

27th BCS viva voce cancellation

An unavoidable step, but now reform of the PSC must follow

By deciding to cancel the results of the viva voce of the 27th Bangladesh Civil Service examinations, the caretaker government has certainly acknowledged public sensitivities on the issue. In these last few months, a very large number of questions have arisen about the conduct of the examinations, with many pointing to the favouritism and political considerations allegedly involved in the success of the examinees. To be sure, there are the candidates who have qualified in a genuine manner. But their success too has unfortunately been overshadowed by all the allegations made about the other candidates around them. When reports suggest that candidates obtaining 45 per cent marks in the written examinations suddenly attain 95 per cent at the viva voce, there are grounds for very real concern about the quality of a selection process that is supposed to choose good, efficient civil servants for the future.

We are, therefore, happy to note that the administration has begun to demonstrate its seriousness about handling the uncomfortable questions which have sprung up around the 27th BCS examinations. The move to cancel the viva voce, from that perspective, is a step toward redressing a major grievance. There are of course a number of other irregularities relating to the examinations which ideally should be dealt with by the PSC. For the moment, though, an important lesson drawn from the viva voce issue is that the commission has truly gone through a steep decline in quality, which quality needs to be brought back. Indeed, there is an integrity question which arises here. The individuals who manned the PSC till the arrival of Saadat Hussain (and all of them except their chairperson are still there) clearly did a poor job of it. It is for the new chairman now to set the right tenor at the PSC through the clearly hands-on leadership he has been demonstrating since taking charge. That obviously calls for the creation of a right, purposeful team which can take the organisation back to its moorings.

At this point, when as a nation we are all engaged in bringing decency and purposeful administration back into our institutions, the matter of a reform of the PSC assumes naturally huge significance. However, what must be borne in mind is that more than a change in personnel, it is a necessary and meaningful transformation of the process of a selection of candidates for the civil service that is crucial. An examination system that really puts candidates through tough scrutiny, with the objective of ensuring a predominance of merit in the selection process, is what we need for a dynamic, responsible civil service in the future. The time has arrived for the Public Service Commission to have its reputation as a credible organisation restored.

Tale of endless greed

Still scratching the surface

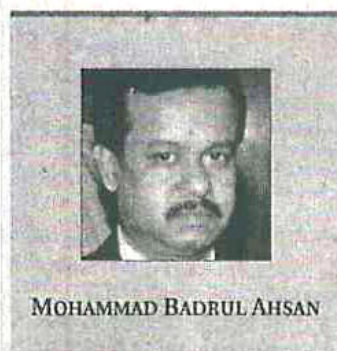
THE arrest of the chief conservator of forests Osman Gani and unearthing of crimes of ill-gotten money and loads of jewellery from his residence have brought the issue of blatant corruption among a segment of government officials to the fore. The sordid tale of the man's greed has generated a feeling of disdain amongst the common citizens. Many could not help but react philosophically: how much money does a man need?

Osman Gani is known to have had a reputation for corruption since joining the forest department but he knew the trick of keeping his superiors happy during the tenure of all the past three governments. Finally, once at the helm of his own department he let loose a reign of corruption through a nexus of criminals who went around various forest ranges looting the resources to amass wealth. It is now evident that a sizeable portion of the loot reached his quarter at the end of the day. The litany of charges against him seems to be endless ranging from pocketing money for promoting and posting officials to selling off valuable trees. He is indeed a classic case of gatekeeper turning a poacher.

Osman Gani and many others like him in the various government offices have enjoyed a free-for-all during the tenure of the past political governments. And before the very eye of the administration they have accumulated wealth beyond their legal means of earning. These corrupt officials have defied all government rules and code of conduct, let alone ethics and morals, to promote and patronise corruption in the respective departments. We have reasons to believe that such organised gangs of looters of national resources remain largely unscratched even though there are occasionally startling revelations of some of their misdeeds.

The case of the chief conservator of forests should be taken as an indicator of the scale of corruption existing in the government offices. It clearly spells out the necessity to launch a cleansing drive in these offices at the earliest.

Measure of man



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

EMPEROR Elagabalus once asked his guards to bring him 1000 pounds of cobwebs and when they returned he boasted that it showed how big was Rome. When Marco Polo went to Dadu, which is modern-day Beijing, he counted 20,000 prostitutes and used that number to estimate the total population.

Different measures at different times, but what about the number of people who are being rounded up in Bangladesh for abuse of power and corruption? What does it say about the country and its people?

Protagoras said in 485 B.C. that man is the measure of everything. And, believe it or not, the converse is also true. Everything around man is a measure of him. It is said that master spies can build the profile of

It may sound comical like taking out a spoonful of medicine and then drinking up rest of the bottle. But if need be we should consider putting a few good men in jail, leaving the country to others. We should do what it takes, but time has come to separate good from bad. No more watching grotty men on TV to tell us how to love this country.

a man simply by going through his trash.

Adulterated food, toxic juice, formalin-laced fish, dubious bank accounts, false credentials, fictitious votes, pretentious politicians, and the list can be long. The bottom line is that everything in life is made in the image of man as everything in the world is made in the image of god.

The connection is therefore unequivocal and strong. Good man makes good life and the bad one does the bad. Fake man creates fake life where everything is spurious and false.

And if you expand it further, it begins to make sense. A culture that condones everything creates a condoning culture. Each day the number of people who are getting caught is only the tip of the iceberg. It tells that there is more.

Jean Paul Sartre called man a

CROSS TALK

useless passion. He is the repository of smiles and tears, joy and sorrow, which are transient like their source. Man exists like a bubble within a bubble. If you look at the number of people who can commit crime in a country, you are also looking at the size of the bubble.

A former home minister agreed to protect a killer for a price. Politicians took monthly doles from businessmen to protect his business. It seems so vacuous that you almost wonder if there is a soul inside any of them.

So, if we want, we can boast that the number of criminals who are arrested on a single day shows how big is that bubble. And this is where everything gets murky. What can we do to fix this bubble? Which leads us to a more valid question: can we fix a circle without going to its centre? Can we kill an odor without going to its source?

That is the crux of the tangle. Can we clean up the mess before we clean up man? I mean he is the source, and life flows from him. We can try anything to bring the change. But inverse of inverse is upright again, while crooked of crooked is not always straight. Left of right is on the same side as right of left. Going in circles only repeats the same. Too many turnings don't necessarily make a change.

And nothing will change unless first we find a way to change man. But it is difficult when you listen to Charles Darwin. Man with all his noble qualities bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin. Every time some people get picked up, that lowly origin becomes oddly obvious.

The rich and powerful men look frazzled, sweating and straddling in the milling crowd of curious onlookers, dragged up and down

courthouse stairs flanked by policemen who appear like crutches on cripples. Last week, the chief conservator of forest took that lowliness one notch up. He was caught conserving bundles of currency notes and then had to be carried out of the house dangled weightlessly by his arms and legs.

In fact, these men tell us something. They tell us that they are hollow inside their bubble, that they are oblivious of their own dignity, that they don't know that they are the measure of all things.

After all, how can you measure these men against anything? And how can you measure anything against them? Anton Chekhov laments that everything in the world is beautiful except the thoughts and actions of men when they lose sight of the higher aims of existence and their dignity as human beings.

Each day brings us that bad news. We have so many notorious men who don't care for dignity. These people are arrested, and some of them become big news on television and newspapers. Then people talk about them for some time while they are hauled between courthouse and jailhouse like a pack of animals harried from cage to cage.

But say what we may, it is amazing that so many people are avail-

able to be rounded up in this country on any given day. And these are not petty thieves or pickpockets. These are men of power and position. They have ruled the country at various levels. It is amazing that the source doesn't get depleted and keeps on churning out more of them every day.

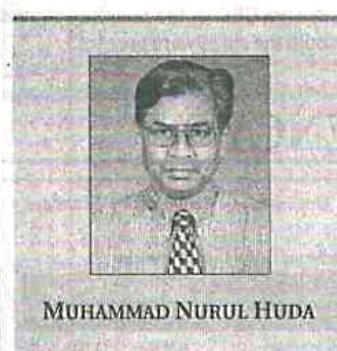
It may sound comical like taking out a spoonful of medicine and then drinking up rest of the bottle. But if need be we should consider putting a few good men in jail, leaving the country to others.

We should do what it takes, but time has come to separate good from bad. No more watching grotty men on TV to tell us how to love this country. No more patriotic shows on a television channel if its owners have got secrets in their closet (washing black money white). This is the time to do it. Man must be reconciled with his measure.

There are two ways to do it. Either we fix the man or we fix the measure. Reforms are necessary only if we can make the necessary reforms. And this is a good place to start. Either man should fit the measure, or the measure should fit the man. At the end of this reforming season, we should be able to diminish both if one falls short of another.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

Punishing the profligates is priority



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

IN describing the political scene of Bangladesh if one were to comment that while the conscientious folks were engaged in introspection, the burly sinners ran the world one would not be far from the reality. The cynics may say that we mustn't enshrine ignorance and dishonesty just because there is so much of it. Such cynics do not credit Bangladeshis with setting their priorities in the pragmatic manner at crucial periods in the nation's history.

The demand for lifting of embargo on indoor politics and the waiving of restrictions on organisational activities is not matched by any sense of urgency for punishing the apprehended political heavyweights and kleptocrats who clearly stand accused of anti-social and corrupt use of the opportunities provided by their official positions.

Resumption of democratic activities is an undoubted necessity but definitely not without sufficient house cleaning. Admittedly, such corrective actions would actually mean ensuring criminal conviction of immoral and corrupt politicians and businessmen by the highest court. That would, in all fairness, require quite a bit of time, but credible trials in open courts necessitate that. While raising our voices for withdrawal of restrictions on political activities we would do well to bear that in mind.

Punishing the bad hats is an urgent priority because we have to, once for all, put a stop to the rise of half-educated arrogant predators in the political arena. Surely we do not wish to see the return of the likes of those criminally disposed young members of parliament of Dhaka city and its periphery of the not-too-distant past. These fellows are now behind bars, and the sense of relief consequent upon their

Bangladesh polity has failed to forge national cohesion on fundamental values. Inadequate nation building and state building processes is the cause. Lack of mutual trust and prevalence of hostile political attitude have resulted in weak political institutions and weak national capacity to resolve national issues. The process needs to be reversed. Such reversal demands expeditious punishment of the profligates.

absence is there for anyone to see and appreciate.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that those who hunger for political profit, or profit in the form of power, are less dangerous to society than those who seek monetary profit. It is time to rein in the unbridled ambitions of unscrupulous money-makers.

Politicians who have very visibly plundered national resources and did not feel uneasy with their ill-gotten wealth need to be exposed and punished. Ministers who had helped, and connived with, the transfer of prime government land at token prices for doubtful use by near relations have to answer for their highhandedness and flouting of rules.

The sense of propriety, and the distinction between public property and private gain, need to be restored. If the constraint of legality is not effectively established by ensuring punishment of the corrupt then the crown would always go to the loudest voices, the biggest sticks and the readiest fists. The greatest social purpose is served when wrong is detested.

The state needs to disqualify and debar a significant number of suspected politicians from participating in electoral politics in order to ensure the growth of a healthy polity. That goal cannot be achieved if it is not possible to criminally convict a substantial number of politicians before the year is out. The premonition is that once the environment becomes relaxed, with the withdrawal of restrictions on political activities, the investigation and enquiries of corruption-related cases and also the trial of such cases would slacken and slow down. The last months of any government's tenure are never an appropriate time to take strong measures.

The state needs to mobilise the best trial lawyers, and experienced and capable investigators, for

successful prosecution. The financial remuneration for such jobs should be significant, and there must not be any bureaucratic encumbrance in this regard.

Punishment of the corrupt would be meaningful when ill-gotten money can be judicially or administratively brought back to the state coffers. In cases of criminal breach of trust and misappropriation, most of the siphoned-off money could not be confiscated by the state. Now that we have signed the International Convention on corruption, efforts should be made to retrieve national wealth by enlisting international cooperation.

The profligates need to be punished because ground realities regarding the imperatives of astute political management of the affairs of Bangladesh deserve serious consideration. It is against the background of such a scenario that concerned Bangladesh citizens will sincerely hope and pray that, indeed, politics truly becomes difficult, so that increasing numbers of brats and non-entities do not occupy the centre-stage of our political horizon.

Such concerned citizens, and the well-meaning folks of our country, earnestly desire that politics becomes the art of wise and patriotic people, and is effectively salvaged from the clutches of the insensitive.

There is no denying that in spite of our adopting a lofty constitution we do not have the ability to keep it. Equally true is the fact that while we are the proud inheritors of a rich and vibrant culture we do not have the wisdom to cherish it. The compounding tragedy is that our resilient people have to suffer and endure in patience, without recognition of their innate potential.

We need to ask ourselves if the apathy of the citizens - particularly the elite who have almost opted out of the democratic pro-

cess -- is responsible for the corruption, incompetence and inefficiency that we see all around? We have to admit that as a nation we have paid substantially for our follies in leaving the governance of this country largely to the professional politicians, for many of whom politics is merely bread and butter, a means of livelihood, or worse, a means of personal enrichment.

Assuming that Bangladesh is passing through the supposedly illiberal phase of democratisation, it is presumed that political instability that goes with the period of transition has security implications for the country. The sources of such instability are negative politics, lawlessness, misgovernment, patronisation of violence, keeping of armed cadre in student/labour fronts, boycotting of parliament amongst others.

The reasonably free and fair elections in the yesteryears still remain open to question in terms of both input and output. The questionable input for our elections has been money, including substantial amounts of black money. Such money militates against the democratic spirit and impacts negatively on the quality of the elected representatives.

Discerning observers would agree that, in recent times, middle class professionals with credentials, and with connections with the people, have been squeezed out of the political market to yield place to rich businessmen, industrialists or individuals with questionable means of income. The security ramifications of this phenomenon is that elected legislators having the backing of black money amassed through smuggling of narcotics or illegal arms can put the country at the mercy of a few powerful dons pulling strings from behind.

In Bangladesh, fingers are already being pointed at such

elements. In the context of the violent trend in politics such accusations cannot be summarily ruled out. Therefore, the election system, vitiated by the money-and-politics nexus, and a literally non-performing parliament, are factors sufficient to make politics volatile and unstable, with serious long-range ramifications.

Criminalised and vandalised politics is another indicator with alarming fall-out. Violence and politics have become almost synonymous. The emergence of political bully-boys would not have been possible without patronisation by political parties. Violence has had serious negative impact on the political culture of the country.

Our intolerant political conduct is reflective of an immature political culture, and politics is viewed as a game in which winner takes all in a zero-sum format. Political parties contest elections as if they were fighting a war. Political division and rivalry often degenerate into personal enmity, thus infusing an unhealthy element of acrimony that leads to violence.

The party in power is mostly intolerant, arrogant, and even feudalistic in attitude. The opposition mostly opposes the government for the sake of opposition, and is in politics as if with the undertaking to bring down the government. Such a scenario has been described as "crisis of governance." A country with such a crisis in governance will be ill-equipped to face the challenges of management, including those emanating from the security environment.

We have to admit that our ethnolinguistic and religious homogeneity factor has not succeeded in bringing the dynamics of socio-political relations within a manageable limit. Presently, our society is characterised by a significant elite-mass gap. A small segment of society influences decision-making, and allocation and distribution of resources.

The failure of democratic experimentation in the initial years of independence led to a succession of military and quasi-military rule by a coalition of the higher echelon of the military and civil bureaucracy. Political leaders joined later to complete the "coalition of convenience." The first two groups remained dominant.

The elections of 1991, 1996 and 2001 may have restored the supremacy of political leadership

but, in the meantime, immense damage has been caused to our political culture by the combined onslaught of corruption, criminalisation and commercialisation of the politics of the country.

The penetration of business interests into politics, made possible through a policy of distribution of political patronage and bureaucratic support, continued on a wider scale, and the emerging business class not only attempted to control politics through donations to party coffers, they also displayed a greater readiness to join politics themselves. We now have politicians and parliamentarians who have business interests. This commercialisation of politics has become the safest and most convenient vehicle for achievements.

One major political priority cries for maintenance of law and order, and protection of national interest, while the other fights for the democratic rights of the people with relentless agitation, work stoppages and violence. Therefore, policies, postures, statements and actions of the political parties and ruling regimes have a significant role in conflict aggravation and its transition from one phase to another.

The interface between the political feuds and intense power struggle on the one hand, and violence of different intensities on the other, is provided by the underworld to which the political leaders of various stature are connected in a shady way. According to credible reports, nearly 300 godfathers control criminal and terrorist activities across the country. The godfathers belonging to major political parties are actually mid and high level leaders of such parties.

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100 years -- Cuba to Iraq



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

THE Spanish American War of 1898 represented the very first time that the US intervened outside the North American continent. As a consequence of success in Cuba and the Philippines, and the very first experience at annexation as an occupying power, the US established a naval presence abroad, with bases in the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, Cuba etc. In 1903 US leased out Guantanamo Bay from Cuba.

Korea should have taught US the hard lesson that land wars are not winnable in Asia, yet Vietnam followed not more than a decade later. Lessons of the killing

AS I SEE IT

As the only Superpower in the world at this time, and with the UN powerless to act effectively and in time, it falls to the lot of the US to intervene when necessary, the key condition being "when necessary." Unfortunately, the judgment of when to send men and women into battle was lacking; intervention must only be when intervention becomes necessary!

fields of South East Asia had been taken to heart, the temptation to return the favour of a proxy war because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan could hardly be ignored. No logic was applied before entering Iraq in 2003, even worse there is no exit strategy from the cauldron even in 2007.

The Afghan war of the 80s was very well fought by US planners using Pakistan as a proxy; in the process Pakistan's social fabric disintegrated. The tenuous peace, when it came, was an unmitigated disaster for Pakistan.

With the US pulling out lock, stock and barrel, and leaving the front-line state not only to pick up the pieces, but also to contend with battle-hardened militants from

many countries spread all over the borders adjacent to its north-west frontier areas, with over 3 million refugees in the country, with forces hostile to Pakistan in control in Kabul, and the ISI's corridors fuelled with visions of a crescent of Islamic Renaissance.

When the US (and other world powers including China) were backing Pakistan, the Afghanistan war had been winnable. Bereft of their support and without the resources to sustain the peace even, what to talk of war, it became "mission impossible."

"Adventureism" should have been shunned. Pakistan's populist road of supporting the Taliban was a one-way road to disaster. If anyone had suggested in the late 90s that the

US would choose to enter Afghanistan physically in less than a decade, he would have been classified as demented and confined in an asylum. After 9/11, while US retribution was a necessary certainty, given the history of Afghanistan the country's occupation should never have been an option.

Prosecuting the war against terrorism, the US effected regime change by running the Taliban out of town in late 2001. With the "Northern Alliance" incapable of ruling except in Kabul, the US cobbled together a coalition of like-minded Nato countries, most of whom lacked the stomach for a fight.

Since the US maintains that the prisoners of war (POWs) captured in the war against terrorism are not

"prisoners of war" according to the Geneva Convention, Guantanamo Bay, with its grey status, became the perfect repository.

Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt, whom Bush Jr sub-consciously imitates, was one of the leaders (as a volunteer Colonel) in the US contingent to Cuba in 1898; his 1st Volunteer Cavalry, known as the "Rough Riders," fully participating in the two-month campaign that saw Santiago fall and Spanish forces in Cuba surrender. Roosevelt caught the imagination of the public by personally leading the charge up San Juan Hill.

Once the war was won, disease threatened the contingent with more casualties than the actual fighting. Along with his fellow senior officers, Roosevelt signed a joint letter to the expedition commander, Gen Shafter, for immediate evacuation. Ordered to by President McKinley, the entire US contingent was brought home and kept in splendid isolation for a few weeks before receiving a hero's welcome in Manhattan, complete with ticker tape.

Having fought a war, and suffering the privations, death and disease that is a soldier's lot Teddy Roosevelt, when he ultimately

became president in his own right, used his experience in Cuba to change the entire uniform and equipment of US army, well before the First World War.

A committed interventionist, as president he established the US as a major naval power. The US made the difference between victory and defeat in both the World Wars, with young Americans making the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of others. The latter part of the 20th century became one of repeated interventions, specially the "Cold War" to fend off communism.

Have we come a full circle after the first intervention in Cuba a hundred years or so earlier? Will the experience in Afghanistan and Iraq chasten the US and hasten its exit from these theaters of war? Not while George W Bush, Jr is the US president!

The Democratic Congress rode into town in January this year, wanting the US out of Iraq. Four months later, they have had to accept Bush Jr's stubborn commitment to war and pass a \$120 billion authorisation without any exit timetable.

What a tragedy that someone like Andrew Bacevich, Professor of Boston University and a great

opponent of interventions, particularly of the Iraq war, should lose his son, Lt Andrew Bacevich, Jr, in Iraq the other day.

As the author of "The New American Militarism," a proponent of all sections of society equally bearing the pain of wars, Bacevich feels that after the termination of the universal draft in the US, the rich have been paying the poor to bear the burden of their wars.

Even though opposed to the war, Bacevich did not say anything to stop his son from doing his duty in Iraq. This type of sacrifice is typically American, to fight and die for your country even when you do not believe in the cause. The list of dead announced daily by the Pentagon represents every strata of society.

The present-day version of "Rough Riders" is not in the same league as the "Originals" of 1898, never having heard a shot being fired in anger. That makes Bush Jr. "Rough Riders" more blood-thirsty than those who had experienced war, and, therefore, too eager to go to war at the slightest pretext. Having found them to be paper tigers, the American people have started to show them the door, starting with Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle and other neo-cons.

Paul Wolfowitz fell the other day as the President World Bank, indulging in charity at home at World Bank expense. Only Vice President Dick Cheney still remains unaccountable, his former Chief of Staff, "Scooter" Libby, awaiting sentencing for lying through his teeth; the Public Prosecutor having asked for a minimum of 3 years. Give credit to both US democracy and the judicial system that they can take on the administration's titans!

As the only superpower in the world at this time, and with the UN powerless to act effectively and in time, it falls to the lot of the US to intervene when necessary, the key condition being "when necessary."

Unfortunately, the judgment of when to send men and women into battle was lacking; intervention must only be when intervention becomes necessary! Beside the needless sacrifice of its youth, the US public should always remember that they bear the fate of the entire world in their hands when they decide whom to give their vote to at the ballot box.

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