

New security measures for secretariat

Those with genuine grievances should not be turned away

THE move by the government to introduce electronic identity cards for secretariat employees as well as visitors is a response to the problem of entry that has persisted for long. There are two important reasons why such a move should be welcomed. The first is that security is fundamentally a concern for any government, especially in these days when security threats happen to be casting a shadow on a smooth functioning of administration.

The second, more germane to conditions in Bangladesh, is that over the past few years maintaining discipline inside the premises of the secretariat has turned out to be a difficult act. That has had to do with an onrush of visitors as well as the rather lax security measures traditionally observed at the secretariat gates. Of course, this is not to suggest that such has always been the case. Indeed, the administration, through the police, has often resorted to stringent moves to keep the secretariat free of the chaos which results from an unimpeded stream of visitors.

But these periodic instances of toughness have clearly not helped. This is borne out by the fact that every day the secretariat in general and the various ministries housed there in particular literally are besieged by people intent on a redress of grievances or seeking favours from various tiers of officialdom. Understandably, during periods of political government, ministers often have to deal with their constituents and followers who make it a point to visit the secretariat either to air some grievances or as part of lobbying for favour. At times like that, individual citizens with genuine grievances and needing to meet the relevant officials have found it rather difficult to enter the secretariat or have their problems looked into.

The wider difficulty here is that with so many people thronging the corridors of the secretariat, it becomes nearly impossible for the ministries to conduct their routine business. That only leads to a stultification of administrative work and sloth tends to affect the work culture. For such reasons alone, it is highly desirable that the authorities should be mulling the new security measures. That they are actually in the process of planning and implementing the steps is encouraging.

While on the subject, we also think that a change in mindset among those working inside the secretariat is necessary. They ought to be able to discourage their followers and party people and other political elements from barging into the secretariat with their grievances and instead, if necessary, see them at their official residences. Indeed, clear lines should be drawn where dealing with personal matters, constituency issues and official business is concerned.

Jalil's faux pas again!

What good has it done to the party and his self?

A leader Abdul Jalil's observation that his party reached some kind of understanding before the last general elections indeed sounds like a gimmick coming from an unhappy party veteran. What more it is outright petulant and, needless to say, highly irresponsible.

First of all, it is incomprehensible why Jalil should say something that could only demean and embarrass the very party of which he is an adviser and with which has had a very long association. He was totally oblivious of the fact that it could create unnecessary confusion in the public mind.

But if he thinks he will be taken seriously than that notion cannot certainly be borne out by his track record of unsubstantiated comments made in a huff and without regard for any likely fallout. One can hardly forget the 'trump card' trick that he played so vigorously to predict a doomsday scenario for BNP in 2004.

If Jalil had any point to make against his party leaders he should have done so as an adviser to the party within the party forum, instead, he went public and that too overseas. Why should he have made any comment far less a serious allegation in a foreign country.

Again reportedly a wrathful reaction was shown against Jalil in London which was not the right way to go about it in a democracy. For, there are civilised ways of dealing with a non-conformist in a party just as there is a responsible manner in which to express dissent or a different point of view.

EDITORIAL

The Daily Star

Water on the Moon emboldens space voyagers

The news of water on the moon has further broadened scientists' imagination about future manned voyage deeper into space aiming for planets from a moon-based launching pad.

SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

THE moon was conquered on 16 July 1969. Later five more successful moon landings were performed, the last one being on 7 December 1972. As everyone knows, all the manned lunar missions were conducted by the USA.

It all started with the aim to beat the Soviets in the space race as they had been playing the leading role from the beginning with their first manned flights in the earth's orbit. But later even after six successful landings by the American astronauts on the moon, the whole programme had to be given up, for even the richest and the most technologically advanced nation on earth found it to be too burdensome to bankroll such a space programme for an indefinite period.

According to 1969 US dollar, in all, the Apollo series of lunar manned missions cost between 20 and 25.4 billion, which would come to around US\$ 145 billion when calculated against the current 2008 worth of the American dollar.

However, the 381.7 kg of lunar soil that the manned probes brought home was of great value to the researchers.

But space exploration was not all about reaching the moon. It was also about satisfying one of the great powers' egos. If the goal of sending rockets carrying man and sophisticated scientific instruments into space is to crack the mysteries of the yet unknown celestial objects like the Sun and its planetary family at the outset, then the moon is just our own backyard. In that sense, the journey to the moon or making a landing on its surface is like having a foot in the door of a yet greater mission of voyaging into the interplanetary space.

So, after all the initial curiosities and enthusiasms, there was a lull in the race to the moon, as the Soviets opted out of it. They rather focused on the orbital probes to know about the immediate surroundings of the earth and the moon. Their cosmonauts conducted numerous tests on the endurance of life in the conditions of weightlessness and achieved various physical and technical feats

there. Later, the Americans also joined the Soviets in carrying out joint exercises on stations floating in space.

In fact, the moon could be an ideal launching pad for further voyages into the interplanetary space. Unfortunately, considering the conditions existing there both according to theory and after what the astronauts had observed themselves, the moon appeared to be too hostile to life, as it had neither air nor water. And given the formidable cost of landing itself, the very suggestion of creating an artificial condition with water and air supplied from the mother earth and then make onward manned voyages into the solar system sounded too extravagant and imaginary. And it is not only the colossal costs, the sustainability of any future space station on the moon was called into question due to the extremely inhospitable conditions existing there.

But meanwhile, the two pioneers of space exploration, the US and the Soviet Union (now Russia), did not stop sending unmanned missions to the orbits of the different planets in the solar system. Hundreds of such missions had gone into space, some to probe all the planets and their moons. The most coveted destination in the solar system after the moon is the mysterious red planet, Mars.

Depending on the nature of the mis-

sions those are termed flybys, orbiters, landers and rovers. The flyby missions sent spacecraft that flew past the planet taking as many pictures as those probes could. Then were the orbiters that explored the surrounding space of the planet globally and for longer times. With the increasing knowledge of interplanetary space, Mars landers including mobile vehicles were also sent to have a feel of the Martian surface and test samples of its soil with the help of remote control devices. There are also on the cards sending of missions like flying airplanes and balloons in the Martian sky; sending probes deeper into the red planet's ground and bringing back soil samples from there and so on.

Of late, another good piece of news has stirred up the passions of the space scientists further. Recent data from very sensitive devices aboard India's lunar probe Chandrayaan-1 has got strong evidence of water in the moon's dust.

The news of water on the moon has further broadened scientists' imagination about future manned voyage deeper into space aiming for planets from a moon-based launching pad. Let us wait with our fingers crossed and see if further experiments prove beyond doubt the verity of the claim that water is really present in the moon's dirt.

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Can we opt for democratic socialism?

For Bangladesh, Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz's prescription of an economic development where, in his words, there will be "moral growth, growth that is sustainable, that increases living standard not just today but for future generations as well, and that leads to a more tolerant, open society" appears to be most suitable.

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WITH the demise of the Soviet Union socialist politico-economic system has all but vanished from the global scene. Though the global recession, affecting both the developed and the developing countries, did bring on a muted debate on the most suitable system that the world can adopt, the sins of the socialist system in the past and the overarching influence of the Western system have denied any possibility of a serious debate on the issue.

Countries like Bangladesh have not fared well under either system, and the restoration of pluralism in our body politic has not improved our condition from LDC to a higher one. A serious investigation could be undertaken, since the ills of socialism are now well known to us all, whether some sort of egalitarian distribution of national income should not be aimed at.

Such an enquiry is overdue because of the failure of the Western world to see ahead the meltdown that Nobel laureate Paul Krugman describes as "predictable failure (and) the (economic) profession's blindness to the very possibility of catastrophic failure in a market economy."

Krugman was critical of economists who, until the Great Depression, saw

capitalism as a perfect or near perfect system and fell in love with the concept as soon as the specter of the Great Depression receded from the public mind.

This school of economists ignored "the limitations of human rationality that often lead to bubbles and busts; to the problems of institutions that run amok; to the imperfections of the markets that can cause the economy's operating system to undergo sudden unpredictable crashes; and to the danger created when regulators don't believe in regulations" (NYT-September 2009: How did economists get it so wrong - Paul Krugman).

Could one conceive of democratic socialism that follows an electoral, reformist or evolutionary path to socialism, rather than a revolutionary one and distinct from communism? An economist has described it as "transformative democratic socialism," referring to the politics of the Clement Attlee government (a strong welfare state, fiscal redistribution, some nationalisation) and "revisionist democratic socialism," as developed by Labor minister and thinker Anthony Crosland and former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

Anthony Crosland contended that a more "benevolent" form of capitalism had emerged since the (Second World

War)... According to Crosland, it was now possible to achieve greater equality in society without the need for "fundamental" economic transformation.

For Crosland, a more meaningful form of equality could be achieved if the growth dividend derived from effective management of the economy was invested in "pro-poor" public services rather than through fiscal redistribution (Robert PageJnl.Soc.Pol 2007).

The inequity that rules the global economic order, notwithstanding the thesis propounded by Thomas Friedman in his book The World is Flat because, he says, technological forces have dismantled the barriers between the rich and the poor segments of the global society. Not so writes Naomi Klein in her book The Shock Doctrine, where she describes the rise of free market fundamentalism as "disaster capitalism."

In a review of her book Joseph Stiglitz speaks of the economic shock therapy given by the corporations and politicians who exploit the fear and disorientation of the people caused by wars, terror, coup d'état, and natural disasters.

While preaching the merits of Adam Smith's theory of minimalist role by the government to lead a country "to the highest degree of opulence from lowest barbarism" advocates of capitalism ignored that perfect marriage between demand and supply is a theoretical concept, particularly in places where few firms forming syndicates control the supply and price of commodities.

In economies like ours, captains of industry and commerce often also dictate standard economic policies, either as pressure groups on the political authority or

on their election as members of parliament.

With the withering away of idealistic politics and the advent of commerce based politics and expensive elections, politicians in both the developed and developing worlds have increasingly become dependent on donations from industrialists to finance their elections. Donations being hardly given for altruistic reasons the donors expect returns on their "investment." Such concentric relationship invariably leads to inequity and power.

Political theorist Benjamin Barber's criticism rests on his argument that while early capitalism encourages virtues with the working men's "robust motion of agency and spirited grittiness" while the decay that spells later-day capitalism suffers from a paradox -- "the needy are without income and the well heeled are without needs."

For Bangladesh, Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz's prescription of an economic development where, in his words, there will be "moral growth, growth that is sustainable, that increases living standard not just today but for future generations as well, and that leads to a more tolerant, open society" appears to be most suitable.

The idea is to avoid a situation as in the US today, where 20% of the wealth is possessed by only 1% of the population. As the recent Eid-ul-Fitr has shown, increase in income distribution between the haves and the have-nots may stunt the development process of the country.

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The significance of Durga Puja

The incarnation of Devi Durga represents this unity. Lakshmi and Ganesha are placed to the right of Durga, while to the left are Saraswati and Kartikeya. Lakshmi represents wealth, while Ganesha stands for manpower. Kartikeya represents the strength of the warrior and Saraswati stands for knowledge.

SOURAV BHATTACHERJEE

UNITY can be considered the root of development for a nation. This fundamental force can be used in different activities related to the welfare of a nation. In the image of Devi Durga, the picture of a united nation is elaborately sketched. In the Vedik Shukta, Devi says, "I am the state, I am the soul of the universe."

Commonly, four categories of people are seen in all countries as well as in all races -- the scholar, the warrior, the trader and the worker. The scholars lay out a nation's various programs and activities and thus they lead a nation. The intrepid warrior guards a nation from internal and external forces. Under this parasol, the traders manage the fortunes of the country.

The worker's capital is her/his physical strength and is regarded as a blessing from birth. The workers sustain the welfare of the country entirely. So, the four classes can be categorised as wisdom, prowess, resources and manpower. When the four forces are united, the nation proceeds to success.

Similarly, the incarnation of Devi Durga represents this unity. Lakshmi and Ganesha are placed to the right of Durga, while to the left are Saraswati and Kartikeya. Lakshmi represents wealth, while Ganesha stands for manpower. Kartikeya represents the strength of the warrior and Saraswati stands for knowledge. And Devi Durga never comes down to earth alone. She comes along with her four children and this is Her entire form. With Her children, Durga is the deification of a complete nation.

Why does the season of Durga puja start with worship of a Bel tree? The Bel tree is regarded as Sribriksha or the tree of grace. And Devi Durga also symbolises wealth, power, and victory. For this reason, the tree is worshipped as Her symbol until the spirit of Durga is established in the image or pratima.

In the Puranas and Tantric literature, great importance has been given to this tree for its herbal medicinal powers. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are its three leaves and Shakti is the stem. It is as great as the trishul, and thus it is a favourite of Shiva.

Social development and social welfare are also depicted in the worship of Devi. Devi Durga protects the ten directions with Her ten arms. Her hands symbolise work and She uses them to call all to work. The image of Devi not only discloses the steps of worship and its stages, but the development and welfare of the society are also portrayed in Her legend.

The entire link between the Goddess and the community resides here. The Goddess lives in us. She comes down to earth with the purpose of serving the eternally problem-ridden poverty-stricken humankind, leaving behind the comforts of Her sublime habitat in the mountains. She incessantly attempts to subdue the animal in people. She plainly shows herself in every sphere -- from husbandry to mining, health and morality. The rituals of Her great bath on Ashtami make a remote allusion to this secret deep significance.

To bathe the Devi with water from the rivers, streams, lakes and oceans of Bharat is a custom. Here the map of a united India comes to our mind. This is the India, which is baptised by the water of her different pilgrim places. We are awakened again with the feeling of an entire India.

From the scholar to the gardener, potter, weaver, the rituals include active participation of all sections of society. The water used for Her bath is very significant. Five seeds, five plants, cowdung, milk and curd are soaked in

it. Thus the great importance of farming, animal husbandry and forest wealth is recognised. Besides water, gold, pearl, ruby, coral and diamond are deeply important in this celebration indicating the production of wealth and mining resources. As a whole, our entire economic and social commitments are reflected in Her worship.

One question can be raised: Why does Durga ride a lion and why is it her mascot? If we think deeply, we can find out some analogies between Durga and lion. Firstly, the lion manifests strength. The lion leads the animal kingdom, as Devi is the empress of the universe. The lion uncovers his claws and fangs as Durga displays Her weapons. Devi's entangled tuft of hair is analogous to the gorgeous mane of a lion. The lion manifests different power and energies of the gods. Vishnu adorns the lion's neck, Mahadeva his head, Parvati his forehead, Durga his breast, Kartikeya his knuckles, the serpents his sides, the twins Ashwinikumar his ears, the Sun and the Moon his eyes, the Vasus his teeth, Chandika his roar and Yama with Yaksha his two cheeks. To protect and nourish the nation, strength is required. But that strength must follow the laws of truth and ethics. In worshipping Devi Durga, we ask Her to give us strength. And by keeping the lion as Her mascot, She teaches us this lesson.

Source: Hindu Gods and Goddesses by Swami Nirmalananda.

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