

## Avoid reverse politicisation

Why must the hope for change be so rudely dashed?

WE are both surprised and frustrated at the news that Vice Chancellor, Bangabandhu Medical University Prof. Nazrul Islam has been called to quit by the Health Minister without assigning any reason whatsoever. As if in a gesture of favour being done to him, he is asked to resign citing personal reasons -- the highhanded manner could hardly be disguised in a wrap of superficial courtesy.

Prof. Islam, a non-political, fully professional, appointee of the last caretaker government took over the most prestigious post-graduate medical institution for research and treatment a year ago to cleanse it of corruption and malpractice that had seeped the organisation -- thanks to BNP loyalist hierarchy at the BSMMU. There cannot any second opinion on the paramount need for a neutral administration running such a highly specialised institution.

All that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina needs to do is to refresh her memory of the vociferous criticism and volumes of media and public outcries that the BNP-led four party alliance government was subjected to for its sweeping politicisation of institutions having to do with rule of law, governance, service delivery and public welfare. It can hardly be overstated that such exposes had played out in shaping the four-party alliance's heavy electoral defeat in December, and conversely, the AL's massive mandate for change. But where is the change in politics and governance if Sheikh Hasina gives in to pressures from within to resort to reverse politicisation.

Promoters of self-serving policies would activate themselves the moment a party comes to power and try and build their argument for change on the premise of victimisation and martyr complex they had been through during the erstwhile government as though they needed to be rewarded for their perceived suffering in the past. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina cannot therefore be oblivious of the fact that individual or group expediency or personal aspiration prompt people around her to persuade her to go for reshuffle in an organisation, even where it is not considered desirable. Once taking over, they would use funds and position of the office for self-aggrandisement and creation of personal fiefdoms while the charter of the institutions get trampled.

What is more to the point, the image of the ruling party and the government suffers badly in the public eye. So, in a very narrow political sense also, reverse politicisation is a tactical blunder. The people expect of the PM to break the cycle politicisation of public institutions once and for all.

## Wild cat strike by interns?

Denial of service to patients reprehensible

THE 14-hour strike by the DMCH interns ended on Saturday, after the health minister and the health adviser had intervened to bring the striking doctors back to duty. The strike was called to protest the alleged misbehaviour by the relatives of a man who had died half an hour after his admission in the hospital.

Now this is the kind of action least expected of the men entrusted with the responsibility of providing much-needed medicare to people. The doctors, in their bid to protest what they deemed unfair, themselves indulged in activities which were a stark violation of the norms of their noble profession. Did they bother to think how the 14-hour strike would affect the people seeking medical treatment in the hospital? Report says over 2,000 patients, many of them in need of emergency medical assistance, were left unattended for hours. The doctors are reported to have dissuaded their senior colleagues from attending the patients and nobody was allowed to enter the hospital as the strike was on. What were the interns trying to achieve through inflicting such punishment on the innocent treatment seekers? And what right do they have to bring the country's premier public hospital to a complete standstill? We wonder how could they have enhanced their self-esteem by not serving the ordinary patients in need of their care. Evidently, the relatives of the dead man were under the impression that it was the doctors' negligence which led to his death. This kind of assumption was a matter for internal investigation and not something to be acting impulsively on. But the doctors' response has been grossly disproportionate as they even did not return the dead body to the relatives before a negotiated settlement could be reached with the health authorities.

Nowhere in the civilised world would anybody ever come across health service providers or doctors showing such insensitivity to the sufferings of people. The 14-hour strike is an example of highly irresponsible behaviour and lack of professionalism by the interns which they should endeavour not to repeat if they are to establish goodwill with the people. Punishing the innocent patients to settle scores with a perceived tormentor is not a doctor's job.

## Elephant in the room?

Those lofty socialist dreams soon disappeared in thin air with the appearance of a band of greedy politicians who found a bonanza in the Bretton Woods prescription of economic conduct.

M. ABDUL HAFIZ

THE wielders of power, ensconced in its citadel, seldom venture demolition of established order so that their vested interests are protected from its falling debris. Until their moribund equation with the existing systems crumbles their preferred choice is status quo -- whether it is the BNP or AL holding the sceptre.

However much their politicians profess change, they carefully avoid the risks it involves. They talk ad nauseam of engineering, for example, in election whenever they see their prospects threatened, but maintain a deafening silence about undertaking social engineering to benefit the larger segment of our population because it might affect them adversely.

That's the pattern of our political behaviour! As a result, even as an "Awami" train has taken off with its front emblazoned with an invisible banner inscribed with the AL government's promise of a "Digital Bangladesh," it is frequently subjected to jerks, jolts and jitters. So much so that those on board are getting restive, not only because of discomfort and inconvenience but also due to apprehension as to the train's destination.

The digital overlords are, in the meantime, nonchalant about the socio-economic equilibrium required for a nation advancing together towards such a goal, about which the people are increasingly becoming sceptical. Unless the pur-

pose and who will be the beneficiaries, of this "Digital Bangladesh" with "Vision 2021" are made clear, it is little more than hollow rhetoric on the surface.

In the first place, there is reason for public apprehension with regard to its feasibility in the face of a global recession without being provided with economic stimulus. Although the government has already handed out a bailout worth Taka 6,000 crores, its scope and coverage are rather narrow; with the exclusion from its windfall, if any, of the larger segment of our population, who will certainly be out of even its trickle-down effect.

Observers see it more as a quid pro quo between the relatively well-off business community in the name of salvaging the RMG export sector and a band of elitist politicians of the BNP -- composed of members of higher echelons of society -- and AL, which is also of the same ilk, though having a pro-poor stance.

Bangladesh came into being with socialism as one of its founding creeds holding out a promise of equal opportunity and egalitarianism, if not distribution of wealth in line with classical socialistic patterns. In a resource-poor Bangladesh we also heard of sharing poverty with each other.

Those lofty socialist dreams soon disappeared in thin air with the appearance of a band of greedy politicians who found a bonanza in the Bretton Woods prescription of economic conduct. Then, in keeping with the global trend, IMF-World Bank dominated economy came to rule the roost



Digital Bangladesh, for whom?

in our economic lives -- leaving the country's poor millions lurching.

Nevertheless, "Digital Bangladesh" is by all means a tremendous idea, though it cannot be achieved piecemeal. The entire country with its entire population will have to move together to achieve this goal. But even a casual glance at the present socio-economic milieu will reveal a divided society hardly capable of moving as a single body. Yes, "Digital Bangladesh" is indeed suggestive of progress and prosperity that are meant to be shared by all, but the wedge existing between the political class and the people renders it elusive.

Any such venture presupposes dismantling of the old socio-economic order and bringing about at least socio-economic equilibrium, if not equality, to involve the entire population in the process. More importantly, it would perhaps also require

state intervention in favour of the entire people, and not only a segment. Through massive social engineering Singapore and South Africa did it by bringing their multi-racial society, immersed in terrible socio-economic disparity, on the same wavelength of national interest and moral standard.

In the large swathe of the underdeveloped world, the politicians do put on a messianic mask but seldom break with the past, steeped in social injustice and pervasive delusion, lest they themselves have to part with their vested interests and privileged position. We eagerly look forward to embracing a "Digital Bangladesh" with "Vision 2021," but the entire population will have to be taken along to make it a reality.

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## Landmark change in Pakistan

Pakistan's altered political equations spell new contestations and instability. The central question is whether the democratisation process consolidates itself to a point where Pakistan is better able to tackle its multiple and structural crises, combat jihadi extremism, and build stronger civilian institutions.

PRAFUL BIDWAI

IT was the moral strength of the civil society mobilisation to restore Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry that peacefully brought President Zardari to his knees. The agitation has broken the fear barrier. This is a historic gain.

Repressive measures against the lawyers' Long March proved useless. The police didn't obey orders to prevent the march, and the government was forced to announce that it would restore Mr. Chaudhry and other deposed judges and appeal the recent order disqualifying the Sharif brothers.

People's power has won out in Pakistan -- for the third time since end-2007. This gives the lie to the proposition that that Pakistani democratic aspirations have been blunted by Islam and/or long years of military rule.

Several processes mediated the government's climb-down; army chief Kiyani's meetings with Zardari, Gilani and Sharif, and calls by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, special envoy Richard Holbrooke, and UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband. Clinton reportedly threatened to cut off aid to Pakistan.

Zardari resisted restoring the deposed

judges until it became plain that his authority would totally collapse unless he agreed to a solution based on the 2006 Charter of Democracy between Benazir Bhutto and Sharif.

This shows that Pakistan's power centres are neither fully civilian nor internal; its crisis cannot be resolved with its own political resources.

Hopefully, the March 16 breather will revive Pakistan's democratic institutions.

This is a tall order. The parties that have gained the most from the Long March are Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), Jamaat-i-Islami and Imran Khan's Tehreek-i-Insaf. These are right-of-centre, with sympathies for religious extremism and reservations about combating the Taliban.

Whether they can be accommodated into Pakistan's power structures, and how various individuals act, will determine whether Pakistan becomes a democracy with legitimacy, or descends into chaos.

Justice Chaudhry has emerged as a symbol of judicial integrity because he stood against President Musharraf's November 2007 Provisional Constituted Order (PCO) to declare emergency and dismiss judges.

This is no small irony. Chaudhry was himself sworn in as a Supreme Court judge in 2000 under another PCO! He validated Gen Musharraf's military takeover and the 17th Amendment.

To his credit, Chaudhry changed and became a defender of judicial independence to the point of promoting activism. Musharraf was alarmed at his investigation into the sale of a state-owned steel mill and some 500 cases of "mission persons."

The Supreme Court under him must not fight shy of inquiring into the "missing persons" cases. Many of them were suspected jihadi militants or separatists, rounded up without proper investigation or charges.

Nawaz Sharif's stock has risen to a point where people might forget his tainted past. By available indications, US would like him to be accommodated in the central power structure so that he's "inside the tent." This must be done in a dignified, democratic way.

This means the US must be more responsive to Pakistani sensibilities while carrying out drone and missile attacks.

Sharif has to play a statesman-like role and honour the Charter of Democracy, which says that neither the PPP nor the PML will resort to military or external mediation to resolve differences, and set up a national judicial commission to appoint judges.

This Charter has been violated repeatedly. Zardari merely imitated Musharraf in packing the courts. The solution isn't to discard the charter, but to implement it honestly with an expansive vision and willingness to build democratic consensus.

Zardari has emerged mauled from the Long March stand-off. His over-reach has further eroded his authority. Worse, he has tried to undermine his own party. He had no organisational/political relationship with the PPP till his wife was killed.

As PPP co-chairperson, he has marginalised or banished every major leader, including Makhdoom Amin Fahim, lawyers' movement leader Aitzaz Ahsan, Leader of the House Raza Rabbani, and Benazir Bhutto confidants Nahid Khan, Safdar Abbasi and Sherry Rehman. A question-mark now hangs over his ability to govern Pakistan. But he's still playing devious games with the PML(Q)'s help. The PPP should immediately replace him. If the NRO is struck down, that will make untenable his continuation as a politician -- even without constitutional office.

Pakistan's altered political equations spell new contestations and instability. The central question is whether the democratisation process consolidates itself to a point where Pakistan is better able to tackle its multiple and structural crises, combat jihadi extremism, and build stronger civilian institutions.

The whole world has a vital stake in Pakistan's sustained evolution towards democracy. If Pakistan succeeds, the world will gain immensely; so will the cause of moderation in Islamic societies. If Pakistan descends into chaos, it will become the world's primary fountainhead of extremism, terror, and Taliban-style brutishness.

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## Power management

If the big shopping malls in the city are closed at dusk, it will help to save nearly 75 mw, which could be diverted to other areas. The government has no other alternative but to drastically reduce power consumption in the less important sectors of the economy to overcome the crisis.

A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

THE country is running acutely short of power nowadays. As a result, load shedding and the consequent suffering of the people have become grave and chronic. Many areas in the capital itself go dark and dry without power and water for hours everyday.

The present installed generation capacity is 3,600 mw, but ageing of the plants over the years has resulted in decline of generation capacity to about 2,950mw. The demand for electricity is more than 4,500 mw.

The capital city is now being provided with 1,185 mw of electricity against the demand for about 1,800 mw. But this demand will rise to 2,200 mw when summer arrives. City dwellers are likely to face severe load-shedding as they will get just half of the demand during summer.

People across the country are now experiencing frequent power outages that, in some places, last for about twelve hours in a day. Frequent power disruptions have been a constant source of misery for the people.

The high-sounding promises by the authorities, abolition of corruption-ridden Desa, and creation of Dhaka Power Distribution Company (DPDC) did not bring any respite to the suffering people. Recurring power failures have crossed the people's tolerance level and their frustration is now likely to give way to anger.

The way the caretaker government of Fakhruddin Ahmed managed the critical power situation is really laudable. It suspended electricity supply to big shopping malls and less important small industries during evening peak hours, and cut power supply to billboards. Rationing of electricity and proper management of the sector helped to overcome the crisis to some extent. Surely, the power management is faulty.

The lack of proper coordination among officials of state-owned bodies in the power sector -- Power Division, PDB, Power Grid Co, DPDC, Reb and Desco -- has aggravated the power outage situation. There is a crying need to address the crisis most efficiently.

The Ministry of Power, Energy and

Mineral Resources is now under the control of the prime minister, an adviser and a state minister. Such triple-tier control sometime creates problem in quick decision-making. So, the energy ministry should be placed under a competent minister for its efficient management. Efficient and dedicated people must also be placed for proper management of the power generation and distribution systems.

Many important cities in the world have electricity rationing, where all shopping malls remain closed after evening. All shops in New Delhi close at seven in the evening.

We should also strictly follow this norm. If the big shopping malls in the city are closed at dusk, it will help to save nearly 75 mw, which could be diverted to other areas. The government has no other alternative but to drastically reduce power consumption in the less important sectors of the economy to overcome the crisis.

There had been huge allocation in the national budget for the power sector every year during the BNP-led four-party alliance rule, which allocated some Tk.16,409 cores in the five financial years for development of the power sector. But it had been able to add only a meagre 80 mw electricity during its tenure.

Bangladesh also spent \$178,44,85,892 (equivalent to Tk.12,000 crore) for expatriate experts in the power sector in the last 15 years. This amount was spent for 148 foreign experts in six state-run power plants, excluding the cost for their accommoda-

tion, cars, medical, airfares and insurance. The amount spent in the name of technology transformation was quite enough for setting up at least five 1000mw capacity power plants in the country.

Currently, the country has about 85 lakh power connections covering nearly five crore people. The number of connections was 50 lakh five years ago. 3,100 mw power was generated in 2002, and stayed even with demand of 3,100 mw. In 2009, only 3,300 mw power is generated while the number of connections has almost doubled.

Bangladesh is a country hungry for more electrical energy, but fails to develop and deliver the necessary amount. The 15 years of democracy led to so many unrealistic programs for energy development, but made very little progress. These problems must now be solved with utmost sincerity and determined efforts, otherwise the country will never be able to get out to the power crisis.

This power crisis has not befallen the nation all on a sudden, but is the natural consequence of years of negligence. The efforts of the successive governments to increase power generation capacity had been quiet negligible, despite the Tk.16,409 crore spent in the five years. The present power crisis has exposed the avarice and weakness of the immediate past government. Such a situation is bound to happen when the lack of competence is complemented by greed for money.

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