

# Politics and the lure of lucre

## STRAIGHT LINE

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MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE high profile criminal cases of corruption lodged against a number of our political heavyweights perhaps demonstrate that the minds of many public leaders have impoverished on account of single-minded pursuit of money. It appears that such relentless pursuit has also desiccated their heart. The malaise seems to be not only persistent but also prone to aggravation.

The question is, can mentally and ethically deficient people as above hold our trust that has to be reposed in public office? Alternatively, should people with an unbridled lust for material accomplishments be allowed to occupy and disgrace high offices? In the fitness of things, such thoughts should engage the minds of all right-thinking people.

It is perhaps time to stop ruling out wide changes by politics as that would amount to a grave indictment of the functioning of the democratic process. The seizure of all levers of power by politicians and conniving bureaucrats in the recent past has been very frustrating to technocrats and professional managers.

The question that should be asked in a scenario as above is, what proportion of time of the members of parliament is spent on law making? Some are of the opinion that in the 300 seats of parliament we, in fact, elect 300 executives. In saying so, one is not oblivious of the reality

that in a parliamentary form of government the elected prime minister is the chief executive, and ministers as colleagues are also executives, as is the practice in the system.

What, however, should engage our attention is whether the legislator is evincing more interest in matters developmental whose actual execution is an executive function, to the detriment of law-making, and whether such a scenario is giving rise to dissatisfaction at the local level? It is also pertinent to know whether such dissatisfaction has harmful effect on the political process, leading ultimately to dishonest and unethical practices.

Many are of the view that one big obstacle to the flowering of local leadership lies in the excessive interference by higher level leaders or representatives in local socio-economic activities. The progress made in strengthening local government does not generate adequate optimism despite our having excellent recommendations in this regard. Consequently, local leaders are tempted to resort to illegal practices, having failed to achieve that desired recognition. Such frustrated leaders often become touts to maintain their leadership in a desperate situation where their continued existence comes under threat. In the ultimate analysis, the ordinary people fall victim to this polluted process for obvious reasons.

There is no doubt that greater involvement and empowerment of local leaders in the decision making process of developmental matters will help achieve satisfaction of such leaders. This would also contribute in the nurturing of local leadership and creation of a positive political culture, thereby gradually lessening the harmful effects of profit maximisation by politicians. People at the local level will at least get some relief, to start with, and it would not be too much to expect that local leaders will start becoming conscientious and responsible. However, reaching such a stage will not be easy because decentralisation of authority will not suddenly gather pace. One has to look at the opposing views about the type of local government at the upazila level.

It is now generally accepted that the election-oriented political culture provides incentive to explicit illegal practices. During elections, a large amount of unaccounted money comes into circulation, and it has not been possible to effectively halt that. A large chunk of such money is spent for the muscle-men or thugs for whom election time is booming business at almost no investment. Such thugs are required for malevolent activities like intimidation of voters, particularly the vulnerable ones, deactivating polling agents, creating tension near election centre to discourage voters from turning out, directly or

indirectly keeping the polling booth under control, etc. There is never a dearth of miscreants for committing such mischief because requisition or demands is there and, as such, supply remains steady on account of ready cash and quick payment.

Observers of the political scene are of the view that the personal and professional credentials of the politician is central to the subject under discussion. In this regard, the layman, in view of his experience, may wonder whether politics is a profession or a vocation or simply a social service. One considered view is that although some political parties may have full-time cadre of workers who are on the party's payroll, in a democratic society, politics cannot be a full-time occupation.

It is felt that, while in power, holders of office shall be adequately compensated by the state, although the compensation may not prove to be satisfying for a capable professional. But then that is the price one has to pay for being in public service. The important issue here is that after one ceases to hold power one goes back to the parent profession or occupation. In other words, it is expected that politicians are in definite profession or occupation and have means to support themselves.

How close is our political scene to the proposition described above may be the subject matter of serious

discussion. Do we witness people in the political scene whose true sources of income cannot be ascertained? One has to bear in mind that parasitic leadership can neither inspire nor help in the creation of healthy political culture. These issues should be discussed seriously by the political parties themselves because barring honourable exception, politicians with accountable income can command respect.

One must add here that simultaneously there must be adequate checks to ensure that affluent politicians do not become promoter or protector of vested interests. In order to maintain societal balance, it has to be ensured that coterie interests do not dictate the party. One recommendation would be to enlist people of different profession or occupation for the party and to attract educated and honest people to the political mainstream.

It is widely believed that in conducting and managing the affairs of major political party, and particularly during election campaigning, unbelievably large funds that includes black money are spent. Such spending is leading us to a perilous course. There was a time when the wealthy would remain behind the scenes and quietly take his reward later, but in the altered scenario a good number of questionable wealthy are entering the centre stage of mainstream politics, consequent to the unholy nexus

between black money and power. This has to be arrested; otherwise the political leadership will be bereft of merit and morality.

We may follow the example of western democracies in creating election fund of the political party. This will, at the least, bring some clarity about the sources of the fund. It is not very difficult to keep the election expenditure with reasonable limits if we can ensure stern enforcement of electoral laws, backed by judicial firmness, executive determination, and ingenuity. The lure of black money during election times is understandably massive, but if politicians, particularly the legislators, do not want their political foundations to be tainted by illegal or criminal deals then political process must have financial discipline and sanity. This would be a painful experience, but is considered essential to sanitise politics.

Concerned Bangladeshi citizens will sincerely hope and pray that indeed politics truly becomes difficult so that increasing number of brats and the 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 become 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 the perception of their innate potentials.

The arrogance and irresponsibility of the executive organ and the politicians can be tamed and chastened by an upright judiciary wherein we must have people who

have the courage never to submit or yield. They should have the capability to effectively pronounce on all spheres of public life. On a more specific reference, our judiciary must firmly ensure the observance of our electoral laws so that the doubtful elements both financially and criminal records wise find it difficult to venture into public life.

In order to make politics difficult for the bad hats, can we demand that no political party should be recognised by the Election Commission unless the party is willing to maintain audited accounts of all its receipts and expenditure? This demand can be accommodated by the addition of a section to the existing law on representation.

How about prescribing some minimum educational qualifications for those who seek election to parliament? One can not fail to be struck by the grim irony of our situation where the one job for which one needs no training or qualification whatsoever is the job of legislating and governing a sizeable democracy. To steer the lives and destinies of more than 150 million people our politicians are not required having any education or equipment at all. It is clearly anomalous that we insist on high qualifications for those who administer or help in administering the law, but none for those who make it except that they are elected. Surely, the law-giver requires intellectual equipment, the capacity to take a balanced view of things and to act independently.

We need to have a merit-based administrative system to ensure pragmatic and balanced behaviour of the politicians. There is a belief that for politicians it would be easier to control officers with average merit rather than meritorious officers. Pliable officers with a low morale cannot put a brake on the unbridled ambitions of the arrogant half-wits masquerading as politi-

cians. The services need to be protected from the high-handed actions of the political executives and their pernicious political links have to sap.

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

Every democratic society needs to have an aristocracy of talent, knowledge, and character. It is this aristocracy which must take to public life, however discriminatory and unpleasant it may sound, if democracy is to have a solid foundation in Bangladesh. We have to go all out to accord the highest recognition to ability, knowledge, and integrity.

Our constitution was framed on the basis that our citizens, including the best, would be willing to take a continuous and meaningful part in public life. So if the thoughtful and the committed fail the country at this juncture, the next alternative would be to invite extra-constitutional authoritarianism of the worst type.

The time has come when citizens must wrest the leadership from the less committed professional politicians and insist upon persons of knowledge, vision, and character to be chosen as candidates for parliamentary and local body election. Such persons can usher in a government which will be strong without being authoritarian and humane without being weak.

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# Putting people first...

DAVID MILIBAND

THE historian Arnold Toynbee said the twentieth century would be remembered not for political conflicts or technical inventions, but as an age when people dared to think of the health of the whole human race as a practical objective.

This year we mark that moment of daring: the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Over the past sixty years, political ideologies have come and gone. Empires have crumbled. Global politics has been reshaped. Yet the Declaration lives on. It is today the cornerstone for much of international human rights law. Its ideas have influenced the thinking of generations, from American civil rights activists, to the champions of gay rights and those who brought down the Berlin Wall.

In the last year, when foreign policy has broken through to dominate the news cycle, it has often been because of concern about human rights. The crisis in Zimbabwe. The twin agony of the suffering in Gaza and Sderot. The frustrated demands of millions of decent people in Burma. The threat to peace in Kenya. And most recently the situation in Tibet: worldwide concern is justified and proper. There needs to be mutual respect between all communities and sustained dialogue between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese authorities.

This is the 10th FCO Human Rights report. Over the last decade, concern for human rights has moved from the margins to the mainstream. The Human Rights Act brought the European Convention into domestic law in 1998. A raft of legislation has been passed promoting gender,

disability and race equality and giving new rights to gay and lesbian couples. Internationally, the establishment of the International Criminal Court, and the arrests of Milosevic and Charles Taylor were major steps forward for international justice. The unanimous 2005 agreement on the Responsibility to Protect was another significant sign of the change in the climate.

As human rights moves from the margins to the mainstream, it can no longer be treated as a discrete area of foreign policy; more and more of the challenges of foreign policy have human rights as a vital dimension. This is reflected in the new strategic framework governing the work of the FCO. All four of the foreign policy goals that now drive our work - from tackling terrorism and conflict to promoting low carbon development and effective international organisations - reflect concerns about human rights, reflect the role of human rights as a platform for human progress, reflect the history of the struggle for human rights and what we have learnt along the way, and reflect something else, namely that the case for human rights is moral but also instrumental: they should be the basic rules for a world in which we can all live in peace and dignity.

Our new goals flow directly from our analysis of how the world is changing. There is more democracy, more wealth, more opportunity than ever before; but also more insecurity and by some definitions more inequality than ever before; and by all calculations more interdependence than ever before. So a country like Britain has a choice: pretend we can opt out of the great struggle for progress, kidding ourselves that it will not affect us; or we can play our part, because it is the right thing to do, and because it is in our interest.

**Interdependence means that states interfere consciously and unconsciously with each other's affairs. We have no choice but to interfere. The choice is whether this is based on agreed rules and responsibilities, or merely a free for all. The only way to protect the climate, the international financial system, counter-terrorism and weapons proliferation is to agree on shared rules and responsibilities.**

Let me set out how concern for human rights will inform the pursuit of our foreign policy goals, and then say what I think we need to do to advance them.

**Counter-terrorism**  
First, the struggle against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. I believe the consciousness of the world has been changed by the events of 11 September 2001, and by subsequent terrorist attacks around the world, including here in London, and in Asia and the Middle East. The threat we face is different - in its methods, in its ideology, in its goals, in its doctrine - than anything we have faced before.

Some say that countering terrorism is so important that we must put aside concerns about human rights. But I think that concern for human rights is our greatest strength. Democratic and inclusive political systems around the world are a bulwark against the terrorist mantra of incompatible civilisations. That is why we are right to support the spread of democracy in Afghanistan, in Bangladesh, in Iraq, and defend fragile democracies in Lebanon, Pakistan and Sierra Leone.

Our own democratic and judicial systems, which embody hard won rights, and deal with people of different religion or race on an equal basis, are living proof that healthy societies depend for their stability on equal rights for all. That is why, for example,

we are making our contribution, through the return of British nationals and residents, to the closure of Guantanamo, and why it is our clear policy never to be complicit in torture or rendition to torture. It is why we need to continue to ensure that we adhere to all of our commitments to human rights and home and abroad.

And human rights are relevant not just to how we respond to those who threaten us, but to how we empower those who share our views and aspirations. That is why we are running projects to promote women's rights in places such as Morocco. It is why we support the establishment of an independent judiciary in Iraq and Pakistan. And it is why we are promoting an independent media through projects in Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Middle East, and through our support for BBC World service's launch of 24-hour BBC Arabic and BBC Persian TV.

Our second policy goal is about preventing and resolving conflict. Modern warfare means that civilians are often the victims. Increasingly violence is deliberately directed against them. But in all cases they suffer because their livelihoods are destroyed, because they are displaced, or because they are unable to access food and healthcare. This is why it is vital that we make the Responsibility to Protect a reality, not just a slogan.

Mary Robinson once said, "today's human rights violations are the

causes of tomorrow's conflicts". Conflict prevention means addressing problems of political and economic marginalisation that can fuel violence and instability, and it can also mean using military power with civilian forces where minority rights will otherwise be abused.

UK foreign policy supports political dialogue as the only solution for the world's most intractable conflicts. In the Middle East, the conflict over the creation of a Palestinian state able to live at peace with a secure Israel, we have not had a political process for seven years. Now we have one - started at Annapolis, fragile in many ways, under assault from various sides, but still the only hope for citizens on both sides united only by the misery and insecurity of the current impasse. In Cyprus, recent elections have given dialogue a chance; we will support it. In Northern Iraq and Southern Turkey the greatest threat to the PKK is dialogue between Turkey and the Kurdish Regional Government.

UK foreign policy will also support the use of the hard power of military force - from Kosovo to Darfur to Afghanistan and Iraq. Military victories never provide solutions, but they can provide the space for political and economic solutions to be found. And without military power, the result can be more bloodshed.

The third policy goal is to promote a low carbon, high growth, global

economy.

Some people might ask what this has to do with human rights. But human rights are not just civil and political; they are economic, social and cultural. And these different rights are interdependent. When political rights are absent, state power and corruption grow, and the people are impoverished. Where economic and social rights are absent, the temptations of dictatorship are greater.

So we need to turn two of the world's great challenges - economic development and climate change - from two separate and parallel tracks, and often two separate sets of campaigning organisations never mind government departments, into two sides of a single coin.

The challenge is to align the three main sources of power and influence in the world: global civil society; international institutions; and national governments. First, global civil society and the media can continue to use the power of public attention on individual cases to make the case for change.

All over the world, the power of technology is providing real time examples of oppression. In China the prominent human rights campaigner Hu Jia has just been tried for the crime of 'subversion of state power' after having been under house arrest for over half a year. And Yang Chunlin, a land-rights campaigner who published an open

letter about human rights, was sentenced yesterday to 5 years' imprisonment for the crime of 'inciting subversion of state power'. In Iran at least 10 people are currently under sentence of death by stoning. And with more than 500 cases in just seven months last year, torture is a growing problem in Zimbabwe.

Networks and mass communication can be used to foment hate, but they can also be used to convey the power of the ideas in the Universal Declaration. And sometimes campaigns, supported by governments, achieve their aims. In Malawi we funded a project which led the abolition of the mandatory death penalty. 30 prisoners were subsequently removed from death row and sentenced. In Saudi Arabia, international concern helped secure a Royal pardon for the Qatif girl who, after being gang raped, was charged for violating laws on segregation of the sexes and sentenced to 200 lashes and 6 months imprisonment.

Global media and civil society have unparalleled reach and influence, but they have little formal legitimacy. For that, they require international institutions - the fourth priority in the FCO's new strategic framework.

I believe in the power of international organisations. The UN, EU, Nato have been great civilising institutions of the post second world war period. But if we are to uphold international rules and norms in a time of great global change, our international architecture needs to better reflect the 21st century world in which we live and the 21st century challenges that we face.

We need to build a clearer consensus about the rights and responsibilities of nation states in advancing the Universal Declaration at home and abroad. The nation state

remains the basis of allegiance and authority. But the acceptance of universal values, and our deepening interdependence means we must adjust our traditional notions of national sovereignty.

That is why we need 'emerging and existing powers to demonstrate 'responsible sovereignty' - not just upholding the obligations towards their citizens that are embodied in human rights treaties, but also demonstrating responsibility to the international community.

But responsible sovereignty is relevant to each and every country because universal values means that power cannot be untrammelled. Citizens have rights, and states have a responsibility to protect them. And in extreme cases the failure of states to exercise their responsibility to protect their own populations from genocide or ethnic cleansing warrant intervention on humanitarian grounds.

Interdependence means that states interfere consciously and unconsciously with each other's affairs. We have no choice but to interfere. The choice is whether this is based on agreed rules and responsibilities, or merely a free for all. The only way to protect the climate, the international financial system, counter-terrorism and weapons proliferation is to agree on shared rules and responsibilities.

And that is why an alliance between the influence of civil society, the legitimacy of international institutions, and the power of government can be a force for good in the world and a force for progress in human rights. I look forward to working with you in that project.

David Miliband is British Foreign Secretary. The article has been excerpted from his speech at the launching of the FCO Human Rights Report 2007 in London on March 25.

# Should we import teachers?

PROF. QUAZI FARUQUE AHMED

IT may surprise many if not all, to know that acute crisis of experienced and qualified teachers in Bangladesh will soon necessitate import of teachers. M. Saifur Rahman who enjoyed longest tenure as Finance Minister, predicted such a possibility in a London assembly of Bangladeshi citizens in the early part of the last four party alliance government. He made this statement out of disgust in the face of serious shortage of English teachers in the country resulting in dearth of Bangladeshis who could communicate fluently in English required for employment prospects in the United Kingdom. With the passage of time and continued negligence of our policy makers at the helm of affairs, the crisis has deepened further bringing it to the present impasse, which draws serious attention to the non availability of teachers of Mathematics and Science subjects also. To speak the truth, even teachers who can teach Bangla with correct pronunciation and adequate knowledge in the subject, have also become rare now.

Iran and other countries to teach English and Mathematics. Some were found to go on deputation/lien. Foreign students were also found to study in our medical and engineering colleges. I saw students from Jordan in Dhaka College, in the early sixties. Now we hear of admission of some foreign students in language and other few courses in Dhaka University. We also know that some young members of the defence services from neighbouring and other countries study training courses in our National Defence College (NDC).

But shortage of teachers has brought a new dimension in our crisis-ridden education system which deserves immediate redress. A recent survey reveals that meritorious students entering the teaching profession leave it within 1 to 3 years in search of better job, dignified position and social status. So assumably only those people continue to remain in the profession who do not have the scope to opt for a new job due to over age, or are reluctant to take further risk of a new job.

Apathy and dislike for teaching profession was mentioned in the first Bangladesh Education Commission Report also. The Education Commission headed by renowned

scientist Dr. Qudrat-E-Khuda could guess the seriousness of the possible shortage of qualified teachers in future even in 1974. It was stated, inter alia, in the report that the secondary level left teaching as a profession, instance of which was found nowhere in the world. Needless to say, lack of due care and neglect of the policy makers and our shortsighted politicians as well, are responsible for this deplorable condition.

Both retirement of the experienced teachers and the exit of the meritorious persons from this profession within 1 to 3 years of entry have worsened the problem. Pious wishes for quality education without realising the gravity and extent of the impediments in its way, has also become a tragic comedy. Though its consequence is to be borne by the entire nation and there is no visible remedy to it in the very near future. This sad state of affairs in education is really unfortunate when human development based on education, research, training and quality management is ensured in almost everywhere in the globe.

Only a few news headlines in our national dailies published during the last two months, will help realise the gravity of the situation in regard to

shortage of qualified teachers at every tier of education:

- "55 primary schools in Jessore are run without headmasters."
- "Education seriously hampered: 19 educational institutions are run by acting headmasters" at Kendua, Netrakona.
- "Posts of headmaster in 13 schools at Najirpur Upazila lying vacant for long."
- "10 educational institutions (non govt. schools, colleges and madrasahs) are collapsing with acting headmasters" at Bheramara.
- "Posts of 17 teachers including vice principal, vacant since 2006. The post of Librarian is vacant for the last 27 years and that of physical education teacher for 15 years" at Narail Victoria College."
- "Education hampered in Khulna Medical College due to lack of teachers..."
- "Chittagong University faces teachers crisis"
- "Posts of headmaster vacant in 13 educational institutions at Chatmohar", Pabna.
- Posts of heads of educational institutions lie vacant now not only in Dhaka city, Non-government educational institutions who bear the bulk of the load in education in the coun-

try are not in a position to appoint headmasters/principals, vice-principals, assistant headmasters and senior teachers, in many cases, even after repeated advertisements for those posts. The situation is worse in the rural areas. Naturally this is hampering normal administrative and academic function of the educational institutions. Non-govt. school Headmasters and Assistant Headmasters receiving govt. salary (under M.P.O), who preferred to their home or permanent abode leaving their present work place, were not allowed by the government on the plea of their holding more than one third division in academic career. The Education Ministry utterly failed to take note of (1) the crisis due to shortage of experienced teachers and that (2) the teachers who had already earned experience through years no matter whether they possess one or more third division, cannot be replaced very readily. Moreover, there is no alternative to experience and one cannot get experienced overnight also. It may be mentioned here that Education Ministry in 1992 extended the tenure of services of English teachers from 60 to 65 years in three slabs (2+2+1). But

government is not abiding by its own order now. However, that has further aggravated the shortage crisis.

It is learnt that inaction, dilatory decision, high handedness and indecision in the Education Ministry has multiplied the crisis of the acute shortage of experienced and qualified teachers. The picture is more or less the same in other national areas also where knowledge and expertise are cognizable factors. The small number of scientists we have are also supposed to remain vacant for a long time, in case they are not reappointed. The Atomic Energy Commission is also going to face crisis in the recruitment of scientists. It may need to import scientists from other countries to fill in the posts! Meanwhile, it is learnt that government has been advised to extend the tenure and utilise the services of the retired scientists as much as possible to avert the crisis.

Adoption of such measures may help revitalize education sector as well, to some extent, and the pressing urgency to import teachers from foreign countries as a dire necessity, will also be decreased at least for the time being. In this connection I would like to suggest the following

- remedial measures:
- Utilisation of the services of already retired senior teachers, through extension/reappointment.
- Extensive subject wise in-service training programmes for teachers, giving priority to Mathematics and Science subjects, and English as a foreign language.
- Area-wise exchange programmes of experienced and qualified teachers between the local educational institutions to cover up the present deficiency.
- Withdrawal and amendment of government orders and strictures prohibiting reappointment of retired teachers, and providing Monthly Pay from government as before, to the index number holder senior teachers who joined new institutions of their preference.
- Decentralisation of structures of education including training programmes avoiding total concentration in Dhaka city.
- Utilisation of the services of Teachers Organization in Teachers Training Programmes as is done in the developed and developing countries.
- Introduction of separate pay scales for teachers in all tiers to attract merit, guaranteeing job security and regular promotions
- Ensuring incentives and provi-

sions for research and development of further education programmes for teachers.

The shortage of teachers once again has amply made it clear that total overhauling of the state of education is very much required. Otherwise quality education with qualified teachers will continue to remain a far cry. The nation cannot afford to sustain losses and waste in human development for long. So the need for change of attitude and mindset of our policy makers taking into account the stark real fact that our vast population can be transformed into genuine human resources only through education and process of human development. They need to keep in mind that education, individual and social development along with desired national progress are inseparable. Those must be attended to with appropriate action at appropriate time, farsightedness, and adhering to democratic practice of interaction with the stake-holders.

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