

Separate pay structure for Bangladesh Bank

Political consideration must not take precedence over other more important considerations. Rather, the government may go for gradual enhancement in the pay and allowances of public sector officials and employees, taking into consideration the increase in the cost of living, so that they can have a decent living.

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

A separate pay structure with a steep rise in the pay and allowances of the officials and employees of Bangladesh Bank (BB) has been in the news for the last few months. While Finance Minister A.M.A. Muhith favours a separate pay structure for BB the bureaucracy opposes it, fearing a total breakdown in the centralised pay structure in the public sector, particularly in 23 or so regulatory bodies.

A look into the emergence of a centralised pay structure shows that when the first National Pay Commission (NPC) of Bangladesh was constituted on July 21, 1972, there were 2,208 scales of pay in the public sector of the erstwhile central government of Pakistan and the provincial government of East Pakistan. The first NPC squeezed 2,208 scales into 10 grades and scales of pay.

This created enormous problems in adjusting such a huge number of scales into 10 grades and scales only and, as a result, the government could implement the lower grades and scales, i.e. grades and scales 5 to 10 only.

The second NPC, formed on February 20, 1976, recommended 52 grades and scales of pay. But the government reduced them to 20 grades and scales. The subsequent NPCs, including the 7th NPC constituted by the last caretaker government, recommended retention of the 20 grades and scales.

In the past 30 plus years, public sector

officials have adjusted themselves to the centralised pay structure having 20 scales. Their demand to the successive NPCs generally had been for a steep rise in their pay and allowances so that they could have an honourable living.

During the time of the last caretaker government, BB submitted a proposal to the finance ministry for introducing a separate pay structure, which was almost similar to that of the Reserve Bank of India and the State Bank of Pakistan. The caretaker government did not approve the proposal stating that there would be disappointment among the officials of regulatory bodies and other public sector organisations if a separate pay structure was allowed for BB.

In the first half of this year, BB again submitted a proposal to the finance ministry for a separate pay structure for its officials and staff. Available reports suggest that BB proposed Tk. 66,700 monthly pay for Executive Director (ED), the third tier in the hierarchy of that organisation, the first and second tiers being the governor and the deputy governor respectively.

Following the deliberations in the meetings of the secretaries' committee headed by the cabinet secretary, the finance ministry recently asked BB to submit the revised pay structure proposal on downsizing its existing salary grades to almost half as part of formulating a separate pay structure.

A report in The Daily Star (DS) of

August 26 suggests that, following the finance ministry's letter, the BB Board of Directors approved on August 25 a separate pay structure with 9 grades, trimming down the existing 20 grades, for sending to the finance ministry. The DS report says that the monthly basic pay of an ED has been proposed at Tk. 66,000, up 79% from Tk. 33,500, the pay granted by the 7th NPC. His gross monthly salary will stand at Tk. 93,000.

An entry-level officer (Assistant Director) will draw Tk. 20,000 as monthly basic pay and his gross salary will be Tk. 32,000. The monthly basic pay for the staff at the lowest grade has been proposed at Tk. 7,000, while his monthly gross salary will stand at Tk. 15,200.

The arguments put forward by BB for proposing a separate pay structure with steep rise in pay and allowances are:

- As the central bank of the country, BB should have a separate pay structure that corresponds to the salary structure of the central banks of the neighbouring countries;
- A separate pay structure with attractive pay is needed to attract talented and experienced officers against the backdrop of high salary in private commercial banks.

The finance minister favours a separate pay structure for BB, saying that the present government is committed to introducing a separate pay structure for BB. The basic question is whether we should continue or not with the centralised pay structure, which has taken deep root in public sector.

The government has from the beginning kept only two public sector commercial organisations -- Biman Bangladesh Airlines and Bangladesh Shipping Corporation -- outside the purview of the centralised pay structure. This is because these two organisations have to maintain international standards to compete with other national carriers. Even their pay

structure is approved by the finance ministry.

Critics say that BB's argument for a separate pay structure corresponding to salary structure of the Reserve Bank of India and the State Bank of Pakistan does not appear to be convincing. Both India and Pakistan have a federal form of government where centralised pay structure in the public sector is not feasible. Bangladesh has a unitary form of government where a centralised pay structure in the public sector may function reasonably well.

The critics also point out that a separate pay structure for BB with a steep rise in pay and allowances will create dissatisfaction among the officers and staff of government offices, corporations and other regulatory bodies. If an ED, who is in tier 3 of BB, is allowed the monthly pay of Tk. 66,000, then what will be the pay of the governor? The governor is now in the pay and grade of the secretary to the government (present monthly pay of a secretary is Tk. 40,000) and they are in the same article of warrant of precedence.

Again, if an assistant director, an entry-level officer, is given monthly pay of Tk. 20,000, then what will be the pay for the entry-level officers (present monthly initial pay is Tk. 11,000) in the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) cadres? The brightest boys and girls of the universities and colleges have to face a very tough competition for recruitment to various BCS cadres. What will be the pay scale of a lecturer, an entry-level post, in a public university? Many such examples may be cited.

A separate pay structure for BB officials and staff with a steep rise in pay and allowances may encourage other government departments, corporations and regulatory bodies to raise their demand very strongly for separate pay scales with higher pay and allowances, and it may be difficult for the government to cope with



KEITH BROFSKY

consideration the increase in the cost of living, so that they can have a decent living. Rightsizing the public sector as a whole may help government attain this.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary. E-mail: latifm43@gmail.com, latifm43atitf43@gmail.com

Purdah in Islam

The issue actually boils down to interpretation of the Qur'anic verses on *purdah*. Of course, that interpretation is to be preferred which would ensure modesty as well as her dignity in a manner that smoothens rather than complicates her living, learning and working in the society.

M. SHAH ALAM

THE High Court Division's recent *suo motu* order directing the government to ensure that no woman is forced to wear *burqa* at the educational institutions and offices, and the subsequent circular of the Ministry of Education with a similar directive have brought forth yet again the religious dogmatism which often tends to violate the human rights of the women.

Instructions in the Holy Qur'an are that women should dress, move and look in a modest way. On the other hand, it has also been made mandatory in the Holy Book for men to conduct themselves in relation to women in a modest and gentle way, and not to look at or think of women in a lustful way.

Verses 30 in Surah An-Nur in the Holy Qur'an says: "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them; and Allah is well acquainted with all that they do."

Reasons for *purdah* seem very innocuous and pious. In fact, women in all religions and communities follow cer-

tain dress code for the purpose of modesty. Controversies and debates, however, are on the degrees and forms of covering the body and face to ensure acceptable modesty.

The issue actually boils down to interpretation of the Qur'anic verses on *purdah*. Of course, that interpretation is to be preferred which would ensure modesty as well as her dignity in a manner that smoothens rather than complicates her living, learning and working in the society. However, this has not been always the case.

Two verses have been especially dedicated to *purdah* in the Holy Qur'an. One says: "And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their brothers and brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons" ... (Surah An-Nur, Verse 31).

The second one is: "O Prophet! Tell thy



SHEKHERMAMI

How much does a woman need to cover?

wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad); that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" ... (Surah Al-Ahzab, Verse 59).

The above two verses have been unfortunately interpreted by some sects in Islam as commands to cover the whole human face and, of course, the body, the practical manifestation of which we find everyday in many women in our society,

who are clad in full burqa, in complete isolation and seclusion from the society.

But understood in their plain and simple meaning, the words and phrases used in the above verses can never mean using a veil to cover full face while covering the head and the bosoms, chest and neck.

Covering the full face marginalises women. It retards socialisation, education and normal transaction, seriously impeding their enlightenment. It is a sort of social imprisonment of women under which their potential for mental, intellec-

tual, cultural and spiritual development can't be properly realised.

It cannot be that the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, which place women in a very dignified position and historically have made great contributions towards protecting and promoting women's rights, would mandate the way the two verses have been interpreted by some traditionalists.

Just imagine a teacher taking his class. He would naturally like to see the impact of his presentation and teaching upon the students, and would also want to make sure the students are attentive. Imagine, in such a classroom, a burqa-clad female student covering the full face! Such problems are not infrequent in our country.

Wearing appropriate dress is, of course, a factor of modesty and good behaviour in the society, for which the above two verses have been revealed by Allah Almighty. In fact, there are many other norms and safeguards rightly prescribed in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, which seek to regulate social discipline to prevent natural attraction of men and women towards one another from developing into a negative factor for human welfare. Covering the full face can't be a factor of modesty.

Inappropriate interpretation of any verse can cause great damage to its true meaning and purpose. Allah Almighty has created man and woman in their majestic, attractive and delicate mutual interrelationships. These relationships are to be definitely regulated, controlled and steered by appropriate norms for the

welfare of both, but keeping in full view that the Qur'an and Sunnah mandate equal position and status of man and woman.

It is indeed very heartening to note that Mahathir Muhammad, one of the most successful leaders of a Muslim country who sought to modernise Islamic thought and used enlightened Islamic ideas to develop Malaysia, had the following to say on *purdah* in his address at the International Forum on Islam in Kuala Lumpur on July 19, 2002: "This belief is very dominant in Afghanistan that no part of women can be shown to any unknown male. Women there, therefore, don't agree to take off veil/burqa even if it is permitted. However, in most other Muslim countries, women's face and hands can remain without cover. Who has ruled such a dress code? Most fundamental and substantive rules of Islam have been systematically ignored and violated, while more importance is given to formalities and rituals."

In another address at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London on September 22, 2003, Mahathir said: "The problem is that Muslims tend to emphasise and venerate the form rather than the substance in the practice of everything."

Dr. M. Shah Alam is Professor of Law, University of Chittagong. (Currently on deputation as Member, Law Commission).

The article is adapted and abridged from an earlier publication of the author (Human Rights: 60 Years after UDHR, ELCOF, Dhaka, 2008).

OBITUARY

Remembering a braveheart

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

WITH profound sadness and a heavy heart I am writing about the demise of Abdur Raquib Khandaker, popularly known as "Raquib Bhai" to his innumerable friends and admirers. He breathed his last on August 26 at Bangkok where he had gone for treatment of foot infection.

A very lively and caring soul, Mr. Khandaker was markedly cheerful and in good spirits during his last days. This was commendable for he was physically uncomfortable due to a near fatal accident that he met in 1974 while on duty. Such adversity could not dampen his determination and he went past all odds of public life to become the Inspector General of Bangladesh Police, the top job in the department.



Abdur Raquib Khandaker

being a law enforcement practitioner and was visibly proud in donning a uniform. He was an economics graduate from Dhaka University and serving

as lecturer, Notre Dame College (his own alma-mater) when he was appointed to the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP) in 1956 after passing the competitive exam.

Raquib Khandaker was one of those nearly extinct breed of public servants who, despite being good at studies, also excelled as star sportsmen of their times. He had the enviable distinction of being a Dhaka University Blue. He played in the first division football league in Dhaka and was a sprinter of considerable repute. His interest in sports did not wane with the passage of time and no wonder he graced the position of the president of Bangladesh Football Federation from 1976 to 1986.

One sterling personality trait for which Raquib Khandaker will be remembered for long by his admirers and associates

was his raw courage in facing adverse situations. As Superintendent of Police, greater Khulna District in 1971 he displayed admirable guts and fortitude in tackling the arrogant non-local population and the frighteningly antagonistic Pakistan army detachments. His tact and presence of mind saved the lives of scores of Bengali policemen.

Raquib Khandaker could remain cool under very unsettling and unstable law and order situations. His associates refer to a particularly interesting fact of November 1987. When Dhaka city was experiencing a serious order crisis the commanders in the police control room decided to measure their blood pressure. Upon examination, everybody's pressure displayed abnormal flow while Raquib Khandaker's reading was 130/80.

Late Raquib Khandaker was a caring

colleague and a ready sight of comfort for those in disconcerting situations. As DIG of Rajshahi range he went to the unusual extent of prolonging his stay at Rangpur only to help the uneasy district superintendent to attend a border conference in India in a peaceful mind.

Raquib Khandaker was fond of eating, and talking to people of different shades. He would often relish telling everybody about the delicacies of old Dhaka food like nehari and bakhar khani and their origin. He would love to tell stories and narrate anecdotes in a typical Dhaka style to his attentive listeners.

As Police Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolis, Raquib Khandaker made an impression on many because he had such wide-ranging contacts in Dhaka city, where he spent a large part of his

eventful life. His contacts and references in different parts of Dhaka city made the onerous task of crime prevention substantially easy for many field level officials.

Late Raquib Khandaker was a handsome man with a physically tough exterior, but was gifted with a soft and caring heart that enquired about the welfare of many. Public servants, both serving and retired, and ordinary folks, would often approach him in times of their need and he tried his best to ease their difficulties. He was one of those few public servants who demonstrably ventured beyond the immediate surroundings and was admirably public-spirited. May Allah rest his soul in eternal peace. I salute this brave heart.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a columnist of The Daily Star.