

Victory of training, commitment and passion

Time to keep a cool head

IN all fairness, the magnificent cricketing prowess that Bangladesh showed in a crucial World Cup match with once world champions India at Queen's Park Oval may not be termed as an 'upset' victory in the normal sense. For, it was a comprehensive, convincing and thoroughly well deserved win by a highly competent and agile Bangladesh team against a strongly contending Indian side.

Young Bangladesh side with the most successful trio -- Tamim, Sakib and Musfiqu -- being as young as 17, 18 and 19 dominated and outplayed India in all departments of the game: bowling, fielding and batting. They showed the sign of enjoying the game as they fielded with a spring in their feet and a rare application that was widely acclaimed. The successful bowling attack spearheaded by Mashrafe, Rafique and Razzaq saw the giant Indian wickets tumble at regular intervals barring that of Yuvraj and Ganguly who stayed in the middle for sometime as a spot of bother and kept the Indian total contained at a getable 191.

On our batting side Tamim Iqbal's swashbuckling 51, Sakib's 53 and Mushfique's 56 were a tale of concentration, consistency and a robust sense of responsibility. We were three down at 69 when the youngsters played a sheet anchor role.

The self-belief and the classy aspect of their performance developed not in a day or two but through a consistent series of victories in the warm up matches against Bermuda, Canada, and more important, New Zealand, who had whitewashed world champions Australia. This was a far cry from a cramped Bangladeshi side.

This is a grand beginning we have marked in world cup cricket. Let it not get into our head; rather we draw an inspiration from it to play into the super-eight and the rest of the ivy league stages with cool head, right stratagem and determined application. The compact team of a fighting unit that Dav Whatmore has turned the Bangladesh side into should make winning into a habit and give the nation more of such mind-lifting victories.

Land recovery drive

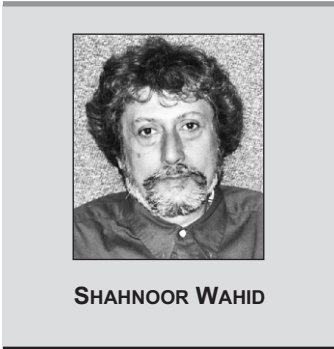
Punish the grabbers

IT would undoubtedly lift the morale of the people to learn that as much as 12,195 acres of land worth Tk. 2, 554 crore have been recovered from illegal occupiers from 64 districts. This is the result of the drive undertaken by the executive committee for recovering grabbed land under the ministry of land in recent months. Out of this, 6,000 acres have been recovered only in one month. By comparison, same amount of land (6,000 acres) had been recovered by the ministry in last two years, which clearly spells out the amount of corruption and lack of motivation that existed among the officials during the tenure of the previous administrations.

The nation witnessed rampant looting of valuable public property by vested quarters in last ten years, that included khas land, riverbanks, water bodies, lakes, forests, canals and railway land. It is common knowledge that grabbing of public property almost assumed the character of a sinister pastime in Bangladesh where the people's representatives were the key players. They went about doing the crime by misusing their power and showing disregard for the laws of the land while in office. These people have to be brought before the court of law and given exemplary punishment. And the officials who colluded with them must be brought to justice. We, at the same time, feel that the different ministries should take steps to recover and conserve their own landed property without looking up to the government.

While we shall urge the government to continue the good work, we would at the same time request the relevant authorities to find ways to distribute the recovered land among the landless poor in a bid to rehabilitate them in society. We believe that if the remaining 20 lakh acres of land is recovered from the illegal occupiers and given away to the landless they will be able to make a reasonably good living out of it. Such a step would be welcome by the people in general and this would help attain the poverty alleviation goals of the country.

Of vices and vice chancellors



SHAHNOOR WAHID

STRANGE things bordering on the insane that take us by surprise keep happening in this country. We discover two crore taka cars abandoned on the streets and we find one crore taka villas in the remote villages towering above thatched houses of the poverty-stricken people. These hurt us to some extent. But what hurts us deep? Obviously when teachers get derailed and indulge in corruption of the most despicable nature.

Teachers, whether at primary school or university level, are held in high esteem by the people since the profession has long been considered a noble one in every society. People send their children to schools, colleges and universities having the full trust in the credibility of the institutes

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

Our pain only doubled when we read the stories of corruption of some vice chancellors of universities of the country. We have a read a series of investigative stories of corruption of a number of vice chancellors in the Bengali daily Prothom Alo and concluded how the process of degeneration has taken a firm root in our education sector. What is left of it? How could these once respected personalities stoop so low and bring such shame to the profession?

and in the moral standing of the teachers there. Pupils spend long hours with teachers in such institutes and get to learn important things from them, including lessons in values and ethics.

Teachers act as friend, philosopher and guide of the pupils and as a result they look up to them as role models and try to emulate them in later life. Famous English critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) said: "Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know; it means teaching them to behave as they do not behave." And George Bernard Shaw said: "I am not a teacher; only a fellow traveler of whom you asked the way. I pointed ahead -- ahead of myself as well as of you."

These two quotations clearly define the role of a teacher. Therefore, when we hold teach-

ers in such lofty esteem it is only natural that we would be immensely hurt and disturbed to hear stories about their misdemeanour. But, unfortunately, some incredulous stories of misdemeanour and corruption that included nepotism, misuse of power and financial misappropriation have been hitting the headlines in the past few weeks to cause much pain in our minds.

And our pain only doubled when we read the stories of corruption of some vice chancellors of universities of the country. We have a read a series of investigative stories of corruption of a number of vice chancellors in the Bengali daily Prothom Alo and concluded how the process of degeneration has taken a firm root in our education sector. What is left of it? How could these once respected personali-

ties stoop so low and bring such shame to the profession?

Very recently the vice chancellor of the Open University has been removed after tangible evidence of corruption was brought against him. He has left behind a trail of tales of corruption that would take years to wipe off. Allegations of irregularities range from useless appointments, drawing huge amounts against cell phone bills and entertainment bills etc have been brought against the gentleman.

While talking about Open University, we recall the stories of blatant misuse of power and other irregularities of the previous vice chancellor, who was later murdered by some assailants in his residence on Dhaka University campus. Why did these respected gentlemen behave the way they did? Why

Our private universities

The skeletal act does not even contain provisions on jurisdiction, powers and functions of the main executive body of the university i.e. the syndicate, and the managing or trustee board. The composition of other bodies, and their relation with the executive body, are not clearly defined. Most of the vice-chancellors are presently acting vice-chancellors, and their legal position and independence vis-à-vis the founders of the universities are not very clear.

M SHAH ALAM

I had written an article earlier on our public universities, which was published in the Daily Star on February 23. Then I felt encouraged, and obliged to write a similar article on our private universities.

I mentioned in the last write-up that one of the reasons for the mushrooming of private universities in the country was not only the incapability of the public universities to develop and expand, but also their further deterioration. In fact, if we talk in terms of providing quality higher education, which must be the focus of any discussion on universities, the number of problems in private universities is higher than that of public universities.

Although I do not possess the exact data, I have sufficient reason to believe that the number of students now studying in the 54 private universities has already exceeded the number of students studying in the five major public universities at Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Jahanگیر Nagar and Kushtia. The main reason for the rapid growth of private universities is the incapacity of the existing public universities to absorb all those who are capable of studying at

university level.

Deterioration of conditions in the public universities has added an extra dimension to it. The quality of education at the higher seats of learning, both public and private, has immense long-term consequences for the nation. We have so far failed to accord sufficient attention to these institutions.

We are already making our expectations and agenda lie heavy on the caretaker government. But we believe that if the government cares to focus its attention on the public universities, which it should, it should also turn its attention towards the private universities.

Although the categories of students studying in the private universities differ in background and merit from those in the public universities, their interests ought to be duly protected by proper national regulation.

The problems of private universities are different in nature from those of the public universities. While recognizing the need and inevitability of the growth of private universities, it must be appreciated that they need more public (govt.) regulation to uphold quality and serve public (national) purpose.

If improper use of autonomy, teachers' and students' politics,

and lack of accountability have been identified as some of the cardinal problems in the public universities, private arbitrariness, profiteering, institutional and organic weaknesses, absence of rules based programs and actions, and liberal admission and evaluation of the students are the main concerns in the private universities.

The non-profit character of the private universities ought to be the fundamental principle of their functioning. Private universities around the world run on a non-profit principle. The resources and funds with which private universities start their activities, and the resources which are generated from students' fees, must be invested and reinvested for their own development and expansion. This basic requirement is not being followed in most of our private universities, nor there is any specific provision regarding this in the Private Universities Act, 1992.

Profit hunting by the private universities is grossly reflected in liberal admission requirements. In most cases, there is virtually no limit to admission. This is capitalizing on the large number of admission seekers who did not have the luck to get admission in public universities.

The fees are very high, but a sizable middle-class is prepared

to pay it to buy admission. Lower fees and a reasonably limited number of seats would have made the admission test more competitive, and made room for more deserving candidates.

Often, the private universities lure students for admission without creating the necessary infrastructure and facilities for imparting higher education worth the name. Even with good infrastructure and facilities, universities ought not to allow reckless admission.

There is an example where more than 15,000 students have been admitted in less than five years. There is also an instance of admission of more than 1,500 students, in three years, to a single department, which had no full-time professor or associate professor in its faculty rolls.

The mad rush for cash blinds the founders of the private universities to the need for a rational limit to admission. When the facilities and teaching capability fail to cope with the demands of the students they look for alternatives, including appointment of teachers from outside, especially from public universities, on part-time basis. This causes extra stress and strain on public universities, negatively impacting on the quality of education there.

In principle, there is nothing wrong in a public university teacher doing a part-time job in a private university, and earning extra income as well as making his professional knowledge available to the students of private universities.

But it seems that there are no specific norms and limits for the public universities to permit their faculty to teach outside, or of the

couldn't they resist the temptations, which as teachers they should have been able to do?

Then we have read the tales of corruption of the vice chancellor of Moulana Bhasani Science and Technology University. The charges were so strong and evidential that the VC submitted his resignation before being sacked. Then there were the stories of corruption of vice chancellors of Noakhali University and Agricultural University and so on. It has been reported in the said Bengali daily that proper action against these gentlemen would be taken by the university Grants Commission (UGC) in due course of time.

Some of our most revered national teachers like Prof. Serajul Islam Chowdhury, Prof. Mozaffar Ahmed and Prof. Anisuzzaman are in favour of changing the system under which vice chancellors are being selected. Prof. Serajul Islam commented that he felt ashamed to learn about the level of corruption of the reported vice chancellors. He hardly could comprehend the facts.

The fact that the previous 4-party alliance government gave appointment to a number of vice chancellors on the basis of their party affiliation came out openly

in some recent investigation. Most of these people were incompetent and dishonest to the core. They began a looting spree and a shameful business of appointment in complicity with other party cadres.

According to Prof. Mozaffar Ahmed, there are many academically competent and honest teachers who could become vice chancellors but they are never considered from partisan point of view. He believes the vice chancellors who have been already identified as corrupt persons through investigation must be tried in a court of law and given punishment.

So, that was the tale of some teachers who miserably failed to live upto our expectations. They have lowered the image of the teaching profession and lowered their self-esteem before the nation. We hope others will take lesson from this sordid tale and join the noble profession only if she or he is convinced that they would be able to fulfill the criteria.

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

Erratic market behaviour



ANM NURUL HAQUE

THE galloping prices of all essential commodities have plagued the common people for quite some time now. Though the trend of price hike caught on around five years ago, it has now started a fresh upward movement which is too unpredictable and surpasses acceptable limits.

The prices of foodstuff including rice, wheat, edible oil, onion, lentil, sugar and baby-food have registered another round of steep increase in the recent days, and are now selling at exorbitant prices.

According to the Directorate of Agricultural Marketing, the price of rice increased by 4.44 percent, while the price of onions shot up

BY THE NUMBERS

The majority of the people in the country have already become crippled with the persistent pressure of price spiral during the rule of the BNP-led alliance. The matter was made more disgraceful when Begum Khaleda Zia, the immediate-past prime minister, said that the price hike was not affecting people as the rise in purchasing power helped them absorb the increase in prices of essentials.

by 38.89 percent in the capital over the week. A report of the TCB, on March 7, said that the prices of common variety of rice increased by 12.50 percent, potato by 22.73 percent and edible oil by 7.72 percent over the last month. Such a soaring price situation has been a nightmarish experience for most of the city dwellers.

The commerce ministry, which is mainly responsible for maintenance of prices, did virtually nothing to control the market during the tenure of the immediate-past government. There were two changes of commerce ministers, reportedly for their failure to exercise enough influence in the market to halt the rise in prices.

The third commerce minister, who roared against the profiteering syndicates immediately after taking over, finally said that he had no responsibility to control prices. The profiteers, thus, received indirect encouragement, and another round of price hike followed.

The recent unbridled rise in prices is attributed to some factors. Shortages of essentials in the market were caused by jitters owing to the crackdown, by businessmen who refused to import the essentials, leaving the entire supply chain disrupted.

Such things are bound to happen in an import-led market where dishonest businessmen still get their way. The amount of LCs opened in February was \$ 1143.13 million, as against \$

1572.63 million in December and \$ 1163.75 million in January. February's figure was also lower than the corresponding month in 2006, when it was \$ 1329.11 million.

In a major move to reduce prices of foodstuff, the caretaker government (CTG) has decided to lift import duties on rice and wheat. Banks have been ordered to open LCs on liberal terms.

The CTG has decided to start open-market sale of some essentials, and also ordered the opening of the sealed food godowns across the country as a way of keeping the supply available in the market.

One lakh tons of subsidized rice will be sold in the open-market, while another ton will be

distributed through food-for-work scheme.

Certainly the public exchequer would be deprived considerably due to these measures, as subsidies amounting to some Tk 32 crore will have to be paid to make up for the low price of rice.

The CTG should take utmost care so that the benefit of duty concessions really reaches the consumers. The businessmen usually reap the full benefit of such duty reduction, as bitter experience shows.

The Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB), established in 1972, was tasked with intervening in the market when the prices of essentials rose. But the immediate past government closed down the TCB in March 2002 with a view to leaving business to the private sector, mostly to its coterie.

The TCB, in the past, had played a very vital role in foiling the machinations of the price syndicates and cartels by going into competition with the private sector importers of essentials. The reactivation of TCB is urgently required for a let-up in the price spiral.

The government's steps in the recent past, to vend some widely used commodities through the TCB and BDR personnel, brought positive results in containing the price spiral. Such vending should be restarted soon.

The erratic market behaviour clearly evinces that the syndicates and cartels are still very much active, and are trying to blackmail the CTG. The law adviser has suspected sabotage in the rise in prices.

The saboteurs or cartels, whichever name they are called, control the prices, and the consumers are hostage to their whims. They remain invisible and, indeed, invincible. The immediate past government admitted the existence of such groups, but did not dare to bring them to justice.

It was not the operation of the economic forces, but these intrusive factors, which were responsible for the erratic market behavior. The CTG must play a stronger role in curbing the syndicated price hike.

Sadly, there was no policy for regulating the storage of food-

stuff and other commodities, which led to hoarding. The government has finalized a policy on hoarding, which is likely to come out as an order soon. It is indeed a welcome development.

The majority of the people in the country have already become crippled with the persistent pressure of price spiral during the rule of the BNP-led alliance. The matter was made more disgraceful when Begum Khaleda Zia, the immediate-past prime minister, said that the price hike was not affecting people as the rise in purchasing power helped them absorb the increase in prices of essentials.

But, unlike the immediate past prime minister, the chief adviser of the CTG has given due emphasis to tackling the price issue. There are reasons enough to expect that the prices will now come back to normal.

The price of essentials is a crucial factor that directly affects the lives of the common people. The measures so far taken by the CTG have earned appreciation from the people. It must sustain what it has done so far to correct the erratic market system, and

should not go soft on cartels.

There must be no laxity on the part of the CTG to bring back discipline in the market, as the majority of the people have been groaning under the crushing burden of galloping prices. The CTG must possess effective tools for market intervention, and create a monitoring system that deters syndicates and cartels from market manipulation.

Bangladesh has adopted a free market policy since the 1990s, where the prices are ascertained by market forces and competition. There are misgivings that the government cannot intervene in the free market. In fact, a free market also provides the government much scope to intervene in, and regulate, the market in public interest.

The government is also required to promote the operation of sound market economics so that market mechanisms can be effective.

ANM Nurul Haque is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.