

Let's go for true reform

Let PSC do its best to ensure the deliverance of good service for the benefit of the nation. The latest technology may be used and, if necessary, the services of experts may be commissioned to devise a foolproof system of recruitment procedures. PSC may challenge the editors of leading journals (not the trashes) to a face-to-face discussion. But it must not entertain half-baked greenhorns who are having a field day in the current free-for-all environments.

AHMADUL AMEEN

Let us accept the fact that there were some irregularities in the process of recruitment by the Public Service Commission (PSC). If there are irregularities or wrong doings in an institution then, obviously, the people running the organisation have to bear some responsibility, and for that reason the PSC management deserves to be censured.

But before going into the affairs of PSC, let us review the overall background. Does the recent spate of corruption stories appearing in

the media shock anyone? Probably not. Whether we like it or not, Bangladesh is viewed by many as a cesspool of corruption that catapulted it to its pole position in the league of corrupt nations in the world. And this exalted status is not a fluke. Bangladesh has landed the trophy for five years in a row.

Having lived overseas for a couple of decades, people like us have perhaps developed a tendency to view issues from a slightly different (may be skewed) angle. Consequently, a few impertinent questions arise.

- If Bangladesh is a champion

country in corruption, why should not the heads of the government be questioned? Despite the fact that the press was not muzzled, not many critical articles (except perhaps the esteemed editorials/commentaries of the Daily Star) have been published in the media against the heads of government for many of the debatable decisions, misjudgements and inactions on their part that led to the corruption.

- Even photographs of Gen. Ershad, a proven convict,

appear in the newspapers every now and then. He, whom the leading political parties before the emergency rule were shamelessly pursuing for favours, now smells good.

- It is universally accepted that the police service, customs, income tax and most other departments are suffering from endemic corruption. My question is -- how many IGP's, commissioners of taxes and customs have been censured to date for the corruption in those institutions?
- It is commonly perceived that there is all pervasive corruption in every facet of the government machinery. Allegation of corruption does not even spare the hallowed judiciary and education. In the above context, isn't it dual standards to spare the police department, income tax department, customs etc., while hounding the PSC?

I have a few suggestions on the

issue.

The government

- Let an enquiry commission be formed by the government to investigate if there are glaring omissions and irregularities in the process of recruitment/administration etc. If necessary, ACC may be asked to initiate the enquiry. However, the same may not be warranted unless there are specific allegations.
- In view of the importance of its role, there should be on-going scrutiny of the ACC's (as well as other departments like police, NBR, customs etc.) activities, preferably through the office of the ombudsman, the creation of which is a pressing need of the time.
- Similarly, there ought to be a speedy-trial court to deal with defamation cases, only to curb excessive enthusiasm of some journalists and armchair critics

who can get away with unsubstantiated character assassination.

The PSC

- Let PSC send a rejoinder to the media refuting or acknowledging the wrongdoings charged against the organisation. There is a likelihood that the biased journalists who are having a heyday in ostracising PSC may not publish the same.
- In that case, PSC could publish a white paper as soon as possible, to state its achievement/failures to the attention of the public who are the ultimate judge of its performance.
- Let PSC open its books to a commission of enquiry, if there is any, to clear its name.
- Let PSC hold its fort till someone can prove specific charges against the organisation or its head.
- Let PSC do its best to ensure the deliverance of good service for

the benefit of the nation. The latest technology may be used and, if necessary, the services of experts may be commissioned to devise a foolproof system of recruitment procedures.

- PSC may challenge the editors of leading journals (not the trashes) to a face-to-face discussion. But it must not entertain half-baked greenhorns who are having a field day in the current free-for-all environments.

Media

- On the whole, the media is doing a fine job in carrying out investigative journalism and, for a change, the governments deserve credit in allowing one of the freest presses in the world.
- But the media ought to self-censor its publications, as over-enthusiasm on the part of the less seasoned journalists may lead to needless witch-hunting. A case in point is the debatable premature media judgement

against Justice Hassan that led to his withdrawal.

- The political affiliation of an individual may not lead to biased performance by him. After all, in the United States most of the top officials are changed with the change in government, but they are not necessarily biased in the discharge of their duties.

- While lot of ink has been used to highlight the plights of peacocks and rare birds etc., did the people see the same degree of coverage in the matter of Mig and Frigate scandals? Arguably the money squandered in those purchases would be enough to build the Padma/Mawa Bridge.

The author is a freelance contributor to the Daily Star.

What's our EQ?

For lack of knowledge, we are giving our children a horrible childhood. We make them sit for examinations from the very first grade of their school, and help them to lose interest in studies. We have an awesome primitive syllabus that has come from our grand-pa's generation. Most of our children learn that two plus two is four, but they never get a chance to learn why or how, and we shamefully expect them to be creative!



SHAHNEWAZ KHAN

Every child born has, at the instant of birth, a higher potential intelligence than Leonardo Da Vinci ever used," the founder of The Institute for the Achievement of Human Potential at Pennsylvania,

Glenn Doman, said after 40 years of study and research in the field of child brain development. In that case why doesn't every child come out with something more alluring than "Mona Lisa," or design something embryonic like "Helical Air Screw."

Harvard's visiting faculty mem-

ber and the author of the highly renowned EQ book (*Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*), Daniel Goleman, has pointed out that the best place for children to acquire EQ (emotional quotient) is at home.

After reading the book, I understood the first sentence my pro-

gramming professor at university said to us on the very first day: "We can't teach programming at university This is a subject you should have already learned when you went to the park for a walk with your parents, or solved a puzzle with your mom in the living room, what we teach here is purely syntax (the grammar of the programming language), and brush up your analytical ability a little to ignite your talent."

Two factors identify a successful personality -- IQ (intelligence quotient) and EQ (emotional quotient). IQ is constant, and there is not much we can do about it. However, EQ can be manipulated, and depends a lot on the environment in which the children are brought up, on what their parents teach them about life, and so on.

A comparison between two individuals may give a bit better idea of the difference between the two quotients. First, a boy named Anwar (not real name). He finished university with the second highest score from the faculty. I know for a fact that he used to get the highest score in most of his subjects. However, even two years after graduation, he was not able to find a job.

The second one, named Raghu. He was one of the toppers as well, but probably not as good as Anwar (tenth in the faculty), but right after his graduation he got a PhD offer from one of the renowned professors of the same university, with a scholarship and a part-time job at the university.

They both had the same IQ level, that we can tell from their academic achievements, but what

made one of them so successful and the other one not was their EQ. Skills like motivation, leadership, team-playing ability, professional attitude, confidence, all depend on EQ, and parents plays a big role in developing these skills.

Probably that is why western countries put so much emphasis on the newcomers. I was amused to know that in Australia every mother has to attend a special class when she is pregnant. There she is taught what to do with the baby, and how to raise it properly. There is constant research to improve, and make appropriate changes to, their course curriculum. Every teacher who conducts the teaching is an expert in the filed and has extensive training.

On the contrary, our parents do not get any chance to learn the ways of parenting, other than the advice from their elders. How many books do we have on child psychology or parenting, in Bangladesh? Probably there is only one bookshop that sells these books in Dhaka city, but they are all in English.

In addition, astonishingly no university has any course or degree in child development or child education. Instead, we have English literature as major in quite a few of the universities (I just don't understand why we need to study that). These problem are cannot be solved in one or two days. Hopefully, our government and policy makers are thinking about these issues.

For lack of knowledge, we are giving our children a horrible childhood. We make them sit for exami-

nations from the very first grade of their school, and help them to lose interest in studies. We have an awesome primitive syllabus that has come from our grand-pa's generation.

Most of our children learn that two plus two is four, but they never get a chance to learn why or how, and we shamefully expect them to be creative! The whole education system in the school is designed in such a way that students memorising something, and successfully vomiting it on to a piece of paper are marked as the best pupils in the class. To most of the kids, school is not a fun place, but a place they have to be.

It is a shame that our education system does not take into account the emotional growth of the child, and the truth is that we cannot change this whole system overnight but, as parents, we can influence it in a greater manner.

Modern-day research scientifically proves that a baby's attitude, creativity, ethics, are influenced by the environment and, more importantly, by the parents. Therefore, it is actually the parents' duty to broaden their own knowledge about parenting and act accordingly, and it does make a huge difference to a child's future.

On the other hand, when we see someone killing someone, being dishonest, or even being found with drugs it will be a disgrace to blame them only, in-fact his/her parents are responsible.

Political leadership and governance

The educational, technical and professional qualifications of political leaders need to be raised. The problems of governance -- transparency, corruption, non-responsiveness, favouritism, bureaucracy, inefficiency, lack of accountability, and ineffectiveness of implementation -- should draw more attention. Rising expectations among the electorate, increasing levels of education, greater access to information and greater prosperity will help to mitigate these factors to a large extent.

MOHAMMAD NAZIM UDDIN

BANGLADESH, like any developing country, needs a great leader who can set out a vision, which stirs the imagination and motivates all segments of society to greater effort. We need a leader who will inspire the country, boost confidence and instill an unshakeable determination to realise our full potential.

Is there is no one in Bangladesh who can, with the help of civil society, formulate policies and strategies that help a country to emerge as a far stronger, more prosperous and more equitable nation in the coming years.

Reflection on the last 36 years does not generate much hope. No leader in the past could give us a clear road map to success, or a sense of direction, or set out a vision shared by others.

That is not to say that our leaders were completely destructive for the country and its economic well-being. A significant reduction in poverty had been achieved between 1991 and 2006. In 1991, around 60% of Bangladeshis were poor, as compared to 40% in 2006. On an average, 1.7 million people came

out of poverty.

In the same period, life expectancy increased from 45 years to 62 years, and secondary school enrollment went up by 13%. Per capita income jumped up by around 70% to around \$470 in 2006.

If the growth momentum continues, Bangladesh will become a middle income country in another 11-15 years. Good achievement, but not the very best. Bangladesh has prospered, but at a slow rate. We have managed to reduce the number of people living in poverty, and per capita income has increased but at the expense of huge income disparity.

Our major political parties are the major stumbling blocks to real democracy. These parties do not have fully functioning democracy within themselves, and they, with few exceptions, are havens for corrupt and dishonest individuals.

Until December 06, the country seemed to be destined to be ruled by these two parties. Suddenly, people saw light at the end of the tunnel. With the support of the international community, the army and civil society, Dr Fakruddin and his pool of advisors came to rescue us.

The performance of our pres-

ent caretaker government during the last three months gives us a sense of hope, a sense of relief, and three months of trouble free time to reflect on what has happened and what is achievable.

Dr Fakruddin and his small pool of advisors are busy in running the country, punishing past abusers, and creating a framework for the future. As the head of administration, he intends to continue in the same position for 24 months, which seems too long for putting in place a framework for conducting a free and fair election.

But I am not convinced that his to-do list is limited to the holding of election. If we look back at the last three months, it appears that he wants to create or modify frameworks that span all the functions of government.

At the end of present government's tenure, if the present condition persists, one of the two major political parties may come to power through election. The country will then start the same journey along the same route.

The legacy of Dr Fakruddin's government will be similar to those of the past caretaker governments; as elected politicians will again revert to the basic frameworks that persisted in the

pre-Fakruddin era.

So, does it mean that there is no way forward? The only way forward is to change the way we vote, the way we hold our leaders and public servants accountable. In short, sensible vote casting and governance.

A majority of us act as vote banks of a few political parties. Obviously, in every democracy there are vote banks. But democracy flourishes in those countries where the number of swing voters is greatest.

Swing voters tend to focus on the actions rather than individual, delivery instead of promise, and achievements against the manifesto. All the major parties publish their election manifestos just before the election. However, in Bangladesh, most of us tend to forget it as soon as election is over.

People should not only compare achievements against the manifesto, but also need to judge the manifesto itself. The country seemed to have no sense of purpose. It was like a ship without a mission. Dr Fakruddin and other advisors should work towards establishing a clearly stated long-term mission.

In order to achieve the mission, this caretaker government should set benchmarks of development, against which success and failure of each government can be measured.

People should be made aware that the success of democracy depends on the decision of the electorate. Unless they have open minds, and decide to choose a leader instead of a party logo, democracy cannot be effective.

Politicians should be judged on the basis of their achievements against the benchmark.

Our vision should deliver a better educated, healthier and more prosperous society. We should have a well-developed network of roads and railways, with adequate capacity to handle the growth in transport.

Our workforce should have a well-educated, specialist and transferable skilled labour force that can provide an attractive commercial environment for the outsourcing of manufacturing and service businesses from high and even middle-income countries.

We should have a targeted approach for bringing millions of families out of poverty, generating millions of new employment opportunities per annum, eradicating illiteracy, improving public health to reduce infant mortality and child malnutrition, and investing in power generation, telecommunications and other physical and social infrastructure.

In order to maintain check and balance, people should not only keep an eye on whether the politician are achieving what they are expected to achieve, but also hold them accountable if things are done inefficiently. This requires sound governance, which can be improved by strengthening "core" governance institutions including:

- Comptroller and auditor general.
- Public accounts committee.
- Bangladesh bank.
- Public service commission.
- Securities and exchange com-

mission.

- The courts.

The government controls most of the institutions. However, these institutions are independent in most of the developed countries. The caretaker government should look at ways for making them independent.

Another way of improving accountability is to look into devolution of power to local bodies. Pressure from the grassroots will increasingly supplant governance from the top down. Local communities will come to depend less on central government action and more on their own initiative and organisational capacity.

Most of the developed countries have put in place financial devolution, which gives local bodies more authority to levy taxes and greater control over the use of local natural resources. It will also make them increasingly responsible for financing local infrastructure.

The educational, technical and professional qualifications of political leaders need to be raised. The problems of governance -- transparency, corruption, non-responsiveness, favouritism, bureaucracy, inefficiency, lack of accountability, and ineffectiveness of implementation -- should draw more attention.

Rising expectations among the electorate, increasing levels of education, greater access to information and greater prosperity will help to mitigate these factors to a large extent.

Prevention cheaper than cure

S.M. ABDUR RAHMAN

THOSE of us who have been following the bird flu outbreaks closely have noticed one very significant detail: almost all the poultry farms infected so far have been layer farms (chicken farms producing eggs). Though this may seem strange to laymen, poultry industry experts say that this was to be expected. They point out that in other Asian countries like Thailand, most of the outbreaks have also occurred on layer farms. Obviously something needs to be done to protect layer farms from the bird flu virus.

Layer farms sell their eggs to egg traders, whose vehicles visit many farms every day. Traces of manure on the wheels of these vehicles are probably carrying the bird flu virus from farm to farm.

Experts say that "bio-security" is the best way to protect livestock farms from diseases. The term bio-security encompasses all systematic measures to protect their animals from exposure to harmful germs and viruses (including the bird flu virus). Layer farms are very susceptible to bird flu because they typically maintain poor bio-security. Common bio-security measures include:

- Requiring all farm workers wash their feet and hands and wear clean sandals/shoes or clean uniforms before entering the poultry shed to start work. This minimizes the chance that the workers will carry in harmful germs (in traces of dirt) on their hands and feet.
- Not allowing any poultry equipment (for example, chicken transport cages or egg carrying trays) to enter the shed unless they have been washed with soap and water, then sprayed with a disinfectant. This is especially important, as the equipment might have come from an infected farm, and could carry traces of infected manure.
- Not allowing any vehicles into the compound unless their wheels have been rinsed clean with a hose (or brushed clean with a wet brush) and then sprayed with disinfectant. This minimizes the chance that a vehicle will carry in traces of infected manure (which it might if it has recently visited an infected farm).
- Closing all the sides of the poultry shed with fine wire mesh to stop even the smallest wild bird from entering. Otherwise wild birds can easily carry many germs and bacteria into the

sheds.

- Not allowing any unnecessary visitors. Any visitor could carry in germs from other farms or from their domestic poultry. Most rural households in Bangladesh own domestic chickens or ducks.

Currently the government's primary strategy to stop the spread of bird flu is to cull (kill and bury) poultry after bird flu infection has been detected on a farm. This is a costly process, as farmers must be compensated for birds which are culled. We need a preventive strategy aimed at improving layer farm bio-security. Common sense tells us that prevention is cheaper than cure. There is no cure for chickens infected with bird flu; they must be culled to stop the virus from spreading to humans. Preventing new outbreaks by improving layer farm bio-security is obviously going to be cheaper than culling chickens after an outbreak has been detected.

The following measures must be taken immediately to improve layer farm bio-security:

- Seminars must be held to educate layer farmers about bio-security, and about the risk of bird flu spreading to their farms.
- Cheap disinfectants (like bleaching powder) and spraying equipment must be delivered to layer farmers so that they can protect themselves by spraying disinfectant on the wheels of egg traders' trucks (or rickshaws) entering their farms.

These measures may be taken either by the government (to protect the public interest) or by the private sector poultry hatcheries and feed mills (to protect their own interests). My own opinion is that the private sector should take the initiative, as any initiative by the government will probably be too slow to be effective.

Of course, bio-security measures by themselves will not be enough. The government's policy of culling poultry on (and around) infected farms must continue. But improving bio-security would greatly reduce the incidence of new outbreaks, and greatly reduce numbers of chickens and ducks to be culled.

