

Breaking the barrier of indifference



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

ments have mostly denied the citizens the opportunity to grow in self-reliance and political responsibility.

One may not be far from reality in saying that the causes of our present socio-political predicament lay in the absence of Constitutional restraints upon, or effective democratic opposition to, an apparently lackadaisical course. Another tragic aspect of our failure was the lack of enough energetic and dedicated people who com-

observe the generational differences of attitude because these are not often explicitly reflected in opinion polls. It may not be improper to suppose that the people who had reached maturity in the late seventies, eighties and nineties do not always feel the same commitment to the Republic as their elders, who remember the liberation struggle and the politico-economic injustices of the sixties and earlier. The younger generation is more inclined to find

state as being synonymous with the government. Conversely, the mindless opposition to authority remains a fixed characteristic of Bangladeshi political attitudes. In fact, to most citizens, the connection between their expression of opinion by means of the ballot and the decisions that the government eventually takes is by no means clear.

Unfortunately, the prejudice against politics is still very much alive. To the average Bangladeshi,

democratic political culture rests.

The enemies of our democracy would point the accusing finger towards the economic malaise and highlight the so-called "crisis of legitimacy," and harp on the theme of un-governability as a new criticism of the democratic system. Unfortunately, our political culture shows a relatively low tolerance for non-conformity and dissent, and a distressing tendency to attempt to counter them by means of legal disabilities and prohibitions. Some

tural overtones. The power structure has to take into account the changing system of production.

To be specific, the present government may be the appropriate change agent to commence professionalising the public services, as opposed to their politicisation. The state machinery cannot be used for political and private purposes. It is time to start the process for establishing a lean and efficient government away from the Darbari ethos.

On the question of choosing our political guardians until education is ensured for the large majority of our population, we have to unfortunately depend on the "illiterate intelligence" of the masses as against the "educated incapacity" of the privileged. In the meantime, we have to stop voting ignorant professional politicians to power.

The time has come for citizens to wrest the initiative from professional politicians, and insist upon persons of knowledge, vision and character to be chosen as representatives at different tiers. This is so because we are caught in a vicious circle. Persons of talent and integrity will not enter public life due to the filth and the stench; and yet public life cannot be cleansed unless persons of talent and integrity enter it.

The tendency of many Bangladeshi political elements, especially during a controversy, to view the political process as a conflict between "Friend and Foe" is a threat to democratic pluralism. In fact, it is an indication of the ambivalence of our democratic conviction.

It may now be the time to break the matrix of indifference for ensuring popular sovereignty. For that to happen, we have to strike first at the antagonism between the state and society. This has to be structural, with political and cul-

ture still believe that any form of dissent is reprehensible. In such a situation, doubts creep in about the justice and fairness of the social order, and the end result may be radicalism of the dreaded kind.

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STRAIGHT LINE

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bine the willingness to assume responsibility for establishing the desired realm of freedom with the practical arts necessary to counter the obstacles that stand in the way of its realisation.

It may be the time to examine the extent of our civic failures and to assess the health of our democracy. We need to know if there is a "crisis of legitimacy," and how the democratic consciousness has been impeded by the dead-weight of irrelevant discourses.

While we shall not be wrong to suppose that there exists a remarkable level of public support for the democratic form of government, we shall only be pragmatic not to dismiss outright the suspected declining faith in democracy.

Some say that we as a nation should have the occasion to

inadequacies in the existing dispensation.

If we go down memory lane we should find that our movements for political emancipation in the fifties and sixties can be considered as a facilitating factor for the development of democracy.

The disturbing reality, however, is that the names of the great persons of the past were rarely rightly invoked in meaningful political discussions, thereby indicating our apparent indifference to the past. This unfortunate ahistorical tendency needs to be reversed.

Our political masters have been no respecters of emancipation in the intellectual realm, thus, there is the resultant continued influence of authoritarian forms of behaviour and traditional mental patterns. As such, most people regard

the state equals the officials, and politics destroys character, and a significant number of our people seem to agree that politics is a "more unfair and ruthless" business than other occupations.

Bangladeshis have good reasons to be extra-sensitive to economic trouble, but the distressing part is the manifest tendency to react with pessimism and undemocratic behaviour. This is so because it reveals the existence of anti-democratic forces in Bangladeshi society that could be mobilised quickly, and that the democratic culture is more than normally vulnerable to signs of economic inconvenience. In times of such inconvenience, one would witness significant loosening of the social

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Could people see a cleaner Dhaka city?



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

Landfills and incinerators, even if they are spewing harmful emissions will be needed for a well-managed waste disposal system. But where possible, landfills should be fitted with impermeable clay or synthetic liners to contain toxic materials, and with pumps to drain out liquid waste for treatment elsewhere. And DCC, if it has not done and thought about all these measures earlier, must not falter now.

ful of the sickening smell that pervades the surroundings. People travel in boats across the shrinking river, defying the long-settled smell, all but forgetful of the health risks these establishments pose.

Unmistakably true, the tannery industry at Hazaribagh in Dhaka, although featuring prominently in the long voyage of the ship "Pelican," filled with 14,000 tonnes of toxic incinerator ash loaded in Philadelphia in 1986, as a stark symbol of environmental exploitation of poor countries by the rich. It also represents the single most irresponsible and reckless way to get rid of the mountains of refuse, much of it highly poisonous.

The ship, it is learnt, sailed around the world for more than two years, seeking a port that would accept its cargo. However, it was further learnt that it brazenly dumped several thousand pounds of its unwanted cargo in 1989 off a Haitian beach then slipped back out into the sea. The captain of the ship said a month later that he had unloaded the ash in a country that he refused to name. Our coastal region, the Bay of Bengal, might become the woe of Dhaka residents.

With population outstripping the land space in the Dhaka city, the trash production has far exceeded the disposal system available. Sadly true, a modern and eco-friendly trash management system cannot be found in the country. Happily, research work on trash management and recycling goes on unabated throughout the world by governments and entrepreneurial organisations inspired with business motive as well as social obligation. Dhaka city, it is learnt from the DCC sources, tosses away about a million tons of solid waste annually, which is dumped in the landfills and low lying areas of the Dhaka city. But run-off from the landfills has been contaminating drinking water, posing a serious health hazard to the citizens.

Incineration is being considered by some major cities, but burning garbage produces significant amount of toxic ash, which itself causes disposal problems as well as health hazards. Dhaka city has not been spared of the scourge originating from huge stockpiling of wastes in the houses, roadsides, and broken dustbins placed haphazardly in important locations. Nobody wants incineration or disposal systems in their localities. From the festering landfills to waste-choked drains of the Dhaka city trash goes on. Shockingly, stinking garbage, chemical effluents and human excreta despoils Dhaka's once unspoiled environment.

Speaking about disposal of garbage in the big cities, there is one school of thought taking recourse to incineration without having any thought about the consequences. When garbage is burned, it spews dangerous gases into the air. Besides, dumped garbage and industrial waste can turn lethal when corrosive acids, long-lived organic materials, and discarded metals leach out of landfills into ground-water supplies.

The question that looms up in the public mind is how to prevent our environment from wallowing in waste and poisonous materials that we ourselves are producing. Higher fines, taxes, and strict

enforcement of laws might force the manufacturing industries to curb waste and toxic materials. Some manufacturing companies in the West have cut waste generation by half by using fewer toxic chemicals, separating out wastes that can be reused, and substituting alternative raw materials for hazardous substances. To cite an example, Duphar, a large chemical concern in the Netherlands adopted a new manufacturing process that decreased by 95 percent the amount of waste created in making a pesticide.

Recycling is, of course, the best way to reduce waste. Japan now recycles more than 50 percent of its trash, and Western Europe around 30 percent. Shockingly, the US, the largest producer of waste and toxic materials, recycles about 10 percent of its garbage, or 16 million tonnes a year, and only 10 states

and incinerators, even if they are spewing harmful emissions will be needed for a well-managed waste disposal system. But where possible, landfills should be fitted with impermeable clay or synthetic liners to contain toxic materials, and with pumps to drain out liquid waste for treatment elsewhere. And DCC, if it has not done and thought about all these measures earlier, must not falter now

because every year half a million people are added to the shrinking city now accommodating about 15 million people.

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Bangladesh continue to build plants without including costly waste disposal systems. In many cases, plants have disposal systems that remain inoperative due to inappropriate technology. Even in the highly industrialised countries there are formidable social obstacles to waste management. Nobody wants incineration or disposal systems in their localities. From the festering landfills to waste-choked drains of the Dhaka city trash goes on. Shockingly, stinking garbage, chemical effluents and human excreta despoils Dhaka's once unspoiled environment.

The survey conducted about handling trash in developed countries might give illuminating insights to the government of Bangladesh and DCC. In most developed countries there are formidable social obstacles to waste management. Nobody wants incineration or disposal systems in their localities. From the festering landfills to waste-choked drains of the Dhaka city trash goes on. Shockingly, stinking garbage, chemical effluents and human excreta despoils Dhaka's once unspoiled environment.

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neighbouring countries there are additional responsibilities for CEO/CFO under the corporate governance rules. Some of the key elements are as follows:

A certification from CEO/CFO shall remain the primary functions, but to play the new role properly the CFO has to be someone who can deal with shareholders, investors, the Securities and Exchange Commission as well as customers with equal efficiency. CFO needs to be aware of the business strategies, company's financial and technological health. CFOs are viewed as not only drivers of the strategy and business models within an organisation but as conduits to the external world. CFO must understand risk in the system and control the risk. CFO must demonstrate high ethical standard in certifying the financial statements and effective

management of account on that basis.

b. These statements do not contain materially untrue statement or omit any material fact nor do they contain statements that might be misleading.

c. These statements together present a true and fair view of the company and are in compliance with the existing accounting standards and / or applicable laws/ regulations;

d. They are responsible for establishing and maintaining internal controls and have evaluated the effectiveness of internal control systems of the company; and they have done or proposed to do to rectify these;

e. They have also disclosed to the auditors as well as the Audit Committee, instances of significant fraud, if any that involve management of employees having significant role in the company's internal control systems; and

f. They have indicated to the auditors, the Audit Committee and in the notes on accounts, whether or not there were significant changes in internal control and / or accounting policies during the year.

Will the changing role conflict with the existing structure of management?

Traditionally, Chief Accountants used to perform several tasks viz preparing accounts, preparing budgets, operational reporting and interpreting, evaluating operating results, preparing income tax returns, establishing internal control procedures to safeguard company's asset. But now the code of corporate governance would make the chief accountant powerful and more responsible. Due to increased governance requirement, there is a transition from Chief Accountants Officer to Chief

Financial Officer (CFO). Although implementation of BAS/IAS/IFRS and presentation of fair view of financial statements shall remain the primary functions, but to play the new role properly the CFO has to be someone who can deal with shareholders, investors, the Securities and Exchange Commission as well as customers with equal efficiency. CFO needs to be aware of the business strategies, company's financial and technological health. CFOs are viewed as not only drivers of the strategy and business models within an organisation but as conduits to the external world. CFO must understand risk in the system and control the risk. CFO must demonstrate high ethical standard in certifying the financial statements and effective

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Will the changing role lead to redefining the risk management?

The banking sector in Bangladesh is the most structured sector of the economy. Due to the efficient supervision by Bangladesh Bank, the sector has implemented many internationally accepted best management practices. Bangladesh Bank has identified five core risk areas for the banks under its core risk guidelines. These are Credit Risk, Foreign Exchange Risk, Money Laundering Risk, Internal Control and Compliance Risk, Asset and Liability/Balance Sheet Risk. In this core risk management, the ownership lies with Head of Credit Risk Management, Head of Internal Control and Compliance, Head of Audit, Head of Treasury and Chief Anti Money Laundering Compliance Officer.

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