

Leadership by example

The CJ has shown the way

THAT which is regarded as a fundamental requirement of transparency and a guaranteed attribute of a functional and responsible democracy, unfortunately, had to await the initiative of a high functionary of the state to be reminded of and be complied with. Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque submitted his wealth statement to President Zillur Rahman on Thursday leading the way for the judges of the Appellate Division and High Court divisions to furnish their wealth statements to the CJ.

This is a highly timely step towards filling a transparency and accountability deficit in the highest echelons of judiciary and down below the pyramid. As for the judges of the lower courts it is mandatory for them to attach their wealth statements with the annual confidential reports to the Supreme Court.

The probity on the part of the judges must not only be something that is applied and practised but also to be provided for in a compelling built-in fashion. Safeguarding and ensuring transparency is the golden way to enhance public confidence in the justice system. In this context, what should be the ideal periodicity and modality of submission of wealth statements and their review and oversight would have to be worked out within the system.

What is coming about in the judiciary laudable as it is, needs to be taken as a reminder by other functionaries of the state to follow suit. Thus the Prime Minister, ministers, MPs of the ruling party and those of other parties, other high government functionaries and those of the statutory bodies need to furnish details of their wealth status and bring these to public knowledge. It is extremely important; in fact, it's a cornerstone of a transparent democracy that people in high places, especially those elected, are obliged to periodically submit their accounts, acquisitions and inherited wealth to public scrutiny.

It is evidently a matter of regret that, to the exception of Finance Minister AMA Muhith, none among the ministers and party lawmakers has submitted annual wealth statement despite the Awami League's express commitment in its electoral manifesto to be doing so. Two years are passing by and yet no annual wealth statements other than of the finance minister is in the government's hand.

We would therefore urge the Prime Minister to intervene at the party and government levels to end the default culture in an area of the highest importance to ensure credibility of public functionaries and with that to instill confidence in public mind about accountability and incorruptibility of a government.

Shoddy state of BSMMU ICU

Can it get any worse?

THE description of the treatment at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) ICU and the condition of the general area belie belief. If that is the state of the premier public hospital of the country very little can be left to the imagination about the condition of other public hospitals.

We will not be very much off the mark to suggest that the state of the BSMMU ICU, as depicted in a recent report in this newspaper, is fairly representative of the conditions of the other departments in the BSMMU, and indeed of the other public hospitals in the country.

An intensive care unit requires the highest degree of sanitisation and cleanliness to ensure that the under-treatment patients are free from all possible infection. The picture and the description of the attendants of the patients making the corridor a temporary home, and that is being allowed under the nose of the hospital administration, speak poorly of the general state of affairs of the public health service.

What does one make of the premier hospital, which also happens to be a medical university too, where patients' attendants have to remind the nurses of the ICU to administer medicines, after having prepared and procured the medicines too? What can you call an ICU whose corridor is cluttered with eating utensils and personal stuff of the attendants? One has not heard of an ICU patients consuming food other than those produced in the hospital kitchen. It is incomprehensible that outsiders should be asked to assist the nurses in administering treatment to patients in the ICU.

One wonders why attendants of patients have to scurry for medicines, and one assumes that for an ICU patient these are lifesaving medicines, when these should be available with the ICU. For patients in intensive care lifesaving medicines must be at hand. What if the relative cannot procure the medicine quickly? After all, ICU treatment is not for free, and it is very expensive too, and thus one would expect that all the necessary medicines would be readily available for immediate administration when needed.

To say the least, there cannot be a shoddier picture of a hospital's ICU than that we have come across in the report. We are surprised too that the administration is unable to ensure the required standard of the department, the apparent helplessness discerned in the statement of the Director of BSMMU. The only deduction that one can make is that the concerned persons are least bothered about the department or they are busy elsewhere.

The BSMMU is not doing the patients any favour. After all, the patients are paying through their nose for the

Food price inflation

M. MIZANUR RAHMAN

IN the last fiscal year inflation in food price was about 11%. When 40% of the people of a country live below the poverty line, this trend of food price inflation becomes an unbearable headache for them. Though productivity in agricultural sector is gradually rising these days, it will, perhaps, not be sufficient to control food price. The upcoming days for us are not good as there are a number of crises to fight against.

Apart from development in some sectors the country has plunged into an ocean of problems, but we still do not see any sign of recovery. The ADB estimates that the soaring food prices could affect a billion people in Asia, home to two-thirds of the world's poor and where spending on food accounts for 60% of total average expenditure.

Climate change, natural disasters, unplanned extraction of resources, power shortage, confrontational politics, rapid increase of population, massive corruption, social and political instability and so many other problems have engulfed the nation. With all these, food security and rise in food price have become big challenges as well.

According to BBS data, food inflation increased continually and stood at 9.72% in September, while it was 9.64% in August. Rural food inflation increased to 10.51% in September from 9.95% in August, while urban food inflation in September declined to 7.95% against 8.95% in August. Recently, a WB report on the Bangladesh economy said that prices in Bangladesh were affected by price developments on the international market, especially food prices in India.

The same argument was given by Will Martin, a manager of Agriculture and Rural Development section of the World Bank (WB) on December 27 in a seminar arranged by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies. He said that the protectionist system caused sufferings to the consumers of the developing country. He also emphasised adoption of technology to promote agricultural growth. But

while doing so, Martin viewed the phenomenon from the consumers' perspective not from the producers' perspective.

Our government took the same view when it decided to import food grains from abroad. But, it has to be remembered that retaining the farmers in the agricultural system is very important for the country.

According to a projection of WB, there will be a massive capital growth in the coming years throughout the world, and this growth will indeed have a huge impact on the consump-

tion habit of people. In 2050, the population growth of Asia will be about 34%, and the growth in capital will be an amazing 80%. This growth will affect food price from both the supply and the demand sides.

Today, though people are not dying, they are going hungry and becoming stunted with reduced mental and physical capacity. They are suffering. The hungry population of over 60 million people is larger than most other global cases -- the third largest poor population in any country after China and India. Nearly half of Bangladesh's

children are underweight, making it one of the most severe cases of malnutrition in the world. While Bangladesh has definitely got more food than it had thirty years back, yet almost half of Bangladesh is still far from being food secure.

Bangladesh has achieved production growth in agriculture not by accident but by deliberate efforts with more intensive use of inputs, which ultimately had a huge impact on our bio-diversity and environmental sustainability. When growth becomes the only goal and is achieved in



A. M. AHAD/DRINK NEWS

It is true that the aggregate capital stock of the country is increasing, but the rising inequality in our society is also alarming.

unplanned ways, it affects some related sectors badly.

For increasing agricultural output, technological adoption has been emphasised. There should be a difference in the use of technology as our agricultural patterns are different from those of the West. Small holding agriculture is increasing here, reducing the economies of scale. Moreover, agricultural food processing industries are not growing here, and diversification of food is also very difficult as we are struggling to meet the staple demand. It is generally argued that high food

Stormy New Year beckons

KULDIP NAYAR

NOBEL Laureate Amartya Sen has said at the International Tagore Conference in Kolkata that "a deep political analysis" was required to understand the reason behind violence. This is a pertinent question posed to a country which won independence through non-violence. Besides, it also claims that it has rejected violence as an instrument in the formulation of its policy, internal or external.

Yet there is hardly any city where violence has not marred the rhythm of life and development. Women and children live in a sense of insecurity. And most of the countryside and the tribal areas are pushed by the security forces on one side and the Maoists and the religious leaders on the other.

There are various reasons which have brought India to this stage. What is most discernable is the loss of people's faith in functioning of the institutions, whether parliament, executive or even the judiciary. The common man doubts the bona fides of the government and the instruments it has. Nor does he trust the legal system to deliver him justice. Over the years he has come to believe that the pressure works. This manifests itself somewhere in the shape of peaceful agitation and somewhere in the form of violent defiance.

Since disconnect between the rulers and the people is lessening rapidly, the outbursts take the government by surprise. These are pent up feelings, finding abrupt outlets. They can be anticipated and probably stalled if only the government is responsive and humane. But the entire system has come to be so manipulated through corruption or other considerations that the *aam aadmi* (common man) cannot get even routine things through, like getting his dues or paying bills without greasing palms.

If people responsible for this were

made accountable and taken to task quickly for their misdeeds, the punishment would serve as an example for others and gratify the sufferers. In the long process of pinning the responsibility, if ever that stage is reached, there are many loopholes, not only legal or procedural but also what is known as *sirfarish* (recommendation). The god-father can be a politician, a bureaucrat or a media hand. India has seen this in the series of scams which have come to light in the last few months.

The society has inferred that every thing can be managed through money, if possible, or political interference, if necessary. And when the top persons involved in a scam or scandal gets away with it, the general impression that the powerful is never touched deepens further.

This increases insensitivity. Already inured to religious class and caste prejudices, people have lost hope in the rule of law which treats everyone at par. They are so used to violation of human and other rights that they do not complain even when they are themselves victims. They are afraid to be categorised as Maoist or anti-national. The life imprisonment given to Binayak Sen, a doctor working in Madhya Pradesh among tribals and reportedly supporting the Maoists and questioning the repressive measures, has shocked the society.

A few NGOs have pointed out that the whole case was fabricated to instill fear. There is yet another example of Nirmala in Tripura in the northeast.

She has been on fast for the last 10 years to have the Armed Forces Special Powers Act removed. Protests by the activists do not worry the government. In fact, their example is cited to show how free the system is.

Then there are numerous laws to "maintain law and order." On top of lessening democratic space comes the escalating cost of food prices. With the basic commodities getting dear every day, how does the lower half live? If he becomes desperate, however condemnable, he conveys a message to those living in comfort asking when will his turn come to have two square meals?

No one person, not one party, not one bureaucrat is responsible for the situation in which we have landed ourselves. All have contributed to the mess. The entire nation has to ponder over the scenario while there is still time to take remedial steps. We have to get out of the rut that a government lapse is an opportunity for the opposition.

In fact, we have been going down the hill from the day we won independence. Lakhs of people who had suffered and sacrificed during the national struggle were left with no focus, no ideal to pursue. The target was independence. Once that was achieved, there was no road map to go ahead. Freedom fighters were not soldiers, who would disperse after the war had been won.

Many of them had not even a place to go. Words that only political independence had been achieved and that economic independence was yet to be won were commendable, but they

were mere words. They did satisfy those who wanted jobs or assistance to build industry or business on their own. Some even sought to cash in on their sacrifice.

Leaders in the forefront of the struggle were expected to occupy chairs on the high table, and most of them did. But what about others who had given everything they had? What was their future? They were left to fend on their own.

True, the experience of partition was traumatic. Seeking new places in harsh surroundings was bound to be upsetting. But that was long ago. Deducting even a decade of troublesome period, the rulers had clear 50 years to give people the minimum standard of living and the security. *Roti, kapada aur makaan* (bread, clothes and house) was a pipe dream, meant to bamboozle people for election purposes. If nothing else, at least starvation should have been averted.

When Amartya Sen was asked if the violent situation could derail the state's economic growth, he said: "Violence produces a terrible state of agony, insecurity, loss of life and loss of sense of peace." That is obvious. What has happened to the society is that it has erased the thin line dividing right from wrong and moral from immoral. There is no desire, much less effort, to act according to what is right. Nor is there any realisation of what is wrong.

Parliament is the best place where the deficiencies of the system can be discussed and steps taken to check the rot. But the forum itself has become a playing ground for the ego of politicians and their dirty tricks. To stall parliament for some days is a protest, but stalling it indefinitely is a slur on democracy.

The cup of people's patience is full. If political parties behave as they did in 2010, they are in for big trouble. Indeed, the New Year looks stormy.

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