

## Doctors' anomalous gradation list

*A basic and vital basis for promotion given a short shrift*

WILL we ever get our basics right? Delving for an answer to this question is likely to yield a terse statement: perhaps only when conflicting group interests will cease to blur the vision for professional integrity demanding straightforward application of time-honoured normative criteria. The gradation list brought out by the health ministry on May 11 this year which is supposed to be based on inter-se seniority of doctors in government employ for the purpose of promotion and posting has been found to be flawed on many counts.

It is observed that cadre and non-cadre doctors and those who have never served the government have been included in the list. Those who are serving at private or autonomous bodies or have been abroad for long are placed on the list. In extreme cases, persons who have died or gone on LPR appear on the list.

How controversial the gradation list is, can be gauged from the fact that inclusion of 1,362 non-cadre doctors has affected the seniority of many cadre officials. The cadre and non-cadre doctors have been put in a conflicting situation which is likely to impact adversely the morale and performance of the health service personnel. As it is, the public health services are beset with problems of divisiveness and politicisation, and to top it off, if inter-se seniority of doctors is not determined on a fair basis then we are looking at a hugely detrimental set of administrative, professional and service delivery issues in an important sector.

This gradation list unsurprisingly drawing sharp reaction from BCS (Health) Cadre Association who has demanded its cancellation, the health ministry has formed a committee to probe their complaints. The committee formed in early July has yet to start working.

In hindsight, gradation list has never been finalised. The first list approved in 1974 didn't see the light of day. Then two decades on, the gradation list that was prepared was 80 per cent faulty with wrong information. The 2008 attempt to prepare a list floundered on the rock of cadre and non-cadre discords. It is pretty much the same tale again. However, we believe it is important that the review being undertaken of the latest gradation list will help clear the course for a broad-based gradation list of doctors in the government employ that is based on professionalism, impartiality and service records.

## Addressing waterlogging

*Coordinated action plan needed*

FROM being a welcome break after a long spell of sweltering heat, the heavy downpour from morning to noon on Wednesday, as always, did prove to be a curse for the city. Curse, because most part of the city was engulfed by ankle to knee-deep water. As the city lacks proper drainage system, large swathes of the major arterial roads including lanes and by-lanes went under water thereby bringing the entire city to a standstill. And to make matters worse, one could find digging going on in different areas either by the City Corporation, or by Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA), or Telephone authority. Small wonder, the city witnessed the suffering of the pedestrians as well as commuters as they had to wade through rainwater mixed with stinking muck from the overflowing drains, the vehicles incapacitated on the roads submerged under knee-deep water and tailbacks longer than the usual ones.

In a word, the city turns into a nightmare every time that we have torrential rain. What is the way out? In this connection, it is worthwhile to note that the Parliamentary Committee on the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD&C) has asked the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to solve the problem of waterlogging and tailbacks in the city and submit a plan to this end. While appreciating the move, it needs also mentioning that the incumbent DCC Mayor being a lame duck one as he has already outlived his tenure in office and is now serving it by default, it naturally puts a damper on the prospect of any prompt and effective action from his office. And if our past experience is any guide, then it would be advisable to involve also other ministries and departments concerned rather than leaving the task to DCC alone.

Clearly, it is due to the poor drainage system that the problem of water logging gets so acute in the city after a medium to heavy rain. The authorities concerned are also well aware of it, as the city has seen still worse case of waterlogging during the deluge of 1988 as well as swamping by occasional cloudbursts in the past. Unfortunately, nothing substantial has been done thus far to address this nagging problem.

In the circumstances, last Wednesday's rainstorm should be a wakeup call to the authorities concerned. And in addressing the problem, the government should take a coordinated approach involving DCC, WASA as well as others concerned utility bodies who have a stake in turning the capital into a cleaner and better functioning city.

## Surviving the struggle



Struggling, but not surviving.

The emphasis has shifted from survival to struggle. People no longer worry about merely keeping together body and soul. It's no longer about three square meals. It's no longer about five basic needs. High thinking and plain living has gone out of the window.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IF the development gurus are listening, we have undergone a bizarre transformation. People no longer take their own lives due to poverty or starvation. We have graduated from that level and entered the next phase. Congratulations, the struggle for survival is no longer an issue. Surviving the struggle is of essence.

The emphasis has shifted from survival to struggle. People no longer worry about merely keeping together body and soul. It's no longer about three square meals. It's no longer about five basic needs. High thinking and plain living has gone out of the window.

The new struggle is the struggle itself,

and people don't wish to go on unless that going on is of some value. A well-to-do mother committed suicide with her two children because her husband and in-laws neglected them. She was well provided by her husband, given a full-time car with a driver and an entire floor in the house to live with her children.

Another mother did the same thing. She doused her two children with kerosene and set them on fire before turning toward herself with equal spite. Few days later all three of them died in a hospital. Last week, another mother threw herself under a speeding train, her infant daughter still locked in her arm. She died after seventeen hours, while the baby miraculously survived.

So, it is no longer about staying alive unless living has enough staying power. In all three cases, which cover the range from affluent to insolvent, the cause was domestic squabbles. In two cases husbands had married a second time and were living with their second wives. In the third case, the husband had broached up the idea of a second marriage. When his wife protested, she was beaten into pulp.

Mundane things though! Conjugal disturbances are as old as the institution of marriage, and wives in the past have committed suicide. Not to say it was the right thing to do, but men took more than one wife then, some men taking the scripture to its logical conclusion. They took as many as four wives at a time.

There are men who still do it, their polygamous minds looking for ways to sow their wild oats. Extramarital affairs and keeping mistresses are an open secret these days, the sanctity of marriage being as forceful as the statutory warning on a cigarette pack. People disregard it in full knowledge that it could be injurious to them.

The gear of life has shifted with an ominous trend. Mothers have taken the

custody battle to a proprietary level as if they have the right to do away with the same children who are born out of them. That is the alarming thing, I say. Mothers use their children as bargaining chips to get even, first with their husbands and then with life itself.

That downplays the survival and upstages the struggle. In the past, the struggle was worth the survival, but now the survival has to be worth the struggle. Those mothers who induced their children to die with them couldn't tell the difference. In their minds, a world that wasn't good enough for them wasn't good enough for their children.

The fallacy of that conclusion is obvious. It ignores the fact that children could be born with their allotted lots. There are children who are abandoned by their parents or bereaved by death of both parents. Life does its random selection. Many of them grow up on the streets, others in orphanages. Some of them grow up to become successful men and women.

Somewhere in the change of gear that abiding truth no longer appears valid. People struggle to survive because they believe in the magic of life. They believe that anything is possible in God's world, that the scheme of life is an unfolding thing. It mustn't become a forgone conclusion.

It is this conclusion which is turning our homes into small-scale mass graves as mothers renouncing life are also involving children. This conclusion is eating away confidence in life, a God's gift not to be wasted. Mothers are selfish if they don't wish to give children their rightful chance to live life to the fullest.

This is where the transformation transcends the barriers of survival and focuses on struggle, as if it's not good to live when living isn't good. Mothers, of all people, are losing faith in the magic and, instead of giving life to their children, are giving up on it. Someone needs to tell them that life isn't a grocery shop. One doesn't always quit just because one doesn't get a good bargain.

Charles Darwin said neither the strongest nor the most intelligent survived but those who were the most adaptable to change. Mothers who once signified it are undermining that strength.

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## Raise my taxes, Mr. President!



We have in front of us a simple, easy way to bring America's fiscal house in order, reduce our dependence on foreign borrowing, restore US credibility and power, and give us a stable revenue base from which to make key investments for future growth. All we need is for Congress to do what it does so well -- nothing.

FAREED ZAKARIA

FOR the last few months, we have heard powerful, passionate arguments about the need to cut America's massive budget deficit. Republican senators have claimed that we are in danger of permanently crippling the economy.

Conservative economists and pundits warn of a Greece-like crisis, when America can borrow only at exorbitant interest rates. So when an opportunity presents itself to cut those deficits by about a third -- more than \$300 billion! -- permanently and relatively easily, you would think that these very people would be in the lead. Far from it.

The Bush tax cuts remain the single largest cause of America's structural deficit -- that is, the deficit not caused by the collapse in tax revenues when the economy goes into recession. The Bush administration inherited budget surpluses from the Clinton administration.

What turned these into deficits, even before the recession?

There were three fundamental new costs -- the tax cuts, the prescription-drug bill, and post-9/11 security spending (including the Iraq and Afghanistan wars). Of these, the tax cuts were by far the largest, adding up to \$2.3 trillion over 10 years.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, nearly half the cost of all legislation enacted from 2001 to 2007 can be attrib-

uted to the tax cuts.

Those cuts are set to expire this year. The Republicans say they want to keep them all, even for those making more than \$250,000 a year (less than 3% of Americans).

They say that higher taxes will hurt the recovery. But for months now they have been arguing that the chief threat to the economy is our gargantuan debt and deficit. That's what's scaring consumers, creditors, and businesses. Given a chance to address those fears by getting serious about deficit reduction, though, they run away.

Look, by contrast, at British Prime Minister David Cameron, a genuine fiscal conservative. To deal with his country's deficit, which in structural terms is not so different from America's, he concluded that he would have to raise taxes as well as cut spending.

The Democrats, for their part, are also running scared, proposing to keep all the tax cuts except those affecting the very rich. But they were opposed to these tax cuts in 2001 and 2003. If they were a bad idea when budget deficits were small, why are tax cuts a good idea when deficits are in the \$1.3 trillion range?

The idea that the average American is

overtaxed is a nice piece of populist pandering. In fact, federal taxes as a percentage of the economy are at their lowest level since the presidency of Harry Truman. Chuck Marr and Gillian Brunet of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities have calculated that a family of four at the exact middle of the income spectrum will pay only 4.6% of its income in taxes.

Remember, almost half of the country pays no income taxes at all. The top 3% of Americans contribute almost 50% of federal income taxes.

The simple fact is this: all the Bush tax cuts were unaffordable. They were an irresponsible act of hubris enacted during an economic boom. Conservatives thought they would force us to shrink the government. But with Republicans controlling the White House and both houses of Congress, did reduced taxes cause reduced spending? No, they led to ever-increasing borrowing and a ballooning deficit.

We have one of the smallest governments among all the rich countries in the world. Yet we refuse to pay for it. (Yes, health-care spending is the big exception and, yes, we will have to get those costs under control.) I understand the fear that this is not a good time to raise taxes. But the impact of marginal shifts in tax rates on growth is pretty unclear. Clinton raised taxes in 1992 and ushered in a period of extraordinarily robust growth.

Bush cut taxes massively in 2001 and got meagre growth in return. Three tax cuts enacted since the financial crisis have done little to spur growth. In any event, if timing is the issue, Congress could extend the tax cuts for a year but then let them expire.

Better yet, spend money on far more efficient ways to spur job creation, such as tax credits for jobs, which the CBO estimates would create four to six times as many jobs as would tax cuts.

I don't like our current tax system. It's unwieldy, taxes the wrong things (income instead of consumption), and is filled with loopholes that are legalised corruption. But we are not going to create the perfect tax code today. We have in front of us a simple, easy way to bring America's fiscal house in order, reduce our dependence on foreign borrowing, restore US credibility and power, and give us a stable revenue base from which to make key investments for future growth. All we need is for Congress to do what it does so well -- nothing.

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