persian and Urdu. In addition, many of these Madrassas teach Islamic behaviour as the only accepted form of conduct for a Muslim. This finally led to indoctrination of the students, particularly in Pakistan, against western culture, and western

They even became more attractive with their relatively less formal structure, easier access, and cost-free education. Their call to serve the cause of religion would make inroads into the heart and minds of rural millions. There is no need for further analysis to draw a parallel of the Pakistan experience to Bangladesh. Situations are similar in many respects. We must have the will to recognise the potentiality of exploitation of these institutions by politically motivated organisations for lethal purposes. In Pakistan, they have recognised it.

Most Madrassas in Bangladesh are still way removed from becoming launching pads of religious militants. But Pakistan experience presents a unique example of how things can go wrong if the religious education system is not monitored properly. There have to be effective ways to regulate flow of funds, monitor syllabus, and to control spread of hatred and deleterious politics from these institutions. To prevent Pakistan experience, several actions are needed. One, recognition at all levels, particularly at the top, that an unmonitored and unregulated religious education system has the potential of breeding radicals. Two, institutions and organisations that promote terrorism or militancy need to be identified, and isolated. Three, strong deterrent measures need to be taken against any sign of militancy or bigotry in the name of religion. It is never too late to take actions.

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Politicisation of bureaucracy impedes to good governance

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IF we honestly want to discover the changes in our bureaucracy, we need to go back to the last 50 years or even more, when the real changes started to set in the sub-continental context. These changes happened not only in reference to quality and quantity of the bureaucracy, but also in terms of its structure, social image, political inclination and over-all role in a sovereign set-up. Let me now elaborate as to how such changes occurred and what has been the ultimate consequence.

In ordinary parlance, bureaucracy stands for a system of government by departments which are managed by state officials, not by elected representatives. However, to get into bureaucracy in the sub-continental perspective, we need to go back to the period of British rule, for it is the British who for the first time introduced here an organised system of non-political bureaucracy led by Indian Civil Service (ICS). There is no denying the fact that the ICS officers used to enjoy a very high social prestige with concomitant politico-economic power and influence. Accordingly, very brilliant graduates of high social stature of both Indian and British origin would join the ICS. Although the critics would say that these cadre officers were used by the British to perpetrate their colonial

governance.

In Bangladesh, the situation was quite different. With not many honourable exceptions, the sagacity and far-sightedness of our political leadership in general were spectacularly lacking compared to those of either Pakistan or India. Besides, the

was hurled in 1973 when the 1st batch of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) and other sister services were recruited just on the basis of *viva voce* conducted by the Bangladesh Public Service Commission. Against the advertised 300 Class-1 vacant posts, more than two thousand people were recruited

people used to make fun of these civil servants as "quota CSPs" or "quota bureaucrats". Then again, with a few admirable exceptions, the merits and capabilities of the majority members of the then East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) were no match for those of the CSPs. Consequently, from the very

sub-serve their respective political purposes. However, most expansive politicization and moral decadence took place during the autocratic regime of H M Ershad. While the civil bureaucracy was used to prolong the despotic rule, the age-old and time-tested civil administrative structure

civil servants were re-employed mostly on political affiliation, blocking thereby the scope of promotion of the junior ones. Then again, in sharp contrast to what was available for the military establishments, little efforts were given to standardise the recruitment procedure, training facilities, service structure etc of the civil bureaucracy. Virtually, nothing has been done to attract the brilliant university students in different superior services. Thus, except a few fortunate high-ups, the civil bureaucracy in general was subject to continuous apathy which ultimately resulted in the qualitative deterioration in the total system of governance.

For the first time in the history of the Public Service Commission, allegations such as document-tampering, question-paper leakage etc were raised. While the incidences of corrupt practices are proliferating beyond imagination, the law-enforcing agencies are almost helpless before the political pressure group. The Cabinet Secretary of the ruling government told a recent seminar that "the lawmakers would not allow the police to take actions against the party leaders and the activists and this is the fundamental reason for deterioration of law and order." While politicization of the bureaucracy disgustingly damaged the entire polity, a new dimension has been added in that the

senior bureaucrats themselves are now inclined to get political colour to get short and long-term favours. While the short-term favour includes good postings and perks, rapid promotions, extension of services, etc, the long-term one is of course revolves round such aspirations as induction in the party politics leading to influential positions in the cabinet or similar bounties. There is no doubt that such self-seeking stance on the part of the senior bureaucrats tells upon their accountability to the republic.

May we not forget that the civil administration is totally a specialised job and there is no scope to belittle the role of the civil servants in the socio-economic advancement of the people as also in maintaining the law and order and administrative discipline in the society which comprises people of varying views and dispositions. Therefore, for a country like Bangladesh where still majority of the people are virtually illiterate and living below poverty-line, there is no alternative to an efficient bureaucracy. While elected representatives of the people can give direction or formulate policy on total national advancement, the professional part of doing the job of good governance depends squarely on the efficiency of the bureaucrats en bloc.

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