

## Increase in transport fares Mechanism needed to enforce rates

COMING on the heels of the recent rise in the price of compressed natural gas (CNG), the move by the government to re-fix public transport fares may have been necessitated. But to announce a 22-30 per cent increase in bus fares in one go is sure to raise a question in the public mind. Actually, the burden of fuel price increase would have to be shared by transport owners, operators and commuters. Moreover, the fact remains that government fixed rates are seldom complied with by the transport operators.

When increase was announced on May 12 for CNG, the move was quickly taken advantage of by private bus transport operators, to a point where they came into sharp conflict with commuters at different points. One does not need much persuasion to be reminded of the severe economic problems consumers are already burdened with -- and not just in the matter of fares. For them now to cough up more money for their movements is going to be a burden on them. That's why it's of utmost importance that the government has a mechanism in place to monitor strict enforcement of the rates. In this endeavour, they should engage the transport owners' and operators' associations as well as government agencies concerned in a continuing process of consultation to ensure that arbitrary fares are not charged from the commuters. For, past experience does not seem to offer any encouragement in this regard; as transport operators have generally managed to get away with their acts.

A further consequence of the rise in fares is an increase in prices of essential commodities. The effects of such a hike on citizens' lives are already beginning to be noticed. With no enhancement in their earnings or purchasing power and yet for them to dig deeper into their pockets to keep families in survival mode, middle and low income group people are bound to suffer. Overall, to what extent the authorities are prepared to keep prices under control is a critical question.

But specifically, are the authorities ready to meet the fallout of the fuel price increase?

## Manpower sector in a crisis

### Find alternative job markets

HERE is no denying that Bangladeshi workers have made their mark abroad by dint of hard work and diligence. They have been big contributors to the national exchequer remitting huge amount of foreign exchange from countries they work in. Some eight million Bangladeshi went to 110 countries during 1976 - 2011 period.

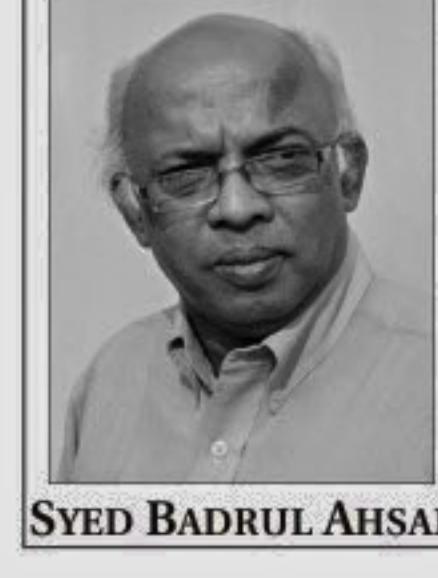
However, a large number of returnees from Libya pose a challenge for the government now. Their rehabilitation has just got underway, but there could be more returnees. There have been problems with Malaysia and Dubai. Malaysia had stopped hiring our workers in 2009; however there is a move to lift the ban soon. But the good news is that the Malaysia has decided to regularise three lakh Bangladeshi workers over the next three months. The authorities must ensure that the workers are not subjected to harassment in the process of regularisation.

To address the problems faced in the manpower export sector, the government ought to prioritise its agenda. It has to gear up the effort to explore alternative job markets in Europe, East Asia and Africa to make up for the predicaments in Japan, ME and North Africa. Health care and hospitality sector could be prospective areas for our skilled workers in Europe.

The government has to ensure adequate training of workers before recruitment. This requires setting up of sufficient number of modern training centres across the country, some with specialised facilities customised to the demand patterns in newer manpower importing countries. Of foremost necessity is keeping migration cost at a minimum as majority of the workers have to meet the cost by selling property or other belongings.

Entire process of exporting manpower should be built around the principle that our workers are appointed legally and able to complete the entire contract period with assured enjoyment of legitimate pay and service conditions. Under no circumstances, they should be forced to or voluntarily become illegal workers. It is not a healthy practice to face deportation and make entreaties

# Of politics being dysfunctional . . .



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

FORMER Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has been enlightening expatriate Bengalis in London on the dysfunctional nature of Parliament back

home in Bangladesh. And that is not all. She feels, as she has felt since the results of the general elections of December 2008 began to pour in, that the Awami League was installed in power by the caretaker government of Fakhruddin Ahmed. There is yet a little more that she told her party faithful in London on Monday. If the former caretaker chief and the former army chief of staff, General Moeen U. Ahmed, were around, they would be subjected to a public beating.

It is clear that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party has not yet fully comprehended the reasons behind its dismal performance at the 2008 elections. And there lies the pity, for had the BNP and its chairperson gone for some sort of introspection once it became clear that they had been routed at the polls, the country would stand to benefit from such an exercise.

An electoral defeat is not the end of the world. Besides, in the tumult that convulsed our world, which is essentially the country we inhabit, between the end of BNP rule in October 2006 and the return of the Awami League to office in January 2009, there were the lessons that the nation's politicians needed to learn.

Both the Awami League and the BNP ought to have been better political parties by now; both should have demonstrated to the country that they have actually and finally come of age; both should have gone the extra mile to convince the electorate that they have well-defined policies and priorities on offer.

None of these has happened. The

Awami League, having made a raft of promises to the nation in the days and weeks before the elections, has put up a disappointing show. It is not likely to do better than what it has done in the nearly two and a half years since returning to power. And hence the portents of deepening gloom.

The bigger disappointment for the nation has come from the BNP. Every time it has lost an election, it has cried foul and has come forth with untena-

marching on the streets.

It is an abdication of responsibility on the part of a party which does not see what it does not wish to see. Begum Zia and her party leaders and workers would have done a far better and more appreciable job if they had looked inward, the better to comprehend all the mistakes they committed in government between 2001 and 2006. Political morality demands that when a party is comprehensively

**Begum Zia is right to suggest that Bangladesh's legislature is dysfunctional today. The ruling Awami League is not responsible for things having to come to such a pass, though.**



PRASHANT RAVIDRINKNEWS

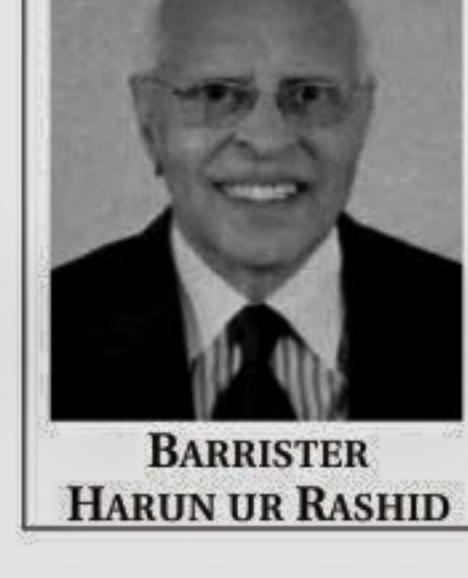
ble reasons to explain its refusal to be part of parliamentary proceedings. Begum Zia and her party colleagues cheerfully describe the Jatiyo Sangsads as being dysfunctional. That is half the truth. The other half is what the nation knows and the opposition does not acknowledge: that Parliament does not function because the BNP still thinks it can and should overthrow a legitimately elected government through

rejected through an exercise of the ballot, it is time for the party go into seclusion, into reflection on what went wrong and why.

The BNP, despite its paltry number of lawmakers in Parliament today, could have added substance to parliamentary debate on the issues through coming forth with clearly set out policies and programmes on what it means to do given another stint in

## BOTTOM LINE

# Impact of Mamata's victory on Bangladesh



BARRISTER  
HARUN UR RASHID

ON May 13, the unofficial result in West Bengal assembly elections show that the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) was decimated after 34 years of rule. Trinamool Congress (TMC) led Ms. Mamata Banerjee and her ally the Congress Party won 226 seats out of 294.

The outgoing Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and 16 ministers of the Left Front lost their seats. The Left Front secured only 62 seats.

Ms. Banerjee declared her party's success as "the new day of independence for the people of West Bengal."

TMC in West Bengal is a partner of the Congress-led government in New Delhi. Ms. Mamata Banerjee has been the union railways minister. She is expected to become the chief minister of West Bengal.

The historical defeat for the Left Front in West Bengal, after three decades in power, is the product of perceived arrogance and political blunders where party convictions and commitment were ditched.

The popular 56-year-old Banerjee, who is the founder and chairperson of the Trinamool Congress which she set up in 1998 after falling out with the Congress Party in West Bengal, can now have the satisfaction of being a victorious party leader.

For years the face of the opposition in West Bengal, Banerjee, known to her supporters as *Didi* (sister) has been the nemesis of the ruling CPI(M)-led Left Front over the last 23 years and has earned the reputation of being a street-fighting politician.

Banerjee, a firebrand orator, coined a catchy slogan *Ma, Mati o Manush* (mother, land and people) before last year's Lok Sabha polls and played on the anti-incumbency factor after more than three decades of Left rule and the creeping disillusionment among several sections, like Muslims, to decimate the Left in partnership with the Congress.

Her nondescript residence -- a tiled single-storey house in a dingy lane close to the Kalighat temple -- and equally simple attire comprising cotton saris, jhola bags and cheap hawai chappals,

**Whatever New Delhi decides may not face bottlenecks in West Bengal. It is hoped that some of the issues with Bangladesh that involve West Bengal will be resolved in the days ahead.**

endeared her to the masses.

The Left Front leaders say it will play the role of a responsible opposition by accepting the people's mandate. "A majority of people wanted us to sit in the opposition. We respect the people's verdict. We will act responsibly, we will not act like them (the Trinamool Congress)," said West Bengal state secretary Gautam Deb, who was housing minister in the Left Front government.

Why did the Left Front lose the election? There are many reasons but those below deserve mention:

- India is so large, with 1.2 billion people, that regional interests override national interests. That is the reason why regional parties, based on caste or state-issues, do well in states. Regional parties are often personality-based and personality clash exists within the states;
- The economy of West Bengal is poorer than that of northern and western

states. Private sector was hesitant to invest in West Bengal because of their political ideology. In recent years, many factories shed their workers and unemployment increased in West Bengal;

- The density of population in West Bengal is quite high (almost 900 per sq kilometre) and, as such, land allocation per person is quite meager. In 2007-08, West Bengal had witnessed large-scale agitation spearheaded by Banerjee in Singur and Nandigram over land acquisition, which alienated

the voters during the election campaign because of its past record. It had lost its credibility to the majority of the people.

Out of our 4,096 km border with India, 2,216.7 km lies along West Bengal. Parakka Barrage is located in West Bengal and was constructed to flush the silt of the Hooghly River for navigability of the Kolkata sea port.

New Delhi may not be able to force West Bengal to do what the centre perhaps wants. For example, the delay in handing over the Tin Bigha corridor to Bangladesh enclave Dhahagram and Angopota was reportedly partly due to the opposition of the West Bengal Assembly.

It may be recalled that the 30-year old Indo-Bangladesh Ganges Water Treaty of 1996 was possible because of the active participation of the then chief minister late Jyoti Basu.

Again, reportedly the interim Teesta Water Agreement with Bangladesh could not be signed until the West Bengal election was held. Transit from Bhutan and Nepal through Bangladesh involves territory of West Bengal.

The attitude of the West Bengal government toward bilateral issues with Bangladesh plays a major part in implementing whatever decisions New Delhi agrees with Bangladesh. Now that TMC, a partner of the Union Congress-led government in New Delhi, will be in power in West Bengal with the Congress, West Bengal-New Delhi relations may be on the same wavelength.

Whatever New Delhi decides may not face bottlenecks in West Bengal. It is hoped that some of the issues with Bangladesh that involve West Bengal will be resolved in the days ahead.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 18

1498

Vasco da Gama reaches the port of Calicut, India.

1804

Napoleon Bonaparte is proclaimed Emperor of the French by the French Senate.

1910

The Earth passes through the tail of Comet Halley.

1950

US and Europe agree Nato aims. Twelve nations agree on a permanent defence organisation for the US and Europe.

1991

Northern Somalia declares independence from the rest of Somalia as the Republic of Somaliland but is not recognised by the international community.

2009

Sri Lankan Civil War: The LTTE are defeated by the Sri Lankan government, ending almost 26 years of fighting between the two sides.