

Trade union in RMG sector

Introduce it with safeguards

THE government's decision to introduce trade union in the garment sector--following the deaths of three workers in police firing at Tongi--is understandable. We are open to the initiative, with some safeguards. The situation prevailing in the industry as a whole has to be examined in all its ramifications before an effective solution to the recurring labour unrest can be found.

The point to be noted here is that the whole issue revolves around the question of workers' representation in matters pertaining to their professional interests. True, lack of organised means of articulation and presentation of the workers' grievances before the employers and the labour ministry has been a major missing link in the garments sector. And yet caution is in order because trade unionism, if our past experience is anything to go by, has a record of often degenerating into a tool in the hands of self-seeking coteries operating as workers' representatives. They basically ended up advancing their feuding agenda and self-aggrandisement at the expense of the genuine grievances of the workers. Secondly, trade unionism has had a way of turning into an appendage of a political party. Obviously, we do not want today's medicine to become tomorrow's malady.

If the ruling party and the opposition agree to allow a free and healthy growth of trade unionism focusing on the rights and benefits of the workers alone, it will indeed be an ideal situation. But what we have witnessed over the years is that the demands and sentiments of workers were exploited by the politically motivated elements in the union and they indulged in activities that threatened the very existence of the mills and factories, leading to their ultimate closure.

The workers' rights have to be established within the broad framework of smooth industrial relations where the trade union is supposed to play the role of a positive catalyst. It must be based on professionalism, not primarily thriving on linkages to political party. Nobody should be allowed to use the workers as pawns in the trade union game that serves neither the industries, nor the workers themselves.

So, the need of the hour is not to jump to a solution but to have all the safeguards to trade unions so that they can be the true defenders of the workers' rights and an effective partner in the growth of industries. That said, the rights of workers are too sacrosanct a thing to be ignored or undermined. The parties concerned -- the owners, the government and workers' representatives -- have to evolve the ways and means for introducing a trade union culture that will help establish the workers' rights without affecting production, investment, enterprise and growth.

Toll-seeking BCL elements

Why aren't they reined in?

REPORTEDLY, a Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader of Haji Mohammad Mohsin hall has forced the contractors to stop repair work of a vulnerable portion of the hall that is urgently in need of repair. This, unfortunately, is symptomatic of a spate of extortionist behaviour that elements within BCL have fallen for since the AL came to power.

Given that the work in the said hall of residence involves safety of a large number of students residing therein, it seems extraordinary that a student leader would display the gumption of halting the work related to the wellbeing of the students. The fact has been confirmed by not only the contractor but also the provost of the hall who is apparently helpless against the might of some student leaders.

There is a litany of illegal activity by some elements belonging to the BCL shows a dangerous trend inasmuch as extortionist acts have now spilled into the university campuses from outside. The process of development work of Dhaka University and the halls of residence, it seems, has become hostage to the unlawful demands of these extortionists. These are culpable acts, and to see them being carried on with impunity gives one the cause for worry.

The central BCL leaders, we are told, have warned hall level leaders to refrain from, in their own words, criminal activities, failing which stern action would be taken against the errant persons. We cannot take heart from what these leaders or indeed any AL leader has been, and is, saying in this regard. Let their deeds prove their words.

Many senior AL leaders, and that include the PM, have been saying ad nauseam that such activities would not be tolerated. Yet, in spite of the exhortations, these illegal activities are going on unabated. These words are not only having no effect on the students, these are turning out to be mere rhetoric in the absence of any control being effectively exercised over the unruly elements belonging to the student wing. This state of affairs must be addressed lest the ground under the AL leadership starts to slip away.

One wonders whether the government feels embarrassed by these excesses, but it must be alive to the fact that if unchecked, these could seriously erode its credibility. The government must come down heavily on these elements, without wasting time on identifying them, since no doubt the AL leaders know fully well who they are.

Interest waived, club bills paid

And the cynics continue to gab. They say that if the banks had given that kind of money to the farmers to grow rice, potato, wheat, vegetables and fish, it surely would have come back with interest. If they had given the money to the workers who go abroad with legal work documents, it would have come back with interest.

SHAHNOOR WAHID

IN the golden olden days our fathers used to say that you could get away by doing anything in this country only if you had *mamar jore* (uncle power). This was not mere oratory. There was substance there and we realise the full potency of it today, ever more than our fathers did at that time, when corruption was only at its nascent stage. Our *mamar jore* has elevated us to the highest level, almost to the level of omnipotence. Now everything gets done like magic. Here is what a classic case would look like.

With *mamar jore*, archetypal nephew Haris Mian, a school-dropout-turned-banner-writer-turned-school-committee-member-turned-UP chairman from remote Bariakanda got intimidating sums of money sanctioned from a nationalised bank to set up an industry. He has no education, no experience, no collateral security and above all no personal integrity that are required to qualify for a loan worth millions of dollars. Yet, it took only three months for his project to be approved and the money to reach his account. For lesser humans it usually takes two years.

Once Haris Mian found colossal sums transferred to his account he began to feel like a king. He immediately came to Dhaka and bought a house in Baridhara and with the support of his *mama*, became a member of as many private clubs as possible. He discovered the *aram* and *ayesh* that he longed for while milking cows in his village. He developed a taste bud for the best whisky in the world, and he never rode a car that had a twin in the city.

Then one fine morning, when he was about to yawn away last night's alcoholic stupor, a not-so-fine letter came from the financing bank. It said in clear terms that he

had to pay a substantial amount of money as interest on the loan he took. He has not paid a single amount so far. He did not like the audacity of the bank manager. He contacted his *mama*. What followed from there on came in the newspapers recently.

In the last eight years some nationalised banks have been "kind" enough to forget and forgive the stupendous sum of Tk 3,644 crore in the form of accrued interest on the borrowed amount that some of our illustrious politicians and businessmen were supposed to pay. Only one industry alone was supposed to pay Tk 148 crore as interest against borrowed loan. High officials were moved when they heard their "sad" stories sitting in the bar room of a local club, they cried in unison and then decided to waive the interests. Interestingly enough, the benefit of waiver was given to more defaulters during the last caretaker government in 2007 than it was given any other time. So, I wonder, why businessmen still hold a grudge against the CG!

But the classic story changes its tone and tenor when it comes to poor women like Shokina Begum. It reads something like this. She took micro-credit from somewhere. She failed to pay interest after the fifth instalment. She begged for more time. But after two/three warnings, *creditwallas* raided her house one day and took away her cow and goat. No power could save her, as she did not have a *mama* at the right place.

Then we have the classic story of retired honest men like Mr. Khabir and Mr. Dabir who got high blood pressure and heart problems trying their best to pay HBFC instalments against the loan they had taken years ago to construct a house. They pass sleepless nights fearing HBFC men knocking on the door in the morning. And the following case is real. I know of a senior



No interest waivers for them?

honest retired army officer who had to sell off his dream house at Uttara when he failed to manage the instalment money.

None of the above mentioned lesser humans have any *mama* who knows his way through the catacomb of the parliament building. Hence, it is the first category of people like Haris Mian who enjoys having a blessed *mama* who can influence high officials to waive all interest accrued on loans. Life couldn't be more bounteous than this. My cynical friends tell me that they always come across those "poor" businessmen and politicians hanging around in private clubs every night. To drown their sorrow, they drink expensive scotch, play pool and cards at high stake and go on holiday trips abroad with family and friends.

And the cynics continue to gab. They say that if the banks had given that kind of money to the farmers to grow rice, potato, wheat, vegetables and fish, it surely would have come back with interest. If they had given the money to small-scale private entrepreneurs in Dolai Khal area, who manufacture wonderful little things in lathe machines, it would have come back with interest. If they had

given the money to the workers who go abroad with legal work documents, it would have come back with interest.

But never expect it back from those club-going, BMW-driving, pool-playing, whisky-guzzling, suddenly urbanised Rockefeller wannabees. They are corpse-eating vultures that only look like humans. They circle high above us in groups and then swoop down to feed on the corpse of the poor people of this land. Next time when you meet such a man with a project proposal in your office room, look deeply into his eyes and you will discover yourself looking into the cold eyes of a hungry vulture. Eyes never betray.

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Effective bureaucracy

The calibre of any organisation is primarily determined by the quality and character of the people within it. It needs blending of universal principles and indigenous culture considerations to build an effective public administration.

A.B.M.S ZAHUR

FOR building a modern state effective public administration is considered as the key. State building needs decisions of ruling authorities to be readily translated into effective policies and programs. Sustained progress based on the full utilisation of modern science and technology needs effective administrative capacity. In Bangladesh, whose aim is to achieve the goal of providing substantial benefit for the common people, a level of administrative capacity must be attained. Thus, establishing an effective bureaucracy is essential for attaining the goal of Digital Bangladesh.

Effective bureaucracy is wise and sound personnel development. Personnel administration is an extremely difficult art. The calibre of any organisation is primarily determined by the quality and character of the people within it. It needs blending of universal principles and indigenous culture considerations to

build an effective public administration.

The goal of administrative development is primarily to provide citizens with services. Often, little attention is paid to developing extractive capabilities, particularly with respect to taxing, either with rural peasantry or wealthy associates of the ruling classes. This phenomenon is clearly evident in Bangladesh. In the western world development of bureaucratic structures was intimately linked with the problems of finance and taxation. Governments were able to justify increases in their capacity to extract resources on the ground of compelling demands of war and military threat to their societies.

Most of the developing countries have experienced colonialism. The emphasis of European colonial rule was on establishing extractive capabilities, furthering law and order, and presenting an impersonal concern for administration of justice. In many non-colonial developing countries the problem is in establishing a strong administrative service to give the state a

firmer and more stable form.

Confusion over administrative norms in many developing countries, including Bangladesh, has led to a debate over the extent to which the classic model of bureaucracy (as described by Max Weber) is relevant for guiding administrative development in the developing countries. Some hold that there is a need for raising the level of administrative professionalism.

Some others consider Weber's model, as an abstraction, which has never been and never should be realised by any effective bureaucracy. Thus, efforts to persuade civil services of the developing countries to adhere to Weberian standards is only likely to produce greater bureaucratic inefficiency and inertia.

The conspicuousness of colonial bureaucracies and significant social and cultural status of the members of civil services, it is argued, has created an unhealthy imbalance in institutional development. This has resulted in premature growth of political agencies. Others argue that political rulers of developing countries are adequately in command of political power.

The problem is that too many bureaucracies of developing countries lack power and hence do not have capabilities needed to further economic and social development. Their conclusion is that unless bureaucracies are greatly improved

there cannot be effective programs for progress. The goal of improving administrative performance should, therefore, be more responsive to society's needs.

The central dilemma between the imperatives of power and authority and the requirements for mobilising available knowledge and skills lies at the heart of the process of administrative development. In thinking about almost all specific problems of administrative development it is considered helpful to ask what the implications of power are, for knowledge and for interrelationship between the two.

Most administrative experts recommend maximising use of knowledge rather than building power and authority. Insensitivity to the importance of the power issue ignores the goals of the country and emphasis on professional competence. Prescriptions should, therefore, be based on greater empirical knowledge than we possess. Thus, more knowledge about actual practices of personnel administration is necessary.

Establishing good governance in Bangladesh is a commitment of the government. For good governance and advancing development the country needs an effective bureaucracy built on knowledge, skill, power and authority. Thus, starting administrative reform brooks no further delay.

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Pointless symbolism

All in all, if Clinton really wants to win over the Pakistani nation to thinking positively about the US, she will have to tackle these contentious issues as well as stop the diatribes and warnings regarding our nukes. The time for beguiling the people of Pakistan with symbolism is long over; it is time to show intent through actions.

EDITORIAL DESK, *The Nation (Pakistan)*

IT is a moment to ponder on the insensitivity of the Pakistani leadership that it failed to observe a sense of mourning over the Peshawar carnage with its official banqueting on Wednesday.

But the leadership has never been overly sensitive to the people, except perhaps at election time.

However, the US secretary of state could have been more responsive to the tragedy since she was on a major PR exercise targeting the people of Pakistan.

Yet, despite the tragic shadow of the

Peshawar carnage, Hilary Clinton has continued with what is now clearly solely a PR exercise aimed at winning over hearts and minds.

But with what?

A few sanitised meetings with selected media people, students and the "right" civil society members? (One female scholar declined the invite when asked to come three hours in advance and wait for the coach!)

And let us not forget the photo-ops at the correct religious symbols -- Sufism's Bari Imam and the historic Lahore symbol, Badshahi Mosque.

Clearly the US does not understand the Pakistani nation, which is neither purchasable nor so gullible.

Just because Clinton declares that she likes Pakistani food, or visits a Sufi shrine will hardly endear the US and make up for the loss of Pakistani lives in drone attacks; nor will it make us forget the present quagmire we have become stuck in as a result of this "war on terror," which has unleashed a "rain of terror" on the Pakistani people across the whole country.

There are, therefore, core issues of contention, if not outright conflict, between the US and the Pakistani nation at least, if not the leadership.

Unfortunately, Clinton chose to remain silent on them when they were raised even in the sanitised settings created for her. For instance, on the drone attacks, she declared she did not want to get into it.

Earlier she had stated that in a war weapons like drones are used but she should have realised that one uses these against an enemy state not against an

allied state's territory!

Again, when asked about the illegal activities of US diplomats in the capital she simply declared she did not know anything of this.

Now, given that all US diplomats come under the State Department and Clinton is the secretary of state, it is astonishing to find that she was ignorant of what has become a major diplomatic issue in Pakistan.

All in all, if Clinton really wants to win over the Pakistani nation to thinking positively about the US, she will have to tackle these contentious issues as well as stop the diatribes and warnings regarding our nukes.

The time for beguiling the people of Pakistan with symbolism is long over; it is time to show intent through actions.

Of course, had Clinton chosen to show some sense of mourning for the over 100 dead Pakistanis in Peshawar, it would have been a most befitting symbolism.

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