

Transport anarchy

Put a stop to it

ANARCHY now rules the city's passenger service, especially of buses and minibuses in the capital. Operators of the public transports are still found to be charging fares in excess of those fixed by the authorities. Small wonder sporadic quarrels and scuffles between ticket collectors and commuters, drivers fleeing buses when challenged by mobile courts, stranded transports on the streets and so on have become a day-to-day scene on the city roads. All this is happening in spite of HC directives to the communications secretary and the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and others concerned to prevent collection of additional fares by bus operators. Five more mobile courts have joined the drive in addition to two others to discipline the recalcitrant bus operators, but with little result.

The bus operators seem to be indifferent to public protests, media coverage on instances of their being caught in the act, government's directive to follow the prescribed fare chart, let alone HC directives. The mobile courts in operation are undoubtedly facing a huge challenge to tame bus operators.

But what is most baffling is where are those unruly bus operators deriving their arrogance from?

The authorities should also give a deeper look at this aspect of the issue and try to delve deeper into the problem. The bus owners, who are the real bosses of the bus drivers and conductors, need also to be brought under the fold of the law.

In its six-point directives, the HC has asked the communications and home secretaries to constitute a seven-member committee to monitor how far its orders are being implemented on the ground. Similarly, it also directed the police authorities concerned to form vigilance teams to enforce government orders.

We think whatever measures the government takes, those should not be one-shot ones. The drives launched by mobile courts and other actions taken should be sustained to produce result. The government may also think of forming a high-powered task force entrusted with the job of looking into all aspects of the fare issue and suggest ways and means to ensure civic order and security.

Land grabbing menace

Deterrent punishment called for

THE government decision to launch a drive to recover about 1000 acres of khas lands of Bhawal forest illegally occupied by industrialists and other individuals in the past is a move in the right direction.

The land ministry identified 93 usurpers of forest lands worth around Taka 1000 crore during the preceding government. The decision to recover the land remained suspended for sometime due to unknown reasons. The grabbers submitted fake documents and false statements to validate their action.

The parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Land will meet this week to discuss the progress on implementation of its recommendations.

Not only are government lands in Bhawal forest under illegal occupation, similar cases of usurpation of all kinds of government lands have also been going on across the country.

Apart from forest lands, plain and hilly lands are also poached upon by the opportunists. The foreshores of rivers and canals are the latest targets, causing immense damage to the rivers of the country. Grabbing of hill lands in Chittagong led to mudslides and loss of lives.

There seems to be a strong nexus at work between vested interest and officials to flout government orders. For its part, the government has not been successful in dealing with them effectively. Half hearted measures have run out of steam; the concerned authorities will have to be tough to prevent the grabbers from continuing their illegal activities and recover not only the particular forest land, but all kinds of land that they have already usurped.

While giving kudos to the land ministry for its decision to recover lost lands, we urge the government to take legal action against the grabbers so as to deter those who are waiting in the wings to follow in their footsteps should

2011-12 budget: Implement women's advancement policy

MAMUNUR RASHID

THE National Women's Advancement Policy (NWAP) 2011 was declared by the government early this year. There are 49 articles covering prevention of violence against women, women's education, employment, food security, gender responsive budgeting, rights of disabled and distressed women, and protection of women from adverse effects of climate change. It needs to be mentioned that the NWAP has not spoken of equal rights of women in private life. Rather, it intends to ensure whatever rights are guaranteed for women in private life and governed by religion-based personal laws.

According to Muslim family law, a woman is entitled to inherit half of her brother's share in parents' property and one-eighth of her husband's property. Hindu women have no inheritance rights and Christian women enjoy equal inheritance rights. The NWAP has not rectified these discriminations existing in private life. Though there is a demand from women's and human rights groups to ensure uniform family code so that all women and men can enjoy equal rights and opportunities regardless of religious identity, it has not been addressed in NWAP 2011. So, the status quo remains.

However, for the moment, it is better not to go into the debate of how NWAP could be more sensitive. At least we now have a policy to remind ourselves that women are lagging behind men in different spheres of life, which undermines women's role in national development. Recognising the gender discriminations, the NWAP seeks to redress them. So let's stick to the policy and demand its implementation without any delay.

The government will soon declare the national budget for FY 2011-12. There will be speculation about whether or not the allocations made in the budget will be responsive enough to achieve the goals outlined in NWAP 2011. Having said that, we also need to see what the priorities are. We need to see if the allocations made are adequate to achieve the

targets of MDG and Vision 2021, which the government highlighted as its agenda when it came to power. It is true that these are long-term goals and cannot be achieved in a single year's budget. But a single year-planner can give a hint about the direction the government is moving towards.

The underlining goal of the NWAP is to reduce discriminations against women. For that, there will be an effort to exploit the opportunities created so far to keep up women's upward trends in education, health and employment sectors. Though women are still lagging behind men in higher education, today, there are a huge number of literate women who are waiting to get into the job market or other employment sources. The budget should address this potentiality.

Emphasis is needed on "ensuring

It's true that emerging problems need to be mitigated, but that should not be done at the cost of compromising with the greater goal, which is achieving a dignified standard of living for all citizens regardless of sex, religion or colour.

equal wages for men and women, enhanced participation of women in labour market, equal opportunity, safety and non-discrimination at workplaces," as mentioned in Article 23.7 of NWAP 2011. Without that, attracting increased women's participation in the labour force will not be possible. Based on these considerations, we would like to highlight a number of areas to be prioritised in the FY 2011-12.

Combating violence against women (Article 19)

- Provide legal support to women victims of torture, stop trafficking in women and provide support to victims; appoint more women members in the police department, extend services of one stop crisis center from divisional to district level

Education and training (Article 21)

- Give emphasis on girls' vocational,

science and technology education; ensure free education for girls up to degree level

Sports and culture (Article 22)

- Develop separate sports complex for women at local level, provide governmental grants to encourage women's film and drama making

Ensuring equal and active participation of women in national economic activities (Article 23)

- Ensure equal wages for men and women, safety and non-discrimination at workplaces; ensure transportation, housing, rest room, separate toilet and daycare centre in workplaces where women are employed in large numbers.

Women's employment (Article 26)

- Increase quota for women from entry to all levels of employment;

initiate special training and credit programmes to develop women entrepreneurs.

Gender responsive budget and gender disaggregated database preparation (Article 27)

- Continue Gender Responsive Budget (GRB); proper implementation of GRB to be continuously followed under the mid-term budgetary framework; introduce provision for collection, compilation and regular publication of separate gender disaggregated data by all ministries, corporations, banks, financial and other institutions

Women and agriculture (Article 31)

- Provide all support to women farmers to mitigate challenges and adverse effects caused by climate change and natural disasters; eliminate wage discrimination and take measures for women's equal access to agricultural materials, fertilizer, seed, farmer's

card and credit facilities

Health and nutrition (Article 34)

- Reduce maternal and child mortality rates; initiate research on reproductive health and disseminate health-related information for awareness building; provide training on women's nutrition.

Safeguard women and children before, after and during disasters (Article 37)

- Take special measures to ensure security and safety of women and girls during disasters; organise awareness programmes on how to face disasters; provide material support with psycho-social counseling for victim women.

Other important issues

- Ensure safe and quality entertainment, sports, cultural facilities for girls (Article 18.7).
- Take proper institutional programs for education, healthcare, training and rehabilitation of women with disability (Article 39.4).

The national budget for the FY 2011-12 is a challenge for the government in the backdrop of growing political and economic unrest both at home and abroad. This challenge should be met with appropriate planning and strategies. It's true that emerging problems need to be mitigated, but that should not be done at the cost of compromising with the greater goal, which is achieving a dignified standard of living for all citizens regardless of sex, religion or colour.

Fanatic groups are trying to distract the government from implementing the NWAP. If the government succumbs to the demands of the negative forces, then that will be considered as a big failure. The opportunities created through the continuous efforts by all positive forces cannot go in vain. The upcoming budget is a good opportunity to prove the government's firm determination to keep the promises that it made to voters in December 2008.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Lessons from Tahrir Square

THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

BEING back in Cairo reminds me that there are two parties in this region that have been untouched by the Arab Spring: the Israelis and the Palestinians. Too bad, because when it comes to ossified, unimaginative, oxygen-deprived governments, the Israelis and Palestinians are right up there with pre-revolutionary Egypt and Tunisia. I mean, is there anything less relevant than the prime minister of Israel going to US Congress for applause and the leader of the Palestinians going to UN instead of to each other?

Both could actually learn something from Tahrir Square. To the Palestinians I would say: You believe the Israelis are stifling you because they think they have you in box. If you resort to violence, they will brand you terrorists. And if you don't resort to violence, the Israelis will just pocket the peace and quiet and build more settlements. Your dilemma is how to move Israel in a way that won't blow up in your face or require total surrender.

You have to start with the iron law of Israeli-Arab peace: whichever party has the Israeli silent majority on its side wins. Anwar Sadat brought the Israeli majority over to his side when he went to Israel, and he got everything he wanted. Yasir Arafat momentarily did the same with the Oslo peace accords. How could Palestinians do that again today? I can tell you how not to do it. Having UN General Assembly pass a resolution recognising an independent

Palestinian state will only rally Israelis around Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, giving him another excuse not to talk.

May I suggest a Tahrir Square alternative? Announce that every Friday from today forward will be "Peace Day," and have thousands of West Bank Palestinians march nonviolently to Jerusalem, carrying two things -- an olive branch in one hand and a sign in Hebrew and Arabic in the other. The sign should say: "Two

states for two peoples. We, the Palestinian people, offer the Jewish people a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders -- with mutually agreed adjustments -- including Jerusalem, where the Arabs will control their neighbourhoods and the Jews theirs."

If Palestinians peacefully march to Jerusalem by the thousands every Friday with a clear peace message, it would become a global news event. Every network in the world would be there. Trust me, it would stimulate a real peace debate within Israel -- especially if Palestinians invited youth delegations from around the Arab world to join the marches, carrying the Saudi peace initiative in Hebrew and Arabic. Israeli Jews and Arabs should be invited to march as well.

Together, the marchers could draw up their own peace maps and upload them onto YouTube as a way of telling their leaders what Egyptian youth said to President Hosni Mubarak: "We're not going to let you waste another day of our lives with your tired mantras and maneuvering." Crazy, I know. Bibi is reading this and laughing: "The Palestinians will never do that. They could never get Hamas to adopt nonviolence. It's not who the Palestinians are."

That is exactly what Mubarak said about the Egyptian people: "They are not capable of being anything but what they are: docile and willing to eat whatever low expectations I feed them." But then Egyptians surprised him. How about you, Palestinians, especially Hamas? Do you have any surprise in you? Is Bibi right about you, or not?

As for Bibi, his Tahrir lesson is obvious: Sir, you are well on your way to becoming the Hosni Mubarak of the peace process. The time to make big decisions in life is when you have all the leverage on your side. For 30 years, Mubarak had all the leverage on his side to gradually move Egypt toward democracy and he never used it. Then, when Mubarak's people rose

up, he tried to do it all in six days. But it was too late. No one believed him. So his tenure ended in ruin.

Israel today still has enormous leverage. It is vastly superior militarily and economically to the Palestinians, and it has US on its side. If Netanyahu actually put a credible, specific two-state peace map on the table not just the same old vague promises about "painful compromises" he could get the Americans and Europeans to toss in anything Israel wanted, including the newest weapons, Nato membership, maybe even European Union membership. It could be a security windfall for Israel. Does Bibi have any surprise in him or do the Palestinians have him right: a big faker, hiding a nationalist-religious agenda under a cloak of security?

It may be that Israeli and Palestinian leaders are incapable of surprising anyone anymore, in which case the logic on the ground will prevail: Israel will gradually absorb the whole West Bank, so, together with Israel proper, a Jewish minority will be ruling over an Arab majority. Israel's enemies will refer to it as "the Jewish apartheid state." America, Israel's only true friend, will find itself having to defend an Israel whose policies it does not believe in and whose leaders it does not respect and the tensions between US and Israel displayed in Washington last week will seem quaint by comparison.

The writer is a three-time Pulitzer Prize winner.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 26

1770

The Orlov Revolt, an attempt to revolt against the Ottoman Empire before the Greek War of Independence, ends in disaster for the Greeks.

1805

Napoléon Bonaparte assumes the title of King of Italy and is crowned with the Iron Crown of Lombardy in the Duomo di Milano, the gothic cathedral in Milan.

1879

Russia and the United Kingdom sign the Treaty of Gandamak establishing an Afghan state.

1896

Nicholas II becomes Tsar of Russia.

1972

The United States and the Soviet Union sign the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

2000

Hezbollah celebrates Israeli retreat. The Hezbollah leader is greeted by thousands of supporters during a victory rally to celebrate the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon.