

Our pledges In to the 21st year

OUR constant strivings over the last two decades have been for fair-minded, decent, constructive and ethical journalism. We have never flinched from the overarching values of journalism nor we ever shall. Modestly but firmly we have adhered to norms of ethical journalism demanding good governance, responsible opposition, efficient and impartial service delivery, rule of law and environment protection. We have also upheld just causes, such as gender equality, minority rights bridging rich-poor gap and inclusive egalitarian social order.

With the help of our readers and patrons we can quite see we have reached a threshold. From here, as we reaffirm our commitment to principled journalism, the demands of technology egg us on to innovate and outgrow our present selves. Let creativity reshape the paper to bring it at par with international print journalism, of which South Asia is the most thriving face.

Our fresh vows are to seek greater freedom of expression and removal of all fetters on individuals and democratic institutions. In particular, our relentless campaign will be against corruption and abuse of power. No corrupt individual or functionary who indulges in abuse of power and trample dignity of human person will ever find a friend in us. Uncompromising in our call of duty, and with steely determination, we ring out the message that no intimidation will work with us.

We have to say while the benefits of free press are well understood by the people, these are yet to be grasped by the power that be. The latter somehow missing on the potent efficacy of newspaper as an independent feedback mechanism, and a bridgehead for linking the government and the governed tends to think of media as an adversary. This is as unfortunate as it is tragic. Free, responsible and constructive expression of opinion and coverage of news are the staple of journalism. A democratic government can only be expected to regard independent journalism as a positive agent for change to benefit by.

As for us in *The Daily Star* on our 20th anniversary, we pledge to our readers, greater in-depth reporting, more investigative stories, more features on our everyday life, and making greater effort to reflect the concern and interest of the ordinary people. In terms of technology we plan to bring in most modern, and utilise the latest marketing tools to reach even greater numbers of homes and readers. Above all, we pledge honesty, fearlessness and objectivity in our work.

Students on rampage

Why resort to violence?

THE students of Dhaka University on Tuesday went on a rampage after traffic police stopped the bus carrying the students which dodged traffic signal. In the ensuing clashes, between a section of DU students and on-duty cops at Russel Square in the city at least ten people were hurt.

If the bus had actually violated the signal at an important intersection that was an offence on the part of its driver. And if the on-duty traffic policeman blocked the bus for the wrong doing he was carrying out his duty. How violence could crop there? We just fail to understand.

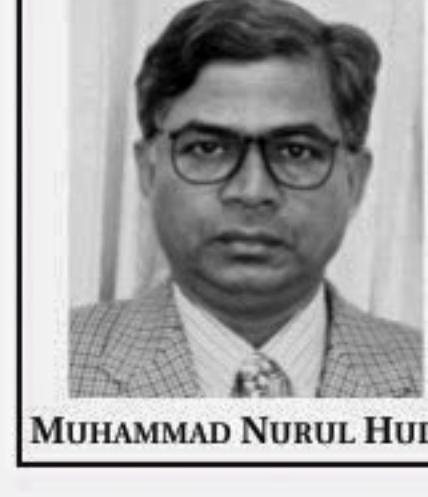
The students allegedly attacking the policemen were joined by students onboard another DU bus which was then passing the intersection. However, the Dhaka University proctor claimed that the bus hurried to cross the signal as many students were going to take exams. A policeman is also alleged to have passed indecent remarks prompting the clashes.

The fallout was traffic jam in all adjacent roads including the Mirpur road causing unnecessary suffering to people who were holed up in their vehicles for more than an hour. Students set afire a police motor bike and bashed several vehicles.

The situation could have been avoided if the students allowed the cops to do their duty in first place. As educated people it was unbecoming of them to have reacted the way they did.

While the police should show more restraint, the students should also create good instances by negotiating such situations in a civil manner, realising that their unruly behaviour causes hardship to other people. It also lowers their image.

Leveraging public sentiment



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

DISCERNING observers say that the cynic segment of the intellectuals believe that in our parlance respecting public sentiment does not necessarily mean sharing public naivety or at worst their stupidity. One would like to trust that our wily politicians do not subscribe to such a view. Therefore, there are good reasons to hope that public voice or aspirations carry a special meaning for our public leaders.

It is in this backdrop that one feels encouraged to hear that henceforth the BNP, a major political party, would seriously take into account the public sentiment while crafting its strategy.

The trusting millions of Bangladesh would expect that BNP's strategy would not remain confined to the religious sentiment of the people and would encapsulate the mundane and material expectations of the broad populace. The question, therefore, is how much people-centric have our political programmes been? How does a paradigm shift in our attitude to people's welfare become a reality? Those are thoughts that should engage the attention of concerned citizens.

In specific terms, will our politicians realise that corruption is the greatest solvent of public institutions and is a far greater threat than poverty? Shall they recognise that ordinary people in course of their business are bewildered and frustrated by reckless corruption of service-giving institutions, and that there seems to be little effort to stem the rot? One may need to know if our public leaders shall remain occupied in maintaining a system that is poisoned by collective bad faith and polluted by indi-

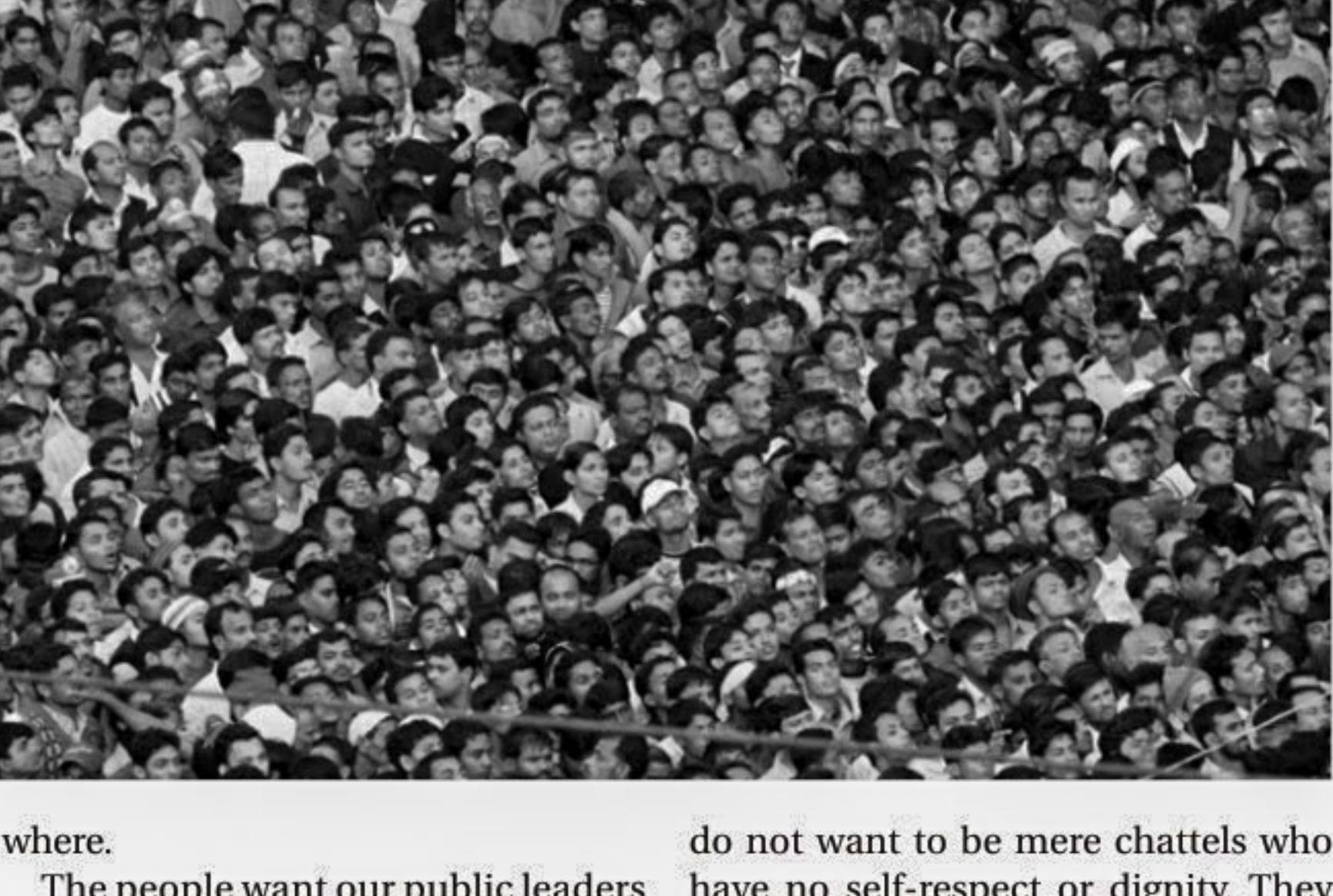
vidual avarice.

Public sentiment demands that we in Bangladesh remain constitutionally and politically united so that we retain the strength that is necessary to sustain us in adversity and also progress towards prosperity. Citizens would like to see that ignorance, incompetence and dishonesty are treated as serious disqualifications for high public office, either in the ministerial ranks or else-

effective instrument of crime control; and that would entail actions like re-defining its role, re-fixation of its size and rationalising its functions. One may also like to see an end to the apparently unlimited powers of the police that might have been useful in colonial days but are irrelevant now.

The people's sentiment centres around their participation in the process of governance. To be specific, they

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change from privilege to talent and from accident of birth to emphasis on calibre and demand that the leaders make serious efforts to stop our society from disintegrating into confrontational factions.

The citizens wish and pray that our leaders are blessed by the wisdom to perceive the truth and display the courage to say it to the people. They want the authority to demonstrate that there is no substitute for knowledge and integrity in public life and that persons are appointed to high public offices because of what they are and not because of their belonging to a particular interest. They want their leaders to stand like a rock in the wilderness of shifting sands.

On a wider canvas, people want the leaders to show the spirit of moderation. This moderation, in practice, would mean not pressing a partisan advantage to its bitter end coupled with the ability to understand and respect the other opinion and the realisation of a unity between all citizens. The people want them to inculcate the habits of consent and compromise that are attributes of mature political societies.

Citizens do not want their leaders to remain preoccupied with single-minded pursuit of money thus becoming money-minded and avaricious. In desperation, they are now looking for people for whom money is not everything.

Our people do not have high aspirations and they do not make heavy demands. They only want reasonably honest and pragmatic leadership that can deliver. The need of the hour is good management and managers. Ensuring that would mean responding positively to public sentiment.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a columnist for *The Daily Star*.

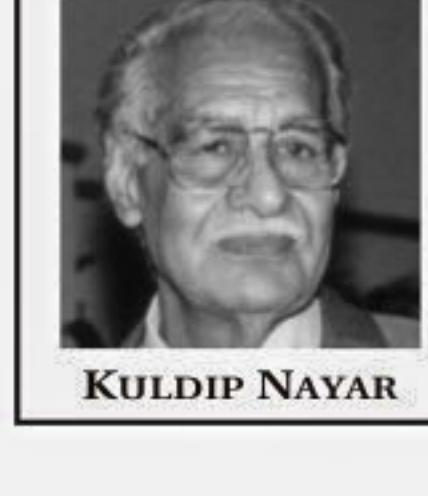
where.

The people want our public leaders to realise that bureaucracy is the instrument through which public policy is formulated and plans implemented. Therefore, after defining the role of public servants and settling the rules of the game, they should be allowed to operate independently and without political interference.

Concerned citizens would like to transform the police force into an

do not want to be mere chattels who have no self-respect or dignity. They want to be in a position to demand protection or security as a matter of right, and do not like to request, beseech or beg. In fine, they want an effective end to the present patron-client relationship, once and for all.

Responding to popular sentiments would in effect mean that our leaders put the nation above the party and the group. People would like to see the



KULDIP NAYAR

WHEN a civil society exhausts its patience, it comes out on the streets. It is a angry, but peaceful. Such was the phenomenon one witnessed in India a few days ago. The country was ablaze with passion, petulance and purity for four days. The mood was to overhaul the entire system which people considered rotten to the core.

Thousands of them gathered from different walks of life in several cities and felt good in responding to a Gandhian, Anna Hazare's call to weed out corruption. He had gone on fast unto death to force the government to set up a 10-member committee, with half of them from civil society, to redraft a bill, pending for the last 42 years, to establish an institution of Lokpal (Ombudsman) to ensure punishment to the corrupt, whether in politics, judiciary or elsewhere.

It was a catharsis of civil society which felt wanting within itself and helpless in doing anything against corruption from top to bottom. Hazare's campaign had given civil society an opportunity to participate in a struggle to redeem itself. Exasperated over a string of scams, resulting in a loss of thousands of crores of rupees to the public exchequer, the society had lost faith in democratic polity. Hazare revived that faith.

When the government accepted Hazare's demand for a joint committee, following which he broke his fast, the peaceful mass of people, essentially from the middle class, was convinced that corruption would be eliminated. Maybe, people are expecting too much. Maybe, they consider the Lokpal as the end by itself, not the means to end corruption. Whatever their preference, their belief in Hazare is total. They are fully behind him because they see in him a person who

would see the end of corruption, an irritant in their daily life.

Cynics and critics have joined hands to run down the movement because it sought to circumvent the institutions available under the constitution. But they miss the point that such outlets -- Gandhian Jayaprakash Narayan's movement was one in 1975 -- take place because institutions have not been responding or were destroyed by the rulers.

Anna Hazare is a symptom, not the disease. The disease is people's disappointment that even after 62 years of independence the living conditions obtaining in the country have not improved.

Ms. Indira Gandhi demolished them at the Centre in 1975-77 during the emergency. Chief ministers have done away with them in states. The administration has now been reduced to a system which is run by the nexus of politicians, bureaucrats, agencies and criminals. Whether a chief secretary or the investigation head, he awaits word from the above.

I am somewhat worried over Hazare's pronouncements. During the movement, he said that Mahatma Gandhi's way of non-violence could be replaced by Shivaji's violent methods. In other words, Hazare means that he will achieve his goal with peace if possible, with militancy if necessary.

His praise of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi is against the spirit of the movement, which is secular in content. Modi has done well in the field of development but has undone his work by planning and executing the pogrom which killed nearly 2,500 Muslims. Cases of fake encounters are still going on in courts. How can Hazare give him a certificate? It may be naïve of him to do so but he has to be careful when people have put him on a high pedestal.

What can people do? True, they can

cleanse the government by electing honest, conscientious candidates. But how do they do that? There has to be a political process to bring in better people. That process has become so expensive that the campaign of a parliament candidate costs at least Rs.10 crore, if not more. Political parties are not willing to jettison even criminals from the list of candidates. (Some 25% in the current parliament are criminals).

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The Central Election Commission has been trying to convince the parties to keep out criminals but without any success. What it means is that there has to be electoral reforms to enable honest people to have a level-playing field. Money and musclemen who have distorted the democratic process must be kept out.

Reforms may not form part of the Lokpal bill's new draft, which the government and civil society have agreed to finalise by June 30. Hazare has said that it must become a law by August 15. Yet, I see a lot of resistance on the part of the ministerial team headed by Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee. The government does not want the Lokpal to even receive complaints directly, much less to dispose them.

Human Resources Development Minister Kapil Sibal has made fun of the Lokpal bill. He says that it cannot provide education and medical care to the poor. We all know that the Lokpal is not a panacea for the country's ills. But the institution, when set up, will see to it that politicians, judges and bureaucrats are made accountable.

The manner in which the government stuck to the notification on the announcement of the joint committee

makes me feel concerned. The Congress spokesman had argued that if the notification were issued it would make a mockery of the constitution and set a precedent which would be dangerous for the nation.

Ms. Indira Gandhi issued a notification on the imposition of the emergency without consulting even the cabinet. She went straight to the president and had the notification signed almost at midnight. How can the ruling party talk about constitutional propriety when it has done so?

The basic fact to note in the movement is that the urban middleclass has expressed its exasperation for the first time in a peaceful and collective manner. The bill that emerges from the joint committee of the government and civil society will have to meet the expectations that have been raised. The middle class is scrutinising the developments every day. Both sides are riding a tiger which they can dismount by being on the same page. Otherwise, both will get hurt.

The movement also indicates that the country is boiling. Hundreds of agitations and protests in different parts of the country in the last 10-15 years show that. The lava beneath can outpour if the rulers do not attend to the needs of the common man. Anna Hazare is a symptom, not the disease. The disease is people's disappointment that even after 62 years of independence the living conditions obtaining in the country have not improved.

I feel this is the time for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to rehabilitate himself. He has lost prestige considerably. He should intervene and should be seen doing so to see that civil society representatives have their proposals incorporated in the Lokpal bill. His ministers, particularly P. Chidambaram and Kapil Sibal, are the hardliners. The prime minister will have to curb them.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 16

73

Masada, a Jewish fortress, falls to the Romans after several months of siege, ending the Jewish Revolt. 1582 Spanish conquistador Hernando de Lerma founds the settlement of Salta, Argentina.

1853

The first passenger rail opens in India, from Bori Bunder, Bombay to Thane.

1863

American Civil War: The Siege of Vicksburg ships led by Union Admiral David Dixon Porter move through heavy Confederate artillery fire on approach to Vicksburg, Mississippi.

1917

Lenin returns to Petrograd from exile in Switzerland.

1919

Gandhi organizes a day of "prayer and fasting" in response to the killing of Indian protesters in the Amritsar Massacre by the British.

1922

The Treaty of Rapallo, pursuant to which Germany and the Soviet Union re-establish diplomatic relations, is signed.

1946

Syria gains independence.