

## ENIGMATTERS

# The enlightened editors



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**E**DITORS from twelve dailies of India, Pakistan and Nepal were in Dhaka last week to attend the 20th anniversary celebration of The Daily Star. As a part of the Editorial team of this daily, I had the opportunity to attend a discussion meeting with the guests at the Daily Star office. I actually looked forward to this deliberation.

The meet was further graced by eminent scholars like Prof. Rehman Sobhan, Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, NGO specialist Ms. Shaheen Anam and business tycoon Latifur Rahman. You could not ask for anything more. Our editor moderated the proceeding. It wasn't a compartmentalised caucus; it was an informal exchange of minds.

The visiting guests were, Kuldeep Nayar, journalist-columnist from India, Ravindra Kumar, Chief Editor and MD, The Statesman Ltd, Kolkata, Jaideep Bose, Editor, Times of India, Mumbai, Dr. Dileep Padgoankar, Consulting Editor, Times Group, Delhi, K.N. Tilak Kumar, Chief Editor, Deccan Herald, Banglaore, Kunda Dixit, Editor and Publisher, Nepal Times, Kathmandu, Narayan Wagle, Editor-in-Chief, Nagarik, Kathmandu; Hamid Mir, Executive Editor GEO TV, Islamabad, Zafar Abbas, Chief Editor, Dawn Karachi; Muhammad Ziauddin, Executive Editor, Express Tribune, Islamabad.

Instead of resorting to archetypal reporting, I would like to focus on what these wise men think. Mr. Kuldeep Nayar, by now himself a time-honoured institution of journalism, said a few words, soft but firm. He lamented over slow progress in peace and development for the last sixty years and till today sixty percent of Indians are in poverty. He mentioned

Anna Hazare, who recently made news in India by going on hunger strike to protest against corruption. He said that Anna Hazare was a symptom, and not the disease. He pointed to the present pathetic state of things in India. He also stressed on the need to change the mindset of the leadership of all the countries in the region.

I heard the editors with interest. They emphasised on better understanding between countries of the region, more interactions between people, more opening of trade, and frequent exchange of information. The meet was informed that India was developing fast and there was a wind of change blowing all over the country. The change is occurring so fast that it is now hard to cope with it. Voters in India have moved on to development politics from typical party politics. A spirit of entrepreneurship has taken over. India is shining.

Editors from Pakistan observed that while India was shining and Bangladesh was moving on, Pakistan was in trouble. But there were hopes of democracy taking firmer roots in that country now plagued by violence and terrorism. Pakistan expects India to take the lead in promoting duty free trade between the two countries. This will create interest in the business communities of both countries. Initially, both India and Pakistan can open trading between their states, like the two Punjab. They also cited failure of consensus in Pakistan political ranks as the main cause of the prevalent

problems in Pakistan. Editor of Nepal Times observed that in Nepal they didn't get to hear much about Bangladesh through any local source, except on certain occasions from CNN or BBC. This was unusual for regional neighbors. He suggested that journalists come up with joint reporting arrangements on important issues of national and regional import.

The Daily Star editor, Mahfuz Anam, posed a question whether the editors were going to be obstructions to modernisation. He stressed on the need for a meeting of regional editors once a year, if not for any serious business at least for socialising. Socialising for them would mean an opportunity for greater understanding. Even in the lightest vein, they are expected to talk about the most serious issues. To me, this meet was very important in that it brought together thinking minds and authors of the

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region. These were important people, people with deep understanding of issues. They are operating leading newspapers in their countries and toiling hard to address the people and their leaders, students and businessmen, workers and farmers, the army and the police etc., in short, people from all strata of the country. They also fight the global war and deal with diplomacy of various kinds. They are the ultimate guide and conscience of a nation.

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deliberate it turns out to be momentous. When they show their keenness in building a tangible relationship on a sustainable ground it emits a noteworthy signal.

They expressed their sincere desire to have a well-knit information exchange system and a true bondage of journalists for the development of the region. They showed eagerness to work on anything that would promote trade, culture and history.

They all felt the same about their political leadership. The truth is that the political leaderships in our countries don't let us mingle and be one, and prosper by mutual exchange of knowledge and wealth.

Journalists have a major role to play to develop mutual understanding and trust among the countries of the region. Without trust nothing tangible is expected. This trust is more conspicuously absent in India and Pakistan. Perhaps they forget their importance in the global context. Both are important strategically and economically. Both have nukes to scare the world, both have been making their marks in world sports and labour markets.

So the need and importance of peace between them has to be felt deeply and realised.

India as a bigger neighbour could do a world of good to the region by creating an ambience of trust by extending the hand of cooperation towards her smaller friends. Pakistan can also contribute to regional peace by coming up with pragmatic measures to counter extremism in her grounds. Regional cooperation in developing trade is as important as countering terrorism collectively.

The press can play a revolutionary role in creating this trust, bridging the gap and tying the knots. The pen has always remained mightier than the sword.

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## Celebrating Mujib Nagar Day

*Remembering the occasion is vital*

**T**HERE are a few events, and a few days, in a nation's history that wield the utmost influence not only in shaping the course of current developments but sets the path for future course of events. 17th April is such a seminal event in the history of Bangladesh whose significance it appears the nation is gradually becoming oblivious of. It only demonstrates the collective lack of understanding of historical events, and sometimes it is perhaps intentional, and sometimes it stems from an indifference to the past. And on both counts the nation is the loser.

It must not be forgotten that on this very day 40 years ago the formal declaration of Independence of Bangladesh was made heralding the emergence of a country whose people had been a nation for centuries but without a state they could call their own. It was a day when the four trusted lieutenants of Bangabandhu formally declared the nation's resolve to free the country from the rapacious onslaught of a marauding occupation army.

The events in Baidyanathalla in Meherpur, renamed most appropriately after the undisputed leader of our freedom struggle, resuscitated the glory of the Bengalis that had been lost on the battlefield of Plassey more than two hundred years ago, not very far from the spot where the flag of a new born country was unfurled.

The prime minister must be congratulated for starting what we hope will be the tradition for the future because it is essential that we not only celebrate but also grasp the significance of what is a landmark event in the history of the nation.

## Tension in the CHT

*The root cause needs addressing*

**I**N spite of the more than decade long existence of the CHT Peace Accord, one very pivotal area of discord remains festering to this day. This has to do with land disputes. These sometimes take on a violent form. It was evidenced on Sunday by a string of clashes between Bengalees and Adivashis in Ramgarh and Manikchhari in the CHT. The trouble originated in the ploughing of a disputed land by some settlers who claimed to have been using the plot for a long time. Then it spread out.

Although the situation seems to have been brought under control and the local authorities do not regard it as being 'serious', clearly tension prevails. Further backlash cannot be ruled out.

What this spurt in violence indicates is the urgency to come to grips with land rights and settlement issues. An understaffed and ill-equipped Land Commission with an undefined mandate, hardly attuned to the demographic peculiarities of the region, virtually remains a non-starter. The fundamental problems centered around lack of land documentation based on land survey as would reflect realities on the ground. The Adivashi leadership should be fully taken on board by the concerned ministry, regional council and the Land Commission for devising ways and means to overcome the legalistic deficits in the land ownership patterns. Their rights to land would have to be fully protected and unassailably documented.

The Adivashi communities and the Bengalee settlers should learn to live in peace and harmony in their greater collective interest. For our part, we should give no cause for grievance to the Adivashis as to their distinct identity and cultural ethos that are a value addition to our national heritage. Similarly, the detractors of peace accord should abide by a sense of collective ethos for mutual co-existence. The fact that the CHT people are overwhelmingly in favour of a full implementation of the peace accord as a necessary precondition to all round development of the region is good augury. And this will have to be cashed in on.

## BARE FACTS

# Proposed civil service law



M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

**T**HE government has asked for opinions and suggestions of the stakeholders and the people on the draft civil

service law posted on the websites of the establishment ministry, cabinet division and deputy commissioners on March 31. This will enable the people to participate in the decision-making process on issues of national importance.

Earlier, in his budget speech on June 10 for the financial year 2010-2011, Finance Minister A.M.A. Muhith said that "major reforms in public administration have become necessary," and added that "the draft Civil Service Act has been prepared and is in the process of finalisation by holding discussions, workshops and exchange of views with different stakeholders."

Although the Constitution provides for enactment of a law to regulate the appointment and conditions of service of persons in the service of the Republic, the successive governments showed no interest in enacting such a law through the parliament, and instead made and unmade rules by executive orders to meet their political ends.

This has particularly happened for appointment to the posts of deputy secretary, joint secretary, additional secretary and secretary in the Bangladesh Secretariat during the last nineteen years or so.

Rules were made, repealed or amended to suit promotion of a particular batch or persons loyal to the party in power. Had there been an act of Parliament on civil service, it might not have been so easy for them to change it according to their sweet will.

The present government deserves thanks for ultimately realising the need for enacting a law to regulate

the civil service. The draft law says that the incumbent members of different cadres of the present Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) -- deputy secretaries, joint secretaries, additional secretaries and secretaries to the government and such other Class I and Class II officers in the revenue budget as are determined by the government shall constitute the proposed Bangladesh Civil Service.

Some knowledgeable people say that it will largely be a replication of the civil service structure that was introduced in the early eighties through rules and orders. This means a narrow base of the civil service as the majority of persons in the service of the republic will not be included in it. This may not be conducive to generating dynamism in public adminis-

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tration. Pay and Services Commission, 1977 examined this issue carefully and concluded that "the term Civil Service should generally include all functionaries of the government who are not in the military service."

The service will have three tiers: superior tier, senior tier and junior tier. The superior tier will include posts that are involved in policy formulation while the senior tier will carry out implementation of policy decisions. The junior tier will provide necessary assistance to the senior-tier.

The posts in different grades of the three tiers will be filled up by direct recruitment, or by promotion, or by both, excepting 10% of the posts in the superior level that will be kept

reserved for the president who will appoint persons to these posts following the terms and conditions to be determined. This reminds us of the Ershad government's decision of 1989, which reserved 10% posts of deputy secretary and above in Bangladesh Secretariat for the president, who was to appoint persons to these posts through contract or deputiation.

The reintroduction of the parliamentary system of government in early nineties made it obligatory for the president to discharge all his functions in accordance with the advice of the prime minister, excepting the appointment of the prime minister and the chief justice. Consequently, during the last 19 years or so, appointment to these posts was made on political consideration.

If the government wants to appoint some competent persons from outside at the policy-making level, as recently indicated by the finance minister, to bring "dynamism" in the administration, it can develop a transparent procedure to make appointment to certain percentage of posts in the superior tier. This may be included in the relevant recruitment rules. Since the president's approval will be necessary for appointment to all posts in the civil service, there is no need for a separate quota for him. Recommendations for promoting BCS officers at different levels through written tests held by Public Service Commission (PSC) had come earlier also. They could not be implemented due to some practical reasons. Appointment by promotion

to the posts in the superior tier should be avoided. We can examine the procedure of promotion in the civil service in neighbouring countries before taking a final decision on the issue.

Clustering of ministries or services is not a new concept. It existed in Pakistan days. However, the system should be carefully designed so that persons with appropriate background are posted to these ministries or services.

The draft law has proposed retirement of civil servants when they complete 59 years of age. Certain factors like increasing average life-span of our people, need for utilising the experience of the civil servants, and retirement age of the civil servants in the neighbouring countries should guide us in determining the retirement age of our civil servants. The present government has already extended the retirement age of freedom fighters by two years. So, fixation of retirement age of civil servants at 60 years may be considered.

The draft law says that the establishment division will control and manage the proposed civil service. At present, recruitment of persons at the entry level of different cadres through the PSC is the responsibility of the establishment ministry. After recruitment, the control and management of different cadres of the BCS rests with the ministries concerned. Only the BCS (Administration) cadre is directly controlled and administered by the establishment ministry. So, a decentralised approach towards managing the affairs of the proposed civil service should be found out.

To conclude, the composition, recruitment, training and management of persons in the proposed civil service should be planned and implemented in such a way that they can successfully face the challenges of the 21st century.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 19

- 1770** Captain James Cook sights the eastern coast of Australia.
- 1928** The 125th and final fascicle of the Oxford English Dictionary is published.
- 1936** First day of the Great Uprising in Palestine.
- 1943** World War II: In Poland German troops enter The Warsaw ghetto to round up the remaining Jews, beginning the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.
- 1954** Constituent Assembly of Pakistan decides Urdu and Bengali to be national languages of Pakistan.
- 1961** The Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba ends in success for the defenders.
- 1975** India's first satellite Aryabhata is launched.
- 1993** The 51-day siege of the Branch Davidian building outside Waco, Texas, USA, ends when a fire breaks out. Eighty-one people die.
- 1995** Oklahoma City bombing: The Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA, is bombed, killing 168. That same day convicted murderer Richard Wayne Snell, who had ties to one of the bombers, Timothy McVeigh, is executed in Arkansas.
- 1999** The German Bundestag returns to Berlin, the first German parliamentary body to meet there since the Reichstag was dissolved in 1945.
- 2005** Ratzinger is elected as new Pope. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger is elected as the Pope - the head of the world's 1.1 billion Roman Catholics.