

## Recruitment controversy

### Government's credibility damaged

THE government has decided to withdraw its earlier cancellation order which halted a controversy-ridden recruitment process relating to several thousand class three and four employees under different district administrations. The retraction is reported to be the result of pressure created by BNP men and apprehension that those who had been appointed might start legal battles.

We believe the government had taken a rightful stand by stopping the recruitment process which had come under clouds of allegations centring around widespread corruption and influence peddling. But relenting to the BNP elements' pressure has more than negated the corrective move made earlier.

A little elaboration is needed to make the point clear. Somehow an impression has grown in the public mind that large-scale recruitment has often been susceptible to corruption, political manipulation and favouritism. A job seeker had to pay an amount of money, depending on the nature of the job, for being considered as the 'most favourite candidate' for a post. The situation has worsened to a point where the higher bidders among job seekers are entitled to special consideration. Everything has been 'standardised' in a negative sense.

The fear of legal battles is not pointless, but what is hard to overlook is how a recruitment process, where merit and eligibility had little place, could be completed so smoothly without anyone in authority frowning at it. And when the scowl came, it turned out to be pathetically short-lived! The process was hostage to corruption and unholy influence which only served one purpose -- leaving many of the deserving candidates out. Fair play and eligibility of the candidates were secondary to gains made by vested quarters.

The government's giving way to pressure from some ruling party elements cannot set any ideal example. It virtually amounts to encouraging corruption. Obviously, a tainted recruitment process leads to appointing incompetent people who cannot be anything but liabilities to the government. The delivery of services may be affected.

We are aware that there are standard policies and rules for recruitment to various government offices. These should be followed scrupulously in order that public services are not derailed in the absence of efficiency and integrity.

## Students going on rampage

### What purpose did it serve?

THE clash between a group of students and transport workers in the streets of Barisal town that left at least 50 injured and more than 40 vehicles damaged, was totally reprehensible. First of all, we simply fail to understand why students of Barisal BM College went to a bus terminal to block the roads and highways to press for a demand that had to do with an academic interest. They were clamouring for upgrading their college to a university, something that should have remained confined to representations before the authorities concerned rather than spilling on to the streets. To press for or highlight a demand why must students resort to disrupting public life?

One can never support the tendency of taking out any anger and frustrations on others which has become a routine behavioral pattern in society. Students blocking the roads and damaging vehicles on the streets is not a new phenomenon. We are simply shocked and disgusted at the repeat.

In the case of Barisal, however, the situation aggravated because the transport workers took it upon themselves to deal with it instead of waiting for the law enforcers to arrive. Whatever the reasons, all of those involved in the clash must realise that they had no right to damage public property, smash vehicles, create panic among the passersby and cause inconvenience to numerous commuters. This sort of unruly, unlawful behaviour must be stopped. The authorities must not hesitate to apply laws to prevent such acts of rampage and mayhem. Only then anyone would think twice before taking public safety hostage to their selfish interests. Let all concerned beware of the fact that, if unchecked, such disruptive behaviour can have a pernicious contagion effect.

## Gossip over gas



ABDUL BAYES

FEW of my friends feel that, at household level at least, gas is for the rich but not for the poor. I reckon, there is a sound economic reasoning behind the hypothesis. The capital cost of a connection for gas is estimated to hover around Tk. 10,000. In addition, there are expenses on accessories and burners to bedevil the access of these poor to such an important energy source. Secondly, even at the current price of gas, the monthly bill on gas for the poor would be too burdensome to bear with. And finally, gas supply would hardly help industries or commercial entities from which the poor would directly benefit.

My friends, some of who are famous, of course, contend that gas-driven industries like fertilizer and power plants might inject some indirect or spillover benefits to the poor. Empirical evidences are in avalanche to support gas-growth

nexus and poverty reduction. For example, gas generates electricity and helps produce fertilizer to reduce cost of irrigation and fertilizer. A priori reasoning would suggest that tenant, small and marginal farmers -- accounting for over three-fourths of farm households in rural areas -- could reap home a better harvest and higher income from such developments. Again, establishment of cold storage or cooling facilities might allow a move toward

Such hypotheses, to be accepted, predominantly need ample empirical evidences and sound econometric techniques, both of which I am lacking at the moment. But gossip over gas with few poor households could possibly open the door for detailed discussions.

The village I recently visited with a young friend Habib is called Charachhola located at Ashugonj. We met family members of Shamsu Mia (47) -- the only earning member

available to quench our queries. She tells us the story. Shamsu Mia has three brothers whose average monthly income also hovers around Tk.3000-4000 per month. They live separately but realising the returns from gas, all the brothers decided that they should share the cost of connection. One of them approached ASA -- an NGO -- for a loan of Tk.10,000. Now the borrower has to pay Tk.300 per week to settle the loan amount in 46 weeks.

There was acute shortage of firewood in and around Ashugonj. The area where they live turned into a semi-desert within a span of a decade and through the treacherous path of development.

Next we visited the adjacent household and heard the same story. Shahidul Alam (37) drives a microbus to earn Tk.4000/month. They also share a common kitchen and total bill for gas. Soon some ladies appeared before us to tell us

Shahadat (12), a madarsha student, pointed out the real economics of gas use. According to him, his mother used to get sick frequently before the advent of the gas but now-a-days she maintains a good health. No smoke, to dirt. Now, health conditions have improved all around and the costs on account of soap have reduced. It appeared from the discussions that the total monetary saving for households with gas amounts to Tk. 300-500 per month. This is 10 per cent of the total income of poor households.

If one travels to Sirajgonj, where gas has just been made available, one would come across various types of industries and commercial activities where poor people are directly engaged. There are two or three factories producing lime from limestones -- a rare economic activity now in evidence. Yarn moistening has become more cost effective, that goes to help the poor weavers from Belkuchi. Textile and cement factories are using gas. There are thus both direct and indirect impacts of gas on the poor. There should be a change in our perceptions about the impact of gas on poverty reduction. But before drawing any policy conclusions, more research is needed and we are waiting for that.

Abdul Bayes is Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University

**BENEATH THE SURFACE**  
No smoke, to dirt. Now, health conditions have improved all around and the costs on account of soap have reduced. It appeared from the discussions that the total monetary saving for households with gas amounts to Tk. 300-500 per month. This is 10 per cent of the total income of poor households. If one travels to Sirajgonj, where gas has just been made available, one would come across various types of industries and commercial activities where poor people are directly engaged. There are thus both direct and indirect impacts of gas on the poor.

more high value crops. Agro processing industries could grow following gas availability or the existing ones could become competitive. By and large, in popular parleys, gas offers no direct benefits to reduction of poverty.

But my recent visit to a village gave just the opposite impression. I can, perhaps, now hypothesise that gas could be a source of cost effective energy for the poor and that the poor tend to benefit more from gas at household level than the rich.

Getting the connection, they further decided that they would cook their meals by rotation. Thus the total monthly bill is shared among brothers and each has to bear a burden of Tk.100 or so per month. We visited the kitchen. A single burner was set in a very small room under a tin shed. But no fences around, no pucca floor either.

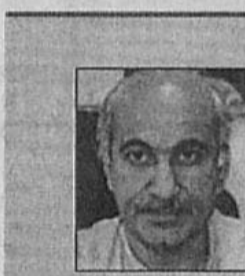
Meantime, Shamsu Mia's father joined the discussion. He told us that they were forced to go for gas -- despite being poverty stricken -- as

the benefits of gas in their respective households. During the discourse, the economics of gas dominated the discussions. Use of traditional fuels, on average, costs a poor household Tk.500-600. If the capital cost could be managed for connection, that translates into a saving of Tk.100-200 per month. Earlier, it would take 2-3 hours for cooking purposes but now all cooking can be completed within one hour. Women are getting more time to sew cloth or to perform some other activities.

matched against Anarkali. The first, *Teri mahfil mein kismat aazman ke ham bhi dekheenge*, Chari bhar to tere nazdeek aakar ham bhi dekheenge (Let me test my fortune in your presence, Let me spend a moment near you), establishes the interplay of character, ambition, opportunity, love and tragedy. Prince Salim judges the two women. The rose goes to the upbeat Bahar, the thorn to Anarkali, who knows that tears are so often the price of love. She accepts the thorn,

## Revisiting Mughal-e-Azam

*Jab raat hai aisi matwali phir subah ka aalam kya hoga...*



M.J. AKBAR

NOW that George Bush can confess to getting "teared up" and win an election, I can make my own confession. I am a total sap for movies like Mughal-e-Azam, the wondrous classic about Emperor Akbar, his son Salim, and the dancing girl, Anarkali. The casting is perfection. Prithviraj as emperor: no one has quivered quite like him. Dilip Kumar as Salim: no one has crossed a heart with his sword with his poetry. Madhubala as Anarkali: no beauty better deserved a prince. Give me a map of my country rising above a plasticine medieval-Delhi-skyline on a large screen, a sonorous voice saying 'Main Hindustan hoon', dollops of the sweetest language in the world, Urdu, and my eyes fill up like a river in the monsoon. Thank God movie halls are dark. What I was not prepared for was the intensity of the rest of the audience. It was a late night show in the heart of Delhi and the hall was full for the colour version of black-and-white film first screened in 1960. I thought that only Sixties' groupies would turn up to relive their comparatively innocent youth. It was an age when virginal love was considered scandalous, so fantasy had a wonderful time. The Sixties were there, and looked frostbitten by reality. They had found husbands instead of Dilip Kumar, and wives instead of Madhubala.

THE young people in the audience were clearly anthropologists who had come to check out what made the Neanderthals tick. They must have been shocked to discover

that it was songs like *Pyar kiya to darma kya, jab pyar kiya to darma kya; Pyar kiya koi chori nahin ki, chup chup ke aahen bharna kya!* (When I have loved, why should I fear? It is love, not theft, so why should I sigh from behind a curtain?). It would need a social historian better than I to convey how powerful, even revolutionary, the idea was that love transcended fear, for every father was an emperor then, demanding the destruction of love in the name of some higher

in the background became a chorus of catharsis for us all. I could not help singing along with Lata Mangeshkar: *Khuda nigehbaan ho tumhara, dharakte dil ka payaam le lo, Tumhari duniya se jaa rahe hain, utho hamara salaam le lo* (God protect you, my love, take a message from a trembling heart; I leave your world, broken, but rise and take my last salute). The lady next to me began to sing as well. I am sure that both of us wished, strangers as we were, that we had the courage to sing

voice break down in the hall. The scene was set just before the epic battle between father and son (the battle itself is a masterpiece of fusion between K. Asif's direction and R.D. Mathur's camera). A maulvi ties a tabeez on the right arm of the emperor with the famous victory verse of the Holy Quran *Nasrumminallah-e-fateh-un-qareeb*. Then a Hindu priest blesses the emperor as well with a saffron mark on the forehead. "Arrey," asked a querulous voice, "yeh Hindu hai

outside known cultures. This does not make it good or bad. To state a fact is not to pass judgement. The relevant point is that the Mughal-e-Azam audience of 2004 seemed entranced by the music of words, and in the music lay the meaning. Urdu lives.

THE denouement is marked by a qawwali that Bahar sings alone, for the conflict with Anarkali is over. Love has been defeated by power. There is pyrrhic victory for both women. Anarkali is permitted to become queen for one night, not because -- as the emperor taunts, because a *lawnai* (slave girl) cannot give up the dream of a crown -- but because, as Anarkali retorts, she does not want a future emperor of Hindustan to be remembered as a man who could not keep his word to a slave. In return, she must drug the prince to sleep while she is led away by guards to death (in the legend) and desolate freedom (in the film). Bahar has won the night, but lost the future, for she does not replace Anarkali in the prince's affections. But she is permitted her final taunt, and she sings:

*Yeh dil ki lagi kam kya hogi, yeh ishq bhala kam kya hogi*  
*Jab raat hai aisi matwali phir subah ka aalam kya hoga!*

When this passion ever diminishes, this love ever wither? When the night is so delicious, imagine what morning will bring! I have rarely come across a more startling and poignant metaphor for power. This is the story of every government, yesterday, today and tomorrow. Everyone in power is permitted the luxury of just one night, and no one ever believes that the night will come to an end. Deceivers promise a dawn filled with wine, when the truth is that with dawn will bring a drug that will put the miracle to sleep.

I wondered about the Urdu-deficit in the Delhi theatre hall. Forty five years ago, a film could be made in superb Urdu for an India-wide audience. Mughal-e-Azam also made marketing history in 1960 when it was released in 150 theatres simultaneously. Today film language is a pidgin patois bred

## BYLINE

I have rarely come across a more startling and poignant metaphor for power. This is the story of every government, yesterday, today and tomorrow. Everyone in power is permitted the luxury of just one night, and no one ever believes that the night will come to an end. Deceivers promise a dawn filled with wine, when the truth is that with dawn will bring a drug that will put the miracle to sleep.

social principle. Emperor Akbar would not allow his son Salim -- the future Emperor Jahangir -- to marry Anarkali, a *kanees*, a palace girl much above a courtesan but much below a princess because the honour of Timurid blood and the demands of empire would not permit a leap over social walls that held the establishment in place. In thousands of mohallas across India, millions of fathers would not permit a leap over the walls of caste and religion and language. And just as Anarkali, played by Madhubala, accepted in the end, so did millions of women who dream of a brief moment of defiance and glory that they could call their own and take to their graves, secret even from their children.

All around me every Madhubala had become just another mother. Sitting to my left was a lady who, midway through the movie, spoke very softly into her mobile, a transgression I forgave for she was talking to a hospital about a patient. As in the last moments of the film a frozen Madhubala walked away to freedom and misery, bereft of a love she had been forced to betray, and the song

louder. THESE are some of the things that could shock the young. In a film of 20 reels, unravelling over three and a half hours, there is not a single item number. There is no hint of cleavage. Even the men are overdressed. The highest-paid playback singer in the movie is the classicist Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, who was given Rs 25,000 for *Shubh din aayo and Prem jogan ban...* at a time when Lata Mangeshkar and Mohammad Rafi received about a thousand rupees per song. (Classical Indian music in a popular movie? Isn't that truly shocking?) Bahar, Anarkali's competitor for Salim's affections, played by Nigar Sultana, arguably as beautiful as Madhubala, wears a light veil when she goes to meet a stranger.

Madhubala says namaz for the life of Durjan Singh, son of Man Singh, who has just rescued her at the cost of his life to keep the word of a Rajput. The emperor prays to Allah, through the sufi divine Salim Chishti of Agra, for a son, and accepts *prasad* from his Hindu wife, Jodha Bai, after she has worshipped Lord Krishna on Janmashtami. I could hear the credulity of one youngish

*ke Mussalman hai?* (I say, is this chap a Hindu or a Muslim?). The times are more liberal now, and the understanding is much less.

WHY hasn't a chain of Mughal-e-Azam boutiques opened up? K. Asif brought master tailors from Delhi, and specialists in zari from Surat to create an exquisite array of clothes. But the piece de resistance is the jewellery, made by goldsmiths from Hyderabad and craftsmen from Kolhapur. It was the most expensive, as well as the slowest, film made till then, and the passion shows in every intricate detail. The clothes may not find takers in a culture of pace, but the jewellery that Bahar wears would lead to competitive bidding in any elite environment. It could even be called the Bahar line. I visualise a jewellery fashion show ablaze with Mughal gold, ruby, sapphire, emerald, diamond and baskets of pearl. The models would wear jewellery and nothing else, of course. That would put their pictures in every newspaper and magazine around the world.

BAHAR'S high moments come during two qawwalis in which she is

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Transparency in recruitment

We often see in the advertisements for vacancies in the international organisations that canvassing is a disqualification and is discouraged. But we also see that there is no accountability or transparency in their recruitment process. That's probably why we find that most of the staff recruited are the kith and kin of big influential people of the society i.e. ministers, senior bureaucrats etc. as if only they are the professionally efficient and capable people. In the government recruitment system, if the minimum requirement is fulfilled the candidate is at least called for an interview. If not s/he has the right to challenge before the concerned authority/court. But in the international institutions, no one knows how the short list is prepared, who are being called for interview and on what

basis. But eventually it is found that only people having good "links" and able to pursue their application are recruited. I ask is it not on the basis of canvassing or persuasion? Then why these organisations always talk about transparency, accountability and in their advertisements underscore that "canvassing is discouraged"?  
A citizen  
Lalmatia, Dhaka

### Interest rate on HBFC loan

A few months have passed since the banks and some other financial institutions have reduced the rates of interest both on deposits and borrowings. This was done following a government decision to direct funds from being deposited in government securities and find way to stock market and other business opportunities. The purpose was also to reduce the cost of finance for

industrial investments. HBFC is also a financial institution. So the rates of interest charged by HBFC to its borrowers should also have been reduced. But it has not done so far. The rate of interest charged by HBFC is in fact much more than what they claim it to be because of the very rigid conditions applied for recovery. In a long term loan case there may occur some variations in paying the loan instalments. But such exceptions are so heavily penalised in HBFC that the borrowers get bogged down in arrears thereby the loan repayment period is stretched beyond any imaginable limit. The HBFC borrowers are mostly in the fixed income group whose repayment habits are much better than other commercial and industrial borrowers. So the rate of recovery of HBFC loan is known to be very high. As such these borrowers should not be deprived of the relief given to others.

I would therefore request the appropriate authority to consider lowering the rate of interest on HBFC loan in line with other institutions.  
MA Zahir  
Kazipara, Mirpur, Dhaka

### A tribute to the late UAE President

It was shocking to learn that the President of UAE Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahiyen was no more. We pray to Almighty Allah for the salvation of his departed soul and for granting the fortitude to the members of his bereaved family and countrymen to bear this loss. Undoubtedly the late President was a leader of high-esteem with modern thoughts and understandings who through his untiring efforts turned his desert country green and made the United Arab Emirates one of the advanced countries in the Arab lands and the world. His people

loved him genuinely. Meanwhile I sincerely wish success for the acting President of UAE, Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid who is also a dynamic leader in running his country smoothly during the transition period.

M. Zahidul Haque  
Chairman, Dept. of Language  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural  
University  
Dhaka-1207

### Outsourcing business

It is nice to notice that the private sector of Bangladesh has woken up to the ways of earning foreign exchange grabbing outsourcing business in the advertising sector (advtin DS). This economic cycle of shift of working place from the developed to the developing countries was inevitable. This follows the earlier phase of workers going abroad to seek jobs for higher wages. Now the Commonwealth Secre-

tariat is suggesting that conditions be created for temporary jobs abroad, with the workers returning to their homeland after contract period expires (DS Oct 29). This would discourage illegal entries. It sounds logical, as working from home via computer links (wired or wireless) has become very common in the West. The philosophy is: Spread the prosperity thin. What is the line of thinking in our foreign office?  
AZ,  
Dhaka

### The hostage problem

If reports filed in various renowned dailies by their correspondents are true, a general hostage problem prevails in many parts of Bangladesh. It is usually reported on a daily basis that (1) WASA employees do not increase the diameter of a pipeline or give other services to their clients unless a handsome amount is given, (2) Cattle-dealers cannot

bring their cattle into the markets without paying to 'law enforcers' and the local mastans, (3) Bawalis cannot collect leaves in the Sundarbans unless they bribe the forest department officials, (4) Char inhabitants cannot plough their lands, though legitimate, without satisfying local hooligans and goons, (5) Principals in many colleges are helpless to take independent decisions regarding admission of students as the unions collect large sums from ineligible admission seekers, (6) Day labourers are forced to give a share of their wages to local extortionists and contractors, (7) The thana police are helpless against local influential quarters and so cannot take cases like murder, rape, illegal arms possession and arson etc and finally 40,000 people of a certain village or locality, say, Boyar char, are being held as hostage by a certain 'Zakir bahini'. After giving the details of each of these cases, the reporters make a

comment to the effect that the clients are being held hostage by the service providers. It is ironic to note on examination that the hostage, for example in the WASA case, surely works somewhere for his living, let us say in PDB, so he also holds his clients hostage when they come to him for receiving a service like installing a meter or having a connection. So the hostage turns into a captor and a captor turns into a hostage. A *tahshildar* or AC (land) collects huge kickback from the sellers and purchasers of land but while he goes to get his child admitted to a school has to give wads of notes to the school authority. Only those who are weak and honest are thus the losers while the others are gainers in the end. Can it not be possible for us to be equitably well-off by following the ideals of the Prophet (SM) who was bold of so much everyday?  
Advocate Monsur Fakir,  
Jamalpur Bar