

Reach food scarcity pockets with succour

The 'monga' problem worsening

IT is disconcerting to learn that food scarcity is spreading beyond the region normally associated with the seasonal unemployment problem that erodes the purchasing power of people. Reports have been appearing in the media over time on the plight of the people in the greater Rangpur area who are visited by 'monga' every year at this time. This annual feature has also been subject of parliamentary discussion several times. The government's failure to provide timely succour to the affected people has come in for criticism by the parliamentary standing committee on agriculture ministry lately.

When the government had anticipated the situation and put aside funds to meet such an eventuality, it is disappointing to learn that the money hasn't been released on time and that food relief is yet to reach the needy people. The measures so far undertaken appear to have been at best halfhearted.

When in fact this is a yearly feature, the affected people need not have gone through the distress they are in at the moment, had the concerned authority demonstrated some alacrity in their planning and action.

That the whole system is hamstrung by lack of inter-ministerial coordination suggests that the relevant agencies of the government have been caught napping and are still rather ill-prepared to handle the situation.

What is beyond comprehension is that, in spite of not only special provision of cash and kind set aside for this region and also the VGF programme being undertaken at this time of the year these people have to suffer a near-famine situation. It hardly needs to be emphasised that the government should immediately provide relief to the affected people of the region by galvanizing all concerned into action.

Monga is an annual occurrence that is brought about by lack of employment at a particular time of the year. There have been voluble commitments on the part of the government to embark on long term rehabilitation programmes for the region which unfortunately have not materialised. Has the vulnerable area been brought under any specific development plan? That is the question begging a satisfactory answer now.

The pricey onion

An avoidable crisis

BEFORE a major festival every year, an artificial shortage would be created of one or the other essential commodity. This time around it is the onion price that has shot up well beyond the common man's reach.

The shortfall in onion supply is attributed to heavy rain in the country. And it has been aggravated by the fact that India, the country from which we import it, suffered the same kind of production crunch this year. But the difference between the approaches of the two countries is that while the former anticipated the problem and took steps to avert a crisis, we are now running from pillar to post to buy onion from wherever we could.

Lack of advance planning to keep the demand-supply equation consumer friendly has always been a problem with us. This time it's onion, it was some other commodity in the non-too-distant past and it will be yet another next year. It's the ordinary people who suffer.

It seems to us that a vested interest is working behind creation of a crisis situation. They whip up an artificial crisis and try to make the most of a high-demand scenario. The emergency procurement drive costs more, as we have less maneuverability under a mounting time-pressure. The hype that is created around such emergency steps is nothing short of playing to the gallery while the consumers pay through their noses.

A meaningful free market operation demands a high degree of planning efficiency and management skill in terms of purchase, procurement and distribution. Even spot buying must be kept within the purview of such planning.

A sudden spurt in the price of any commodity adds to the predicament of people already grappling with the general trend of price hikes. The extremely high price of any particular commodity may also have a sympathetic reaction in the price situation as a whole.

Our planners have always shown poor preparedness and foresight insofar as tackling a sudden turn of events is concerned. The present crisis is another reminder of the lapses at planning level.

facing the danger of total domination by a vicious Islamist group, a regime which does not believe in people's sovereignty.

We do not know as yet as to what our major political parties are thinking about the looming danger of establishing say, a Taliban type regime in Bangladesh. They must realise that if they continue to fight only to capture power ignoring the danger from the Islamist militants they may not find enough time to lament for their lapse in future.

The BNP-led alliance government has completed four years of their rule. Surprisingly, instead of showing any regret for their huge failures to fulfil their major election pledges like rooting out corruption, improving law and order situation or separation of judiciary from executive they are out to make the people believe that their stay in power for four years was a whacking success. Frankly speaking, no neutral person will hesitate to state that the present regime's performance happens to be worse. In fact one may be prompted to say "Seleukas, this is a strange land" because this country

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THE Daily Star' in its lead news of 23rd October last reports that half-trained cops are scheduled to report to duty posts for alleged election related functions and that the same would be made possible by shortening the training period of police officers of different ranks. It has also been reported that 200 Assistant Superintendents (ASP-Managerial entry level post) would be recruited through 25th BCS examinations and these appointees will join training early next year and complete the same by late next year in order to be able to report for election duty. Additionally, another 200 ASPs will be recruited through special BCS examinations to allegedly debar the next government in the likely event of incumbent political party losing the election, from making any such appointments for quite some time. It should be pertinent to note that 200 ASPs who have been recruited through 24th BCS examination and have now completed only 15 weeks of their Academy training schedule of one year will have to complete their training after only nine months.

The worries

From the above one can see that within the space of barely two years a staggering number of 600 managerial level appointments will have been effected in a sensitive and vital organ of the state like police. Even if one desists from ascribing political motives to such hastily planned unusual appointments as alleged, one cannot but be concerned at such a scenario in view of the time honoured golden principles of establishment pertaining to recruitment of entry level posts in a discipline bound organisation as Police Mention has to be made about the less-than-satisfactory experience of similar bulk recruitments in 1973-74, though apparently necessitated by administrative imperatives of a war ravaged independent county and the motivated lateral appointments in 1976 and 1978 by the then military regime.

Although in all such exercises there were some noticeable intake of capable individuals it was more of a chance than the expected planned selection, with the result that these three appointments have been labelled as political with the concomitant unhealthy consequence on enforcement ethos.

background that the reported bulk recruitments and reduced training schedule has to be viewed.

Our training scenario

Our police training is in a general state of neglect. The training arrangements are unsatisfactory, qualitatively and quantitatively. The strength of the force has increased substantially but the facilities have not kept pace with this increase. The contrast between the Police Academy at Sardah and the training establishments of the Defence Services is so great that one cannot escape the impression that the provision of police training has not received adequate attention from any government. It must, however, be added that the most important reason for the situation of general neglect appears to be the lack of a genuine conviction about the value of training on the part of administration, including the higher ranks of police service.

Even the buildings which house many police training institutions and the state of their maintenance and repair are unworthy of a major organisation of the government entrusted with vital

In fact, in independent Bangladesh, regular appointments through nationwide competitive examinations started taking place from 1979, though not on a yearly basis. It must be mentioned that in the recent past during the two party governments there were more than 100 appointments in one go although such intake was not appreciated by the professionals in the department. Sadly, the views of professionals did not receive the desired attention in an atmosphere of emerging political requirements.

The disconcerting part of such politically motivated appointments is that it cripples the training scenario and makes a mess of the career planning. Ad-hoc short-term measures are introduced which in the end produce half-baked and ill-trained officials. It is in this

functions. Constable trainees are often accommodated in barracks whose physical conditions are as good as those specified for the inmates of a prison. The budgets of the training schools are meagre and financial powers of institutional heads are extremely limited. These institutions can not find officers who are willing to join the instructional staff and their teaching equipment and other facilities are outmoded.

In recent times, law and order duties have tended to form the major part of police work. In such a scenario the harassed police officials who are hard pressed for time and are perennially short of men, use up their district pools as well as their training reserves and as such are unwilling to spare their men for training except for the shortest of

courses. There have been occasions when the trainees were pulled out of training institutions to meet the demands of law and order situations. In such an atmosphere training has become a ritual where new recruits are put through a programme which is often shortened and wherein unwilling and ill-equipped instructors perform the necessary rites of drilling and lecturing.

The training programmes suffer because the posting of officers to training institutions are not a part of any career plan. A stint for two to three years at a training institution is neither an essential nor a desirable qualification for promotion. The special allowances given to instructors are marginal and the officers avoid posting to training establishments because it takes them away from their main line of duty and reduces their visibility in the eyes of senior officers and political masters.

The development of an awareness of the social and political climate in which the policemen has to work does not find much place in the police training programmes and the inculcation of the

Our ancestors believed in it and they prayed in quiet patience. They believed it could come only if they earned it, only if they lived their lives according to scriptures in tolerance, kindness, purity, honesty, and righteousness. They grew beards when they grew old, some of them wore caps, observed ablation, watched that the outer garments in the lower portion of the body always stayed above their ankles. It was part of natural transformation, people growing old felt nearer to death and closer to God, getting ready to give up on this life to embrace the life

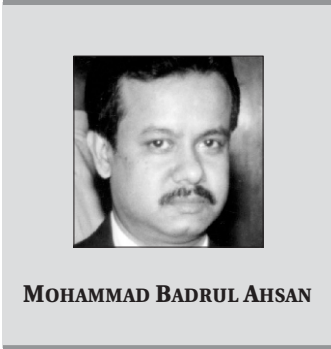
fast, that they are skipping the stages of life when love not hatred should sway their hearts, when passion for life, not death should rule their minds?

In his article *God and Mammon: Does Poverty Cause Militant Islam?*, which appeared in the US think tank journal *National Interest*, Daniel Pipes investigated why the Muslim minds turned to militant Islam. He denied that socio-economic distress alone drove Muslims to their extremist path. Poverty didn't do it because militant Islam took off in the 1970s, just about the time oil-exporting Muslim states

tancy in Islam. People tend to become more engaged ideologically and active politically after they reach a fairly high standard of living. Most of the times, revolutions took place when the middle class swelled in their ranks. It is an irony that when Pipes wrote this article in 2002, one of his conclusions was that Bangladesh was the living proof amongst a few other countries that poverty couldn't generate militant Islam.

What went wrong in three years that turned our image upside down? If you visit a website called Wikipedia, there is

Militant Islam



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IT seems if you dig a hole anywhere in Bangladesh, some Islamic militant is likely to pop out. At least that is how it looks since the government started rounding up the militants after they staged a showdown by exploding some five hundred bombs across the country. Until then the government behaved like a stick in the mud. It refused to admit that Islamic militants lived in Bangladesh.

Now the government finds militants all over the place, arresting them as fruitiously as a fisherman catches fish with every draw of the net. They are found everywhere -- madrasahs, mosques, hotels, schools, colleges, universities, offices, cantonments, shoals, backwaters, woods, and forests. The demographic profile of these militants is also equally pervasive. From boys in the ninth grade to bearded men in their sunset age, the passion runs high to push religion to its logical end.

So, how has it happened? How has it come so far that devout men have hardened so much as to kill for faith? We have been a God-fearing country

faith to win favour in franchise. What we see now is Frankenstein confronting its maker. The faithful is asking for their fair share of the game. They want to run the government.

We are talking about two different worlds here. In one world sober and secular people live, where anyone who kills should go to jail. In the other world we have got the fanatics, people of extreme devotion, who believe that anyone who kills should go to heaven. We as a nation have been always pre-occupied with the notion of heaven, our lives sharpened to the point of denying this life to conquer the next, our pleasures postponed for the bliss and ecstasy of the world to come.

awaiting them on the other side of the grave.

What if that transformation comes to a teenager, one who wants to renounce the world before he is old enough to understand it? And what about the older men who teach it to him, who encourage him to kill and die in the name of God, shed the blood of innocent men, disturb the peace of his own society and raise hell on earth in the name of heaven? There is a disease called Progeria Syndrome when a child begins to look like an elderly person. When a schoolboy carries the bomb, when he hurls it in the sublimated rage of his deranged mentor, does it tell us that our young minds are growing old

started enjoying extraordinary growth rates. He cited the example of Iran, where per capita income plummeted by nearly 90 per cent since 1980, causing alienation from Islam.

Instead affluent societies became the breeding grounds of militant Islam. In Kuwait Islamists control the parliament. The militant Islamic groups are more popular in the West Bank, which is more prosperous than Gaza. Militant Islam flourished in the member states of the European Union and in North America, where Muslims as a group enjoy a standard of living higher than the national averages.

Hence, Daniel Pipes inferred that perhaps wealth was the cause of mili-

There is also the bandwagon effect, opportunistic people getting a free-ride on the train of social transformation. There are those who are doing it for themselves, trying to get on to the elevator of power by adopting a counter-elitist path. Like every revolution, militant Islam will eventually devour its own children. That is how it goes, starting with a bang and ending with a whimper. There will be a time when this madness also shall pass.

reference to how Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh rose in power exploiting the sentiments of people who resented the rampant corruption of the Awami League government. There are others who will blame BNP for sheltering Islamists under its fold and looking the other way when the militants were getting organised.

But that doesn't explain why the militants were getting organised in the first place. Many of these militants are educated, young, coming from small towns or rural background. Many of them are perhaps bright students, high achievers, people who want to go places in life. Why would they embark on the deadly course of death and violence?

OPINION

Four years of achievements and failures

ABMS ZAHUR

IT is not unusual to hear false and shameless propaganda from the military dictators' regimes because they do not rely on the people but on some chosen groups. They can be shameless because such is their capturing of power. They start their regimes with cock and bull stories to justify their coups. In Pakistan Gen. Ayub did it in 1958. Later on we hear similar stories from Pervez Musharraf regime. In Bangladesh things are not dissimilar either, though unfortunately. Too much of our association with military regimes (1958-71 and 1975-90) has made even our democratic regimes, perhaps, oblivious about their responsibility toward people. We fought for independence not for establishing some dynasty, our people did not sacrifice for establishing any authoritarian democratic regime. Our freedom fighters never desired to divide our people into various sects or communities. It is regrettable what we could attain after 1971 is not truly democratic rule or secularism. Now we are

made too many commitments in the election of 2001 to capture votes. Many of its commitments could not be fulfilled either because of its wrong assessment of its capability or bureaucracy's capability or sheer lack of sincerity or both. So long as the government fails to show some appreciable success in curbing corruption in administration, in improving law and order (extra judicial killing is no success) sheer propaganda not backed by factual strength can never be effective. Let the alliance government not follow the example of Gen Ayub's decade of development (1958-68) which compelled the powerful dictator like Ayub to abdicate. It is a fact that too many failures in a tenure of a party in power may cause it to suffer a long negative effect. If they realise that mere drum beating cannot bring them good result it would be helpful for them and the people of Bangladesh.

was established through war of independence and run by a bureaucracy which is more than 150-year-old to assist a democratically elected government, but cannot perform even minimum functions of the state properly and effectively because of poor governance by politicians who however loudly proclaim about success.

For an independent land it is indeed regrettable that allegedly anti-liberation, anti-democratic forces are having best of their time. The heavily politicised corrupt, inefficient, demoralised and bankrupt administration is no match for highly organised Islamist militants who reportedly are regularly receiving various support from some Islamic countries.

The present situation appears to be worse than 1971 in some respects. In 1971 we were fighting against our exploiters. Now we are fighting against a force which may drag us a few centuries back. The conscious citizens of Bangladesh will have to decide as to whether they are ready to sacrifice to save their future generation from the vicious bite of the so-called

fundamentalists. In India Advani's all out support to Narendra Modi despite his massacre of Muslims in Gujarat is regarded as the only reason for the loss of power by NDA led by BJP. In fact it was the RSS which resulted in the weakening of BJP.

The people of India, because of their better political perception, better leadership and much longer democratic tradition gave their verdict against fundamentalists. The situation is not similar in Bangladesh because of lower political perception, lower literacy and much shorter duration of democratic tradition as well as lack of proper political leadership. Our moderate Muslim population must realise that vast majority of our rural mass are not only poor they are also highly illiterate and as such they want to surrender everything to the will of the Almighty. They actually think that madrasa educated people can help them in improving their lot because God may be nearer to them (mullahs). They believe that all their sufferings may end if the administration can be run on Islamic line.

Because of their illiteracy they fail to understand that wealth cannot come from heaven, it must be earned.

In the election campaign of Awami League in late 1960s, it is alleged that it was stated that rice would be available @ Tk 20/maund if independence could be attained. In reality (naturally enough) we saw a totally different picture after liberation. Thus people's faith in politicians started diminishing. In the present situation the common people of Bangladesh must be made aware about the happenings in Afghanistan during Taleban regime. They must know as to how women were treated there, what was the state of economy, how non-Talebans were seen by the government, how the cultural life was systematically and gradually destroyed to drag Afghanistan a few centuries back. Without visual illustration it may be difficult to convince the illiterate and gullible villagers about the heinous activities of the militants. This can only be done by the government. But can it be done by this alliance government?

Without women's adequate participation in all developmental activities no real progress is possible. It is well-known that our NGOs are doing excellent job through helping the poor rural women to improve their financial and social positions in the society. Thus BNP-led government should extend unhesitating support to the NGOs for the benefit of the nation. Attacks on NGOs such as Proshika or Aarong etc. must be stopped for improving its image. It is time for BNP to realise that as the largest party it must not be afraid of losing support of Jamaat-e-Islami when the question of its ideology comes. With nearing of national election it would be desirable to show their ability to face the serious problems like corruption, law and order, freeing administration from politicisation, handling the problems of judiciary. Simply finding faults with Awami League or claiming false successes will certainly not improve the image of BNP.

During the last four years we see some minor successes of this government like reducing air pollution on the streets of

Dhaka, control of adulteration of food, reducing copying in examination halls by the students, increasing remittances by expatriate Bangladesh wage earners. In completing the projects like some important bridges, or some flyovers etc it cannot claim sole credit. Even new projects of ministry of communication appear to be too ambitious and as such do not appear to have any possibility of their start during the remaining tenure of this government. Law minister has clearly stated about no possibility of separation of judiciary from the executive. We are not sure about the start of operation of ACC. The less said about energy sector's performance the better. The justification of having a ministry of foreign affairs is becoming increasingly weaker. Except an attempt to reduce adulteration in food items ministry of industries cannot claim much credit. In regard to ministry/commerce we do not see anything as such praiseworthy. If any credit is to be given for spectacular growth of export against various odds it should go to the private sector.

The crux of the matter is that BNP

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