

Promotions and OSD

More we talk about administrative reform the less we do anything about it

ACCORDING to a Daily Star report another series of mass promotions of bureaucrats at the level of deputy secretaries, additional secretaries and secretaries is in the offing. Only recently mass promotion at the level of joint secretaries took place. We have no objection to deserving officials being promoted to the next level of hierarchy. It is the mass nature of it that concerns us. It appears that promotions are made more by the years of service put in rather than quality of service. There cannot be any consideration of merit when the promotions are of a mass nature and based on mere seniority.

This putting together of the grain and the chaff totally negates the importance of all the factors that should determine promotion such as efficiency, commitment, team spirit, diligence, regularity and punctuality. Coupled with the mass promotion is the phenomenon of OSD, the so-called officers on special duty, which in reality means officers with no duty. If we can paraphrase the well known saying "an idle brain is a devil's workshop" so an idle bureaucracy (which the OSD signifies) is a dissension generating factory.

Having nothing to do for the whole day and being either explicitly or implicitly resentful of OSD status, he or she spends the whole time finding fault with those who are not OSD and trying to regress whatever work that goes on, not to mention politicising the process and embittering all those who have reasons to feel discriminated.

Ever since Bangladesh's birth we have been hearing about administrative reforms. Some have been instituted. But fundamental reforms, especially those dealing with career planning, proper ACR writing and objective evaluation of performance remain a far cry. Added to that the increasing politicisation and partisan viewing of bureaucrats have all but debilitated this pivotal instrument of governance and development.

Can we start a change first by putting to work all officers who are OSD?

Pending vacancies let us assign genuine special duties to these senior bureaucrats. On the one hand we hear about inadequate staff and then we see more than 400 senior, experienced and fully paid staff being wasted away without any work.

Many are made OSD for political reasons. Some are made because of absence of suitable posts. Since they already have the title and the pay, government must make use of them in development work. Let them hold appropriate level responsibility on various new and on going government projects. A way must be found to put these officials to some useful jobs. Making OSD is promoting inefficiency. There must not be a single OSD from now. That should be the government's policy. Otherwise it is a criminal waste of public resource.

Child rights protection

Practical action awaited

FIVE decades after the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Child by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and two decades after adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Bangladesh government last year on May Day declared it had a National Child Policy in hand. The final draft of the policy was placed on the Women and Children Affairs ministry's website on September 15 this year. According to the draft policy, the age of a child has been redefined at below 18 years and it promises to keep children out of work.

The draft policy, with its redefinition of a child's age and its pledge to rid the nation of child labour apart, the nation is still home to some 7.4 million working children. But this number is also dated because the National Bureau of Statistics gave this estimate seven years back in 2003. Meanwhile, the number must have increased on a par with the growth of the population. So, when it comes to the realities on the ground, we are still rather in the rhetorical phase and far from addressing it in earnest.

At a recent seminar on child rights held in the city, the state minister for Women and Children Affairs Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury made a frank admission that the tendency to engage children in work has rather increased in society. By admitting it, the minister has only acknowledged the gravity of the situation so far as rights of children are concerned.

By engaging in work, children are being denied firstly their basic right to education. At the workplace, what they face are yet other forms of denial, deprivation and hazards. Small wonder children so exposed to maltreatment and abuse suffer from malnutrition and various types of diseases. That in other words means, in addition to their right to education, children at work also risk losing every other right they are entitled to.

Sad to say, little is being done to take these children back to school, which is experiencing increasing number of dropouts at the primary stage of education. And if brought under closer scrutiny, it will be found that in most cases, the dropped out boys and girls have been engaged in work at home or field or at other workplaces. And in the case of girls, some may have even been married off.

In the circumstances, protection of child rights should better be taken from the level of mere rhetoric and reiteration by government leaders and advocacy bodies at seminars and symposia to the field of action to remove the curse from society.

And to reduce the rate of dropout, steps need to be taken to provide children with food and other incentives at school so that the poor guardians feel encouraged to keep sending their wards to school.

Where is the civility?

The manner in which Begum Zia was made to vacate her residence of nearly forty years has left a bad taste even with those that believe that the house doesn't belong to her or that she should have let that go long ago when she got embroiled in politics.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

NO one should be allowed to retain what is not his or hers -- no matter how that came to be in his or her possession. And what the state giveth it can taketh away too. But there is a dignified way of taking it away. Even in a country like ours, where we are normally not accustomed to politeness, a modicum of graciousness ought to be reserved, at least for leading political personalities, all the more so if he or she happens to be an ex-prime minister or the leader of the opposition.

But Begum Zia also happens to be the widow of an assassinated president who was a freedom fighter. And the "Bir Uttam" testifies to the valour of Zia during the War of Liberation; and it was awarded to him by no other person than Bangabandhu himself. And that makes the treatment meted out to her even more poignant.

The manner in which Begum Zia was made to vacate her residence of nearly forty years has left a bad taste even with those that believe that the house doesn't belong to her or that she should have let that go long ago when she got embroiled in politics. It has been perceived by many, rightly or wrongly, that it was a way of getting even, for what the current prime minister and her sister was not given by the BNP when it was returned to power in 2002.

Begum Zia cannot be faulted for coming into possession of the house. It was a

rank errant decision on the part of the then government to permit a government property to pass on to private hands. But if seen in the context of the time it was not surprising that the army leadership went overboard in providing for a widow, and the acting president was only too willing to oblige.

Although emotion played a very significant part, there were a few dissenters, but their advice went unheeded. Perhaps nobody could ever foresee a widow, rather mild in demeanour, and even more, reticent in disposition, would turn out to be the leader of one of the largest parties in the country, be a pain in the neck of Ershad for most of the nine years of his regime, and get elected as prime minister twice.

It would have been extremely prudent of Begum Zia to vacate the cantonment house long before she was forced to. If for nothing else, her being inside the cantonment and being involved in politics restricted her space when out of power, and created great inconvenience for those who were residing inside the cantonment, when in power. And in a country where more than 90% of the people cannot own a house, having two gifted by the state appears absurd if not bizarre. And she would have spared herself and the nation the embarrassment that both were subjected to had this absurdity dawned on her.

The manner in which the eviction was handled on November 12th would have



been comical were it not for the fact that the issue was burdened with emotions and sentiments. One would naturally question the undue haste with which the eviction process was undertaken, given that the matter was with the highest judiciary and the hearing was due only two weeks after. Some feel that the judiciary and indeed the apex court of the country have been preempted by the action of the government.

And it was not difficult to see through the ludicrous statements that emanated from various sources. If Begum Zia had decided to leave the house on her own why was there posse of police personal to see her off? Was it not a waste of manpower? It was unfortunate that the army was dragged in the political game. One wished that somebody could draft more intelligible and credible press notes that did not make those purporting to issue those appear ridiculous.

The comments that followed the eviction added to the already vitiated atmosphere. It was cynicism of the crudest form when the AL chose to officially

thank Begum Zia for "vacating the house on her own" knowing fully well that it was not the case. And when a senior office bearer of the ruling party tried to pass the buck on the military saying that the matter has to do with the CEO and nothing to do with the government he sounded very puerile. Isn't the Cantonment Board a part of the state administration? And when the attorney general commented that the law would take its own course -- did it really? Or does "own course" mean a course that is determined by the administration?

The matter has kicked up a lot of dust that may not settle for a long time, and may not be without its fallout. And many apprehend that this will perhaps keep the vendetta game rolling for many years. This episode will, regrettably, keep the abrasive nature of AL-BNP relationship alive, and the unfortunate sufferer will be the people. We have already got a hint of things to come.

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Last chance to save the wild tiger?

Saving the wild tiger is a global challenge. Just as with many of the other challenges of sustainability -- such as climate change, pandemic disease, or poverty -- the crisis facing tigers overwhelms local capabilities and transcends national boundaries.

ROBERT ZOELICK

AS Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book" begins, Mother and Father Wolf are troubled to learn that the tiger, "Shere Khan, the Big One, has shifted his hunting grounds." The wolves fear the tiger's presence in their midst may anger local villagers and cause man

to seek revenge, threatening animal and land alike.

In 1894, when this collection of short stories was published, 100,000 tigers roamed the wild. Today, that number has plummeted to 3,200. And Shere Khan's hunting grounds -- the habitats in which all wild tigers live -- are vanishing. Tigers



now occupy only 7% of their original range. We are fast-approaching a time when the roar of a tiger in the wild will be replaced forever by silence.

The extinction of the wild tiger would be an extraordinary tragedy. It would be a tragedy not only because of the appalling loss of these iconic animals, but also because it would pose a threat to the health of the habitats in which they live and the prey that support them. Tigers are an umbrella species -- their health reflects the health of surrounding plants and animals.

We know what is causing the decline in numbers of wild tigers: illegal poaching; illegal wildlife trade; loss of habitat through conversion, encroachment, and land degradation. But the good news is that we have also found that tiger populations can recover. For them to do so we have to target the illicit demand that drives tiger decline -- because the illegal trade in wildlife is nothing more than organised crime. In fact, it's the third largest form of organised crime, after the arms and drugs trades.

2010 is the Year of the Tiger. On November 21-24, the Global Tiger Summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, will bring together the 13 countries that still have wild tigers, along with the World Bank Group, Smithsonian Institution, the WWF, National Geographic, and other conservation and development partners and stakeholders. The Summit will be an historic occasion, where world leaders will undertake specific commitments with the goal of doubling tiger numbers to 7,000 by 2022, the next Year of the Tiger, and protecting their habitats.

Around the globe, individuals, governments, the World Bank Group, the Global Environment Facility, and conservation groups have already invested considerable resources in tiger protection -- and there have been successes. The Amur, or Siberian tiger has been brought back from the brink of extinction through the combined anti-poaching and conservation efforts of the Russian government, local and international NGOs, and local communities in the Russian Far East.

The Terai Arc Landscape project in Nepal offers another possible model for how human communities can coexist alongside core tiger habitats. For this project, conservationists in the public and private sectors are working together to restore, reconnect, and manage 11 national parks into one continuous corridor of protected areas to benefit humans and wildlife.

These examples show that tiger popu-

lations can recover if habitats can be protected, within and outside protected areas, and if poaching of tigers and their prey is stopped.

But while there are some important successes, the bigger picture remains bleak. Habitat degradation and fragmentation continue. Conservation efforts are continually being undermined by poaching and illegal trade. Wild tigers are slipping away.

Saving the wild tiger is a global challenge. Just as with many of the other challenges of sustainability -- such as climate change, pandemic disease, or poverty -- the crisis facing tigers overwhelms local capabilities and transcends national boundaries. This is a problem that cannot be handled by individual governments alone. In order to succeed, it will take a partnership of national governments and organisations pooling their expertise and passion.

Central to all these efforts, however, must be strong ownership of the conservation agenda by tiger range countries, because it is those who live with the tiger who will determine the great cats' fate. This is why it is critical to engage and empower these governments' leaders, bring them together on a single platform of action, and develop national policies tailored to individual country needs. This is why the Global Tiger Summit offers the chance to be a game-changer in contrast to previously failed efforts.

The task will not end in St. Petersburg. We will need to ensure robust implementation and regular stocktaking in the next 3-5 critical years to ensure success. Success would mark a turning point, where countries secure wildlife and biodiversity, and their very valuable but fragile natural wealth.

The plight of tigers casts a spotlight on the broader biodiversity crisis that often goes unnoticed amid the many actors debating climate change. If we falter, the tigers' loss would be a dramatic indication of our failure to safeguard biodiversity and balanced development.

By working to save the wild tigers, we're protecting a majestic animal so it can continue to stir our imagination, just as it did in Kipling's day. At the same time, we're arousing attention about all the biodiversity of our planet.

In Kipling's story, Mowgli, the man-cub, was rescued from a tiger. It is critical that we come together now to save the last of the great wild tigers -- from man.

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