

Bending rules in the ship-breaking industry

Take the public into confidence on the issue

IT is difficult to understand, far less appreciate, how skirting clear HC directives to the contrary, the government has altered an import policy order which would have involved two precautionary steps: one, authentic pre-cleaning certificate from the exporter obtained from an agency of the state of origin certifying that a scrap ship is hazard-free; and two, the importing company in turn will then submit the clearance at our end to facilitate entry of the ship into our territorial waters.

Now, in terms of the relaxation, the company selling the scrap ship will provide a certificate saying that the ship has been cleaned of all toxic substances and its export will take place accordingly. We would like to know if there is any cross-checking mechanism or verification of the claim for hazard-free status of the ship on the part of our environmental officials on the basis of which a scrap ship could be turned away if found hazardous. The commerce minister has, of course, assured us of a verification by the Department of Environment to ensure that the imported ships headed for the breaking yards were really cleaned according to the certification.

We discern some kind of a big business approach across the board to the issue at the expense of environmental concerns for the country importing scrap ships as well as safety considerations for the workers in the ship breaking yards. Strangely, even when the exporter had to provide the clearance, it was not legally binding and 'no one could be sued for providing false information'. This is indicative of an existence of not just strong lobbies but also collusive lobbies calling for an updating of the relevant international convention and greater vigil at the state level, particularly in the developing world.

For, the Basel Convention, 1989 which clearly stipulates that no country can export or import toxic wastes or ships containing toxic substances is being violated making a mockery of international standards. We have a history of toxic ships or ships laden with toxic substances having been dumped inside our territory and workers in the yards meeting with lethal accidents. This is an issue that evidently needs closer national and international attention for resolution.

Stalking menace

Time to fight it head-on

THE heightening incidence of pestering girls leading to tragic consequences for the victims and their families, has brought to the fore a dimension of social criminality that has hitherto been low-down on the pecking order of crimes. But this trivialisation shouldn't have occurred to begin with given that the aberration, keeping pace with other forms of social degeneration and lack of governance, has been growing all the time without our realising it.

A number of girls have taken their lives to save them from the ignominy of constant intimidation and humiliation, even though some form of timely counselling and intervention should have enabled them to pull back from the brink. But the lexicon on women's repression sounds so fulsome: suicide added to dowry related torture, burning, acid throwing, rape and murder.

It must also be noted that the reported incidence of such offences is but a tip of the iceberg. The scale on which different forms of harassment of women is taking place -- unrecognised -- be it in schools, colleges, universities, public places and work places must be appalling if fully exposed.

So, our social conscience should be nudged into action of which there are growing signs, with the government leading the way. It is good to see that the PM has called for stern action while different organisations including NGOs, civil rights bodies, educational institutions recently organised human chains to express their indignation over the malady. However, that by itself is not enough nor are the hot pursuit or arrest of the accused. It is essential to see to it that they are convicted and punished. The community should not rest content with demanding justice but also making sure the stalkers are exposed, resisted and neutralised. They must make the police take up the cases without fear and favour and be prepared to provide evidence and witness support to the prosecution whenever necessary. We know there are women's rights bodies ready to provide legal aid to victims. They must come forward in a bigger way. In the end, there should be a coalition of social forces to resist all forms of threats to life and security of every individual, particularly girls and women who remain vulnerable despite empowerment of women in some vital sectors of national life.

Combating political corruption

Autonomy is a key component of institutionalisation. Therefore, if there is little or no autonomy, there is little to no institutionalisation, which puts in jeopardy the growth of democracy within the party. This substantiates the argument that corruption is a symptom of deeper institutional weakness.

Z.A. KHAN

IT is often said that "corruption has always existed, it is pervasive, and has far reaching consequences on the functioning of democratic institutions." Unless key institutions of democratic bodies are strengthened, democracy is sure to receive a body blow.

Political parties are part of a set of institutions aggregating diverse sets of interest, providing the structure for political participation and formulating policy options for a nation. Institutionalisation of political parties, according to Huntington, is the process by which organisations and procedures acquire value and stability. The level of political institutionalisation can be defined by the adaptability, complexity, autonomy and coherence of its organisations and procedures.

Politics in the initial years of independent Bangladesh had been fiercely confrontational, which divided our population sharply even on issues that needed consensus. This often insulated people of common belief into isolated segments.

Assuming that difference or dissent is a normal process of democracy, our people, who suffered marginalisation for so long, are no longer prepared to accept perennial poverty and misery. They wish political parties would function as organised bodies and their institutions should be allowed to take initiatives to prevent the leadership from going haywire and rocking the structure at will. This may help the economy to grow unhindered, and the people to free themselves from the deep-rooted poverty trap.

Our leaders since independence have not taken attainable initiatives to democratise their parties and the institutions, fear-

ing a slide of their hold. Party bureaucracy was never allowed to emerge as a structure for supporting collective decision making. Favoured persons of the leaders have been chosen to grace the party bureaucracy, resulting in increase of familial control on the party procedures. This has encouraged people to seek a short-cut to reach the leadership. The leaders too have often obliged the time opportunists in exchange of graft taken in the guise of party fund.

Institutionalisation of political parties occurs, opines Huntington, "when parties develop characteristics like adaptability, complexity, autonomy and coherence." Our two major political parties are yet to create scope to attain adaptability in the changing socio-political environment and generational age. Both these parties have not acted seriously to transfer leadership through following a democratic process. Brutal violence forced changes in their leadership.

These parties do not apparently hold any proactive party position on contemporary international issues that have considerable bearing on our national politics. The politics pursued by these parties presently is what was formulated decades ago, despite these becoming outdated over the years. Amendments, if made, were only to tighten the grip of leadership bestowed or inherited. It is somewhat like basking in a martyr's glory.

The current four levels of organisation of these parties have made them highly complex insofar as controlling their activities is concerned. Since no central budget allocation is made to conduct party activities at levels other than the central, they depend largely on raising funds from the local traders who oblige them in exchange of

favours. Even auditing of funds so raised has never been done by the party bureaucracy, so that they are not made to explain their financial conduct to anyone other than the leaders, who sit pretty with the booty they receive from them.

This is how corruption has made inroads into the parties at all levels. As a result, political parties build their support around patron-client relationship rather than through a well-developed issue-oriented platform that doesn't cater to patronage and payments in exchange of support. This paves the way for getting involved in illicit activities.

In the absence of arrangement for democratic transition of leadership, the parties are still led by first generation leaders, except for the transition through inheritance that became "necessary" due to sudden death. This has been causing tensions within the parties. The limited autonomy that the organisations now enjoy at various levels was resisted, and major problems have been encountered in structuring and institutionalising their practises and procedures.

This has happened because of the unofficial and often familial and clan-like nature of structure of the two major political parties in Bangladesh. Both the parties have not developed, established and systematically applied objectives and merit-based mechanisms for selecting and promoting party leaders and cadres. This kind of weak institutionalisation of the parties is both a cause and a consequence of corruption.

Autonomy is a key component of institutionalisation. Therefore, if there is little or no autonomy, there is little to no institutionalisation, which puts in jeopardy the growth of democracy within the party. This substantiates the argument that corruption is a symptom of deeper institutional weakness.

Some reforms of the existing procedures of running the party institutions will have to be brought about to free the parties from the clutches of the leadership that only promotes patron-client relationship which breeds corruption. The following, accord-

ing to experts, may be of considerable help to strengthen the institutions of the political parties with a view to curtailing corruption:

- Full membership involvement in the election of party leaders, officials and candidates for public office;
- Mandatory disclosure of assets and interest of leaders, official and candidates;
- Regular independent and public accessible financial audits;
- Term limits of party leaders and officials;
- Greater interaction of political parties with the civil society;
- Introduction of subsidies and funding by the government, which should be tied with regular reform;
- Prohibition of fund-raising by all levels of institutions. Central leadership may authorise a particular unit at a particular time. Money so raised will have to be accounted for and verified by the centre;
- Introduction of disciplinary committees to investigate into corruption and other violations of party rules and to recommend punishment.

We in Bangladesh do not want to hibernate any longer and let our leadership map our destiny at will. Collective wisdom must replace individual caprice. Collective wisdom emanates from the interaction of the central leadership with grassroot cadres and leaders and with civil society. Institutionalised party organisations are more likely to seek accountability and transparency in financial transaction and political decision making.

In such circumstances the leadership will appreciate the transition of power, which will be a fundamental shift from arrogance of power to amenable consensus. Structural coherence should improve the ability to control the sub-units, keep them accountable, allocate resources on need basis, decide the party lines on the basis of consensus and implement these with efficiency.

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Not through the gun

The government would do well in stopping industrialists and businessmen from appropriating minerals and other natural resources which constitute the tribals' wealth. They should be made partners in ventures which come up to utilise the resources. The Maoists have been harnessing grievances of tribals for their armed revolution. Once the tribals know that they have control over natural resources, they will stop supporting the Maoists.

KULDIP NAYAR

NOT many Indians are happy with the prevailing system. Too many disparities have come to be entrenched and too many people have been driven to live on the margin. Corruption of the bureaucracy and the involvement of political masters are too blatant. "Crime has been politicised and politics has been criminalised" may be a cliché but it aptly describes the situation.

The question that faces the nation is how to change the system. Should it be with the gun, as the Maoists and their sympathisers in civil society have come to believe, or should the people decide it through the ballot?

This question has become more pressing and relevant after the Maoists went on a killing spree. This week's tragedy in the deep forests of Dantewada in Chattisgarh, where 76 policemen were killed, is adequate proof, if any more proof is needed, that the Maoists are out to capture power through the gun.

What is worse is that they not only planned the attack but also managed to take away all arms and ammunition from the police. This underlines the fact that the Maoists have improved their tactics and weaponry. On the other hand, the police remain ill-equipped, under-trained and ill-served by intelligence. A report suggests that four top Maoist cadres from Andhra Pradesh planned the ambush. According to counter-insurgency experts analysing the Chattisgarh massacre, the police were led into a death trap.

This carnage is the Maoists' way of conducting an armed revolution. When India won freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, it did not fire a shot to oust the mightiest world power. The reason why the Mahatma could do so was the power of people behind him. The poor, the illiterate and the backward were all with him. In fact, most of the affluent were on the British side to enjoy their luxurious living. The bureaucracy too was part of the imperialist power. Still the Mahatma won.

If the Maoists represent the poor, the illiterate and the backward, let them prove it, not by egging them on to use the gun but through elections which are held, by any

yardstick, fairly and independently. This needs persuasion, patience and arguments to win people over. The Maoists believe that they do not have to do so. The gun can do the job. This was the language of the imperialists also.

What the Maoists do not understand or realise is that the state has many more guns and can ultimately silence other guns. The rulers may not be to their likings but they have come through a process where people have queued up before the booths to cast their votes. If the gun is the way to throw them out, then the guns or the other methods the rulers use to curb the Maoists are justified.

Violence in today's world is out of place. Even limited violence can turn out to be dangerous. In India, where there are so many fissiparous tendencies, violence can result in anything. Trigger happy groups or some other forces can try to seize power when the arbiter is the gunman. Hitler ruled Germany through his cadres, which espoused democracy but used violent methods to eliminate the opponents.

Bhagat Singh was also a revolutionary. He too believed in armed struggle. Yet, he never preached violence. Nor did he or his organisation, Hindustan Socialist Republic Army, behead any person. The Maoists have much to learn from him. The British hanged Bhagat Singh because they were afraid of his philosophy, not him.

What did killing mean to a revolutionary? Bhagat Singh explained it in his own words: "We attach great sanctity to human life; we regard man's life as sacred. We would sooner lay down our lives in the service of humanity than injure anyone." There was no revenge, no vendetta, no brutality.

In his article, the Philosophy of the Bomb, which Bhagat Singh wrote at the age of 21, he said revolutionaries did not shun criticism and public scrutiny of their ideals or actions. They rather welcomed these as chances of making those who had a genuine desire to do so understand the basic principles of the revolutionary movement and the high and noble ideals that were a perennial source of inspiration and strength to it. But the Maoists are running away from talks. The killings do not tell what they stand for.



Out to capture power through the gun.

Bhagat Singh's passion was to write in his notebook the quotations he liked from different books. After reading R.H. Tawney's *The Acquisitive Society*, Bhagat Singh said that the acquisitive society "was a reality." The reason why people from the Tawney age adopted the socialist creed was the degrading economic and moral conditions under which so many people lived at that time. He underlined the contradiction between political freedom and economic dependence and underscored the necessity of freedom for economic improvement.

The history of all societies, Bhagat Singh argued, was the history of class struggles. It was a fight between those "who do not work" and "those who do." It had been caused not by subversion or conspiracies and astute political leaders, but by the same inexorable social laws that destroyed previous systems like feudalism in Europe. He never mentioned violence, nor did he preach it.

Bhagat Singh was able to make it clear during his trial that their philosophy was not violence. He wanted to awaken people to their plight and organise a mass movement of workers, peasants, students and youth. The Maoists can introspect on how their armed revolution is increasingly degenerating into senseless violence.

I do not like all the things that Home Minister P. Chidambaram does. But in the case of Maoists, he has gone quite far to initiate a dialogue with them. He has not asked them to surrender their arms, nor to give up their ideology. He has only told them to renounce violence. If they were to do so, the central government would talk to them, sitting across the table.

The government would, in the meanwhile, do well in stopping industrialists and businessmen from appropriating minerals and other natural resources which constitute the tribals' wealth. They should be made partners in ventures which come up to utilise the resources. The Maoists have been harnessing grievances of tribals for their armed revolution. Once the tribals know that they have control over natural resources, they will stop supporting the Maoists.

In the name of revolution, the Maoists are getting money and weapons from "questionable sources." They cannot play with the Indian polity, however wanting the government may be. The rulers can be ousted in election. But the blows inflicted on India can be irreparable. The Maoists are making the mistake of equating government with India.

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