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Empowering the poor



Full marks to the caretaker government of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed. Never before, except probably during the days of our fight for freedom in 1971, we the poor felt so empowered. Corrupt politicians and their cronies have been mercilessly looting our national resources for too long. In doing so they became indecently rich and kept millions of our hard working poor from gaining any ground economically. They have been committing crimes in broad daylight with the support of our top leaders. The same morally bankrupt top political leaders are now crying foul in the name of democracy and demanding immediate election. Why are they in such a hurry? For what? Did they become leaders by any democratic process or do they practise any democratic principles in running their party or the nation? It seems pretty obvious that they cannot wait to be in power and start looting our national resources once again. That is their only aim. The people, especially

those with no connection to the corrupt politicians, are supporting the present caretaker government wholeheartedly.

We the people feel that the caretaker government has shown by its actions that it is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. This government will have full support of the majority of the citizens as long as it continues to work for the people. These undemocratic top leaders should know that we the people are absolutely fed up with their corrupt politics. We will not be fooled again. This time, the people will not excuse them if they keep on pressurizing our long wished for government to achieve their sinister goals.

There should not be any national election until the caretaker government is able to completely wipe out all the cancerous roots of our rotten politics.

Dr. Mohammed S. Islam
Folsom, California, USA

Conserving electricity

With the summer round the corner, and putting more power plants on line years hence, our quality of life is bound to deteriorate. The only pragmatic and easy option is to go for load-shedding, a harsh and unavoidable measure. That too unfortunately is not being uniformly done as seen by me in my neighbourhood. Like all rationing scheme, it is flawed and favouring some while depriving others! Even in the much touted democracy that we swear by; some are more equal than others! However, there are also other options for load reduction which should be tried!

These in order of priorities are:

A: Ban illumination of all advertising hoardings, billboards and all signboards from 6:00pm till midnight. Also stop power supplies to all cinema halls; except those who generate own power. This measure can be adopted today. Estimated power savings could be around 100MW during the evening maximum demand period; and it will cost the government nothing!

B: Replace all filament light bulbs by compact fluorescent lamps free of charge (by the government). Assuming we change one million light bulbs, it will cost the country a maximum of Tk 10 crore, and power reduction will be at least around 200MW!

Is it not a cheap option to add 100MW for Tk 10 crore? The time required will be maximum six months in an emergency measure to do it. Further, to subsequently encourage CFL use, decrease its import duty (make it NIL). Add extra duties on filament bulbs, and give incentive for its export. This was done in South Africa a few years ago!

C: Connect all captive power plants in industries, commercial buildings and finally residences. This will take time; maybe two to

three years in a crash programme; and the cost involved in protective switchgear and connecting cable may well be around 50 to 70 crore taka; but it will add at least over 400MW power to the national grid. The generating sets are already there; all we need is couple it to the grid. The government can buy this power from the owners of these generating sets at a fair price; based on fuel used, age and size of these Gen-Sets. This was done in California and some other states in the US some years back!

D: Identify all energy efficient electrical appliances, and encourage their use by giving import duty cuts, as against heavy surcharges for similar appliances that consume more power. This is practised in all electrical appliance purchases by the US government! Why can't we practise it and save power? It can reduce power demand by at least 50MW every year (250MW in 5 years= one power station at no cost!) Just for example, in the US every night they consume over 100MW for charging all cell phones which are usually charged at night during maximum demand period! The same scenario is true for Bangladesh; though the charging load today could be only 5MW!

All these are tried and tested ways of power savings. I am not reinventing the wheel. Advanced countries adopt these measures not only to save power; but to decrease atmospheric pollution from thermal power generation.

The question is when will we wake up?
S.A. Mansoor
Technical Adviser, Spectra Group, Dhaka



Price hike of essential commodities

I believe that the reason behind the current "price hike" of essential commodities should be understood first, and only then the government should take the necessary measures to bring down the prices of these commodities.

We should not forget that it is the law of Demand & Supply which plays a vital role in a free market economy. If any factor creates blockage in the supply process of any commodity it may increase the price of that commodity in the market. So we must consider and investigate properly the market forces that play a vital role in the matter, before we blame the business people.

It is good for us to know that presently our country is almost self-sufficient in rice production and only a very small quantity is imported by private importers whenever the market demands. We do not have to depend on the outdated food department's rationing system any more. The food department probably keeps a small buffer stock of rice only to cope with any unexpected crisis.

Every year it can be observed that the price of rice in the market goes up to a certain extent when the country's overall stock goes down i.e. usually just before the next crop comes to the market. This is a natural phenomenon and there is no point in making a hue & cry about it because price shall naturally fall as the new crop enters the market. There is one step that the food department can take in order to control this natural price hike (to a certain extent only): it can sell some of the reserve stock through "Open Market Sale" (OMS) scheme in places where prices shoot up abnormally.

I would like to mention here that every businessman's target is to make profit, it will not be wise to expect that they will sell any product without making any profit and only serve the people's interest.

Here the government's task is to adopt proper policies and ensure healthy competition so that no monopoly exists in the market. The government should always keep statistics regarding total requirements of all essential items and continuously monitor whether the local stock and possible imported stocks (quantity for which L/C is made) meet the country's requirements. During any crisis, allow local trucks to carry the maximum quantity. In any ferry crossing, give priority to the movements of those trucks which are carrying food items.

Allow import of essential items without imposing any restrictions.
Engr. Mahbub
Australia

Ensure supply of

unadulterated foods

The cleansing drive by the present caretaker government has revealed the dreadful fact that we as a nation have been plagued by a sea of corruption committed by almost all the responsible people in society. We all know how corruption has just enveloped our national life from all directions.

We are indeed happy and thus would like to draw the notice of the present government to the fact that they should ensure a supply of unadulterated baby foods for our newcomers. Milk powder, medicines and other infant foods must be pure and harmless.

The CTG would do well if they launch yet another all-out drive in

Rafiqu Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Those luxury vehicles

So, we have a problem on hand. What to do with those confiscated gas guzzling luxury vehicles? Nobody will or should buy them. They are too expensive to operate and as a nation we can not afford them. Vehicles in Bangladesh are for transportation and nobody should be allowed to fulfill the sick desire of impressing others with illegally gotten things.

We can auction them off to the foreign commercial or diplomatic entities if they want to buy them. If that does not work then we can sell those to specialized taxi fleets. If somebody wants to rent a Hummer and burn some cash and petrol (that is the sad part) then let them do that.

I think those would be very popular in weddings. Those prospective grandparents can tell the story of their ride in a Hummer to their grandchildren.

I have also a suggestion for the licence plate number: It was X's. X here means the current owner. It should make those current owners very happy. After all, that is what they wanted: crude publicity for their new found prosperity.

Anwarul Islam
Michigan, USA

To the chief adviser..

You are really worthy of appreciation for having taken drastic steps against corruption. Your government has already asked for a wealth statement from the political top brass which should also be appreciated.

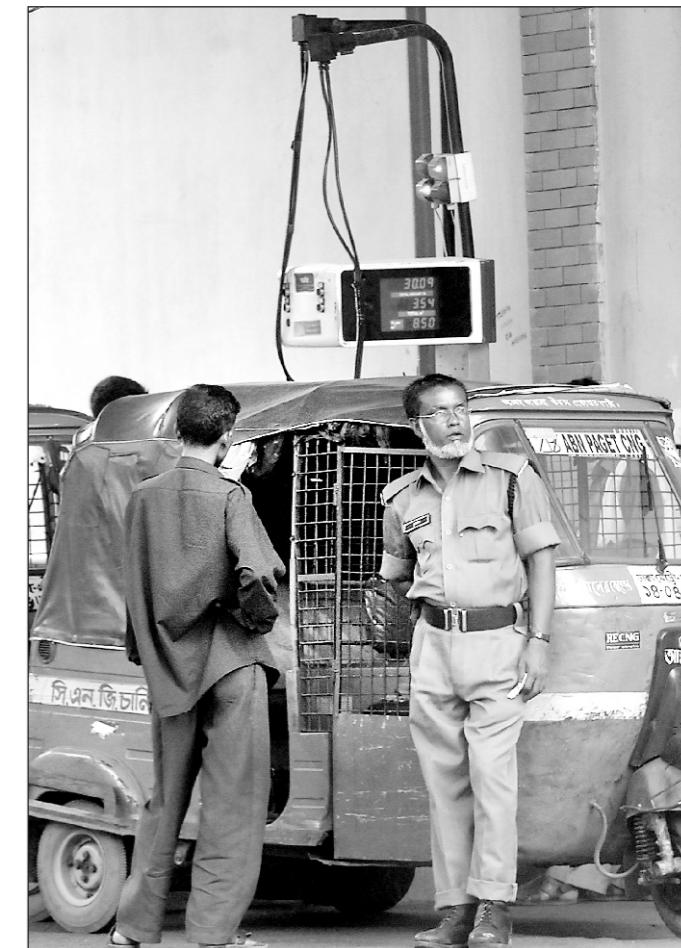
But what surprises me is that some known corrupt people are still out of the list!

Md Gias Uddin Chowdhury
Ghandaon R/A, Ctg.

Drop those sentences

In spite of his poverty he is honest. He is poor but honest. Though he is

Qamruddin Chowdhury
On e-mail



CNG stations

CNG stations

Thank you for your special report on the subject in your daily on 10 March 2007. I hope the authorities will initiate appropriate action in the greater interest of the state. I would now like to add a few points to the subject and request you to kindly urge the authorities to resolve the prevalent CNG refueling crisis. You are aware that due to exercise of undue control by the government, refueling stations are far too less compared to the number of CNG run vehicles. Moreover, due to high price of petrol and environment friendliness of clean fuel (CNG) there has been massive conversion of automobiles including commercial ones. As a result, at any point of time long queues in CNG stations consume precious time in both Dhaka and Chittagong.

Now that we have seen what democracy is all about, do we need a repetition of it? We should consider and think outside the box and I propose that Bangladesh devise a system of 'selection' instead of 'election' to run the government. Now Bangladesh is being praised due to the 'selected' caretaker government. Even if we had a consensus government of all politicians, Bangladesh would never prosper as all politicians are bent upon looting, nepotism etc.

It can be seen that in each and every area of life we 'select' the best person on hand. That is, finding the Right Man for the Right Job. Management (or governance) starts from here. From the clerk to the chief justice, from the soldier to the chief of army, from the peon to the MD, everywhere we 'select', not 'elect'. Even the sports captain is 'selected', not 'elected'.

Just as the caretaker government Advisors and Chief Advisor were selected, and the country is in total peace with the help of our armed forces, we should continue with this system of governance for at least 30 years, i.e., to give us peace at least equal to our sufferings in the last 30 years of political turmoil.

We should invite and 'SELECT' Dr. Yunus to help this country with his dynamism, vision and experience. He has a proven track record of accomplishment and integrity, and may kindly volunteer to help this nation.

Kashed Chowdhury, On e-mail

Restructuring PSC

PSC is the abbreviation of Public Service Commission (PSC) but over the last few years it has stood for 'permanent sources of corruption' (PSC). The apex body of selecting eligible and most suitable candidates for recruitment to different posts plunged into rampant corruption. Now time has changed with the present caretaker government taking over. Restructuring the PSC should be high on the government's agenda. This apex body is responsible for selecting the qualified people who will help run the country but with the passage of time most unqualified people, in many cases, have been recruited, thanks to bribe, nepotism and political affiliation. When the question papers of BCS preliminary test is sold openly in Dhaka University, then we can easily understand to what extent this institution's acceptability and transparency have gone down.

Actually, political influence has paralysed the PSC. Instead of studying books thousands of candidates remain busy collecting BCS question papers from different sources with the hope that they would be able to manage a good job. Without condemning a single official I would like to say that the whole PSC should be restructured for better recruitment of qualified people.

As a university student, I would like to request the caretaker government to take effective measures in this regard.

Bazlur Rahman
MBA, Dhaka University

We all appreciate the pre-election reforms and remarkable achievements of the caretaker government in a short time. We want the campaign against corruption to move forward. We appreciate the bold decisions. We all know what happened in the 27th BCS. The PSC syndicate along with the four party alliance made sure that nobody was going to be selected solely on merit. Reports on recruitment anomalies were published in most of the dailies.

Now I find this habit of blinking, when there's no reason for that, a very un-gentlemanly and impolite act. I've seen people, especially the elite of Dhaka who speak a foreign language at social gatherings trying to prove themselves a better breed, are the most arrogant blinks on the streets.

Please ensure that people abide by those regulations. There are a million regulations to implement; so, you better start right now!

Ekram Kabir
Gulshan, Dhaka

A. H. M. Rezaul Karim

Lecturer
Department of CSE
BRAC University

Combat corruption

I appreciate the initiatives taken by the government to combat corruption at all levels of society. I am excited and inspired to hear from the ACC Chairman about his commitment on behalf of his team. He rightly said it is a teamwork of honest and competent people of the society to uproot corruption. He is going to convert this spirit of the government into a social movement.

The war must be continued until the situation is reversed. The war must be sustained otherwise a more powerful nexus of evils will emerge.

Recently, I visited some rural areas to see how our brothers and sisters are experiencing this changing environment. I found wide spread skepticism, skepticism on sustainability of this social war. I am inspired by the commitment that the ACC Chairman showed during the last meeting with the journalists to combat corruption.

I truly believe it is time to take actions than to talk for me--actions based on my creativity, competence and honesty; I foresee a new future of our country for which we laid down our lives during the war of liberation. The prevailing skepticism is already in the process of melting down begetting people's confidence in the sustainability of the long desired anti-crime drive.

Muklesur Rahman
Dhanmonji, Dhaka

Anomalies in education

There are several private universities in the country. Many of them are selling degrees for money.

When I went to them for admission, they offered me, "If you have problem with class attendance or class exams, no problem, we(the university) will manage it if you pay all the tuition fees at a time."

Please do something to eliminate this type of irregularities and anomalies in the education sector.

Al Ameen
On e-mail



TV channels

TV channels have a negative influence on our society as a whole, especially Indian TV channels like Star Plus, Sony, Zee TV, MTV, V-TV etc. They provide crude and meaningless entertainment.

I am not writing this from any anti-Indian feelings; I am trying to make a point about our unconcerned attitude. We say we are so much in love with our language, culture and heritage, we are so proud of our war of independence, but have we materialized the martyrs' dreams?

We can have a bilateral agreement with India that if we show 10 Indian channels, they also have to open their sky to 10 Bangladeshi channels.

Md. Fazle Rabbi Hasan
Senior Programmer,
Finance Department, ICDDR,B

Stop honking and blinking!

I would like to thank the Dhaka metropolitan police authorities for banning honking in certain roads in the capital. I must say this is a great initiative by the law enforcers. I would also like to see they do the same for many other roads. Honking on Dhaka streets has reached such a level that when you go out of your residence, everything seems so bizarre. It's entirely a paranormal situation.

However, I must say that people behind the wheels are not listening to the ban. They are continuing with their obnoxious practice of unruly driving. The tendency for honking, to my mind, actually comes from the lack of discipline and patience on the roads. First, we are not disciplined; we don't want to stay in the lane that I was originally driving my car in. Then, even after knowing that there's no way to go, we keep on

honking as if to scare away the driver who is in front of me.

This has to stop. Only putting a ban on honking may not solve the problem. There's no one watching whether the drivers are really following the instruction. A programme on traffic education would have to be introduced for the drivers and would-be drivers. I've seen textbooks at schools in other countries containing intense lessons on traffic education. Whether one agrees or not, this leaves a life-long impact on the minds of the children who'd grow up and be future assets.

Why don't we start with textbooks for many of our wrongs? Or do we have to keep our murky politics in mind for doing that? Do we have to decide who - Bangabandhu or Ziaur Rahman actually thought of a good traffic system in Bangladesh?

There's another point I would like to make: "blinking" from the back. During nights, most cars on Dhaka streets ply with high-beam lights.

Please ensure that people abide by those regulations. There are a million regulations to implement; so, you better start right now!

Ekram Kabir
Gulshan, Dhaka

A. H. M. Rezaul Karim