

Large-scale nationalisation of primary schools

A stride in the right direction

THE government move to nationalise more than 26,000 primary schools in three phases, bringing more than 100,000 teachers under the umbrella of government pay scale has been widely welcomed. Previously, the teachers of private primary schools were only paid the government approved basic salary and not much else. This decision, if implemented properly will have addressed a longstanding demand of teachers who have been demanding for years that they receive benefits along the lines of government-owned schools. As per declaration, the government will nationalise MPO-listed schools from January 1. Non-MPO registered non-registered, community and government-funded NGO-run schools from July 1. The third phase of nationalisation is due to commence on January 1, 2014.

The plan is undoubtedly a positive move and should address most demands of the thousands of teachers nationwide. This step comes in the backdrop of a series of moves to increase enrolment of students in primary education and keep the country on the path to meeting a key millennium development goal. Much has been done in primary education during the tenure of the present government. With enrolment up to nearly 99% -- a jump from about 87% in 2005, that goal is very much within reach. Substantial resources have been allocated to recruit human resources in schools. These include teachers, headmasters, assistant teachers and staff. All these efforts were concrete steps to man and equip the pre-primary sections that were introduced in some 57,000 schools. Despite some initial hiccups new textbooks have been printed and distributed free of cost to primary schools.

Yet, a long way to go in terms of imparting quality education to our children at primary level. Although the data looks good on paper, many schools do not have the requisite infrastructure in terms of proper classrooms, furniture and fixtures. These are serious issues that need to be addressed if we are to overcome the problems associated with quality education.

Biman schedules badly upset

Passenger hardships know no bounds

ALTHOUGH the seven-hour strike on Tuesday has been brought to an end through the intervention of civil aviation minister, chain effects are proving to be disruptive even now. The sudden strike forced cancellation of 18 flights. Outbound 4000 passengers were stranded at cities and airports for a whole day. Passengers of four flights stayed put in their craft waiting to disembark for a few hours. Only because the gangway was not available.

As of yesterday, Biman was still grappling with five delayed flights and a canceled one, and there is no knowing when the backlogs will be cleared. The cargo handling for arriving and departing passengers has been terribly messed up. Till the time of writing, many morning passengers were still waiting to get their baggages and begin their ride out into the city.

The responsibility rests in a large part with the Biman authorities. For the minister himself admitted that discussion could have taken place a day before to head off the crisis. A chaotic situation like this at the premier international airport of the country is simply unacceptable.

The CBA leaders for their part failed to allow sufficient time to the authorities before taking the extreme step.

There were, however, forebodings of a stalemate when on Sunday at the call of Biman Sramik League which is supportive of the ruling party, workers laid siege for 11 hours on the management board directors' offices. The following day, they staged a sit-in for long hours at the Biman head office. If the assurance of the minister was enough to call off the strike why then didn't the CBA leaders approach the minister earlier on?

We are looking forward to both sides keeping the channels of communication open to avert any recurrence of such a crisis. We believe though, there needs to be a consensus on which of their demands are legitimate and which are not. That's the first exercise the employer and employees need to undertake to smoothen

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IN 1948, the Gallup poll predicted Thomas Dewey was going to win, but proved wrong when Harry Truman was elected US president. Few days later George Gallup, the pioneer of survey sampling techniques and inventor of the Gallup poll, was stopped by a policeman for driving down a one-way street in the wrong direction. When the policeman saw the name on Gallup's driving license, he is said to have grinned broadly and exclaimed: "Wrong again!"

That exclamation couldn't be uttered when several newspapers in the country conducted opinion polls last week, simply because we had no reasons to believe they were wrong. But the polls varied in their respective conclusions. In many cases, the findings didn't conform to perception. For example, despite so much rape, killing and abduction around us, one of the surveys stated that the law and order situation had improved. Another survey contradicted that position.

On Padma Bridge, people were expected to be critical but one survey revealed that majority of them supported the government's handling of this crucial project. Likewise, fewer percentage of respondents believed in 2012, compared to 2011, that the government failed to control prices. When fuel and electricity prices went up so many times last year, it was baffling to learn that people should have felt more relieved last year compared to the previous one.

One of the hard-to-digest news comes from the agriculture sector. This is one sector besides education that has been always extolled as a



star performer. But one of the polls showed a yawning gap in terms of whether the farmers have benefited from the steps taken by the government. A resoundingly high number of survey participants appeared to have differed.

In some cases, the poll findings have challenged common sense. One of the surveys poorly rated the home minister. In all fairness, this minister was appointed to his job only four months ago. One doesn't have to pay taxes if one works for less than six months of a year. The home minister shouldn't have been included in the annual evaluation. Neither should have been the communication minister, who also came to his job last September. The same survey gave the third position to our deadweight foreign minister only to intensify the fallacy that doing nothing is better than doing anything.

Most of the surveys showed the government has fewer successes than failures. It has done consistently well in education, reasonably well in infrastructure development, and

marginally well in power generation. In one survey, people have claimed that standard of living has gone up in last four years.

On the other hand, people have said that law and order and judicial system have suffered a decline, and partisan influence has seeped into every corner of the government. In one survey they even expressed doubts if the government is taking the right steps towards the trial of war criminals.

Survey conducted by one vernacular daily claimed that more people believe the government hasn't done enough to bring the opposition to the parliament. A whopping percentage don't support the way the government behaved with the opposition during last four years. More people said that corruption has gone up during the tenure of this government. A large percentage has expressed dissatisfaction over government's ability to control prices.

Other findings of this survey have been equally dismal. People don't

Gun control in US needs a miracle

ANDY HO

ON December 14, Adam Lanza, 20, shot and killed his mother at home before driving to a school to mow down 20 first-graders and six school employees with an assault weapon. He then killed himself with a handgun. His mother legally owned the weapons he used.

In the United States, gun owners point to their right to bear arms, as enshrined in the Second Amendment to the Constitution. This states: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

Does this phrasing allow individuals to bear arms per se or only as part of a well-regulated militia?

The issue has drawn different comments, including a column in these pages which argued that the "collective right to maintain militias against autocratic government (is) anti-quoted" and that "firearm possession (should be) restricted to trained and uniformed personnel so one can walk on the streets free from assault."

In fact, the US Supreme Court did offer a logical argument in District of Columbia v Heller (2008) why the Second Amendment refers to a constitutional right of the individual to bear arms per se, outside the context of militias.

It has long been debated in learned circles whether the right to bear arms is an individual or a collective one. Before Heller, the last important Second Amendment case was US v Miller (1939), which affirmed the view held since the latter part of the 19th century that the Amendment was primarily about a state's right to raise a militia to protect itself against tyranny. While this might be true, the Heller Court asked what the state's right to raise a militia was itself grounded upon.

The answer: It was built upon a pre-existing and ancient right of the individual to bear arms.

How so? The Heller Court noted that the clause "a well regulated

Militia" was really a preface to the operative clause, "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms." It said that according to established rules for interpreting all statutes, the clause that prefaces an operative one does not restrict it. Instead, the prefacing clause is meant to clarify ambiguities in the operative one, if any.

In other words, the operative clause -- on the right to bear arms -- was always primary. The prefacing clause on raising a militia was secondary. This meant that, while a free state may certainly raise a militia, that capacity was based upon individuals who already had the right to own and carry their own guns. The clause about raising a militia was

historically intended to prevent the federal government from robbing the states of a right they always had.

This concern about a federal or central government becoming tyrannical against a state government has always animated US politics because of the colonial experience with the non-representative government of the English Crown that eventually led to the War of Independence of 1776.

The US federal government was officially formed in 1789 as a constitutional republic where power was to be shared between the federal government and state governments. In this federation of states, the states were meant to matter very much whereas the federal government was not to be all-powerful as it might well be in today's Britain or Malaysia, say.

While the federal government was limited to specifically enumerated powers such as printing money or declaring war, all unenumerated powers were to belong to the states.

That is, there is a presumption in the Constitution that any given policy question was, by default, to be addressed by state governments. The Founders wanted it so because they felt that, in a huge country, decentralised policy decisions at state level were more accountable to local tastes, preferences and economics.

In sum, federal and state governments share power in a "dual sovereignty" system, an arrangement designed to prevent a dictatorship from ever emerging. And critical to this idea was the states' capacity to have men bearing arms, organised into militias that could literally fight off the federal government if it should ever dare to come against a state with force.

The Second Amendment's phrase "shall not be infringed" suggested it was a right of "the people" that pre-existed the writing of the Constitution, the Heller Court noted, adding that "the people" was always used in the Constitution to refer to an individual and not collective right.

If the right pre-existed the written Constitution, then every individual citizen always had the right to bear arms to begin with, a right meant primarily for self-defence against others and tyrannical rulers, the court reasoned.

What of the point about a well-regulated militia? Well, the "militia" is a subset of "the people" in whom the right to bear arms resides. In particular those people who were "male, able bodied, and within a certain age range" might qualify for the militia. Others who are not militia members but still of "the people" are individuals with the right.

If this argument holds, then the right to bear arms went beyond the militia context so that "all members of the political community" -- all individual citizens -- had the right to bear arms, the court concluded.

think the Election Commission can work freely under this government. They have poorly rated the government's treatment of Dr. Muhammad Yunus, doubted that the Anti-Corruption Commission is independent, despaired at the bilateral relations with India, and strongly disapproved government's attitude towards the media. The survey participants have also expressed their unhappiness over how the government is running the parliament. They are deeply dejected that the government has failed to keep its promise to create more jobs.

Then there are these dashboard indicators. People's approval of how this government ran the country has declined. More frightening is that they are worried the country overall has been heading in the wrong direction. That, however, has been inconsistent with another survey that said more people think the country is heading in the right direction.

While all surveys agreed that the ruling part leader has a popularity edge over her rival, one vernacular daily contradicted itself. It said that although the government lost popularity, the prime minister enjoyed greater confidence of people. That's like saying a box-office flop won an Oscar for best actor or best direction.

The newspaper should have run a correction of its sub-headline or explained where it saw the connection. The prime minister's popularity showed a piddling one percent rise, which cannot be statistically significant. For untrammelled eyes, the popularity of both leaders is the same. At best they're equally popular or unpopular. An opinion poll, willingly or unwillingly opinionated, smacks of propaganda.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 11

- 1055**
Theodora is crowned Empress of the Byzantine Empire.
- 1158**
Vladislav II becomes King of Bohemia.
- 1943**
World War II: The United States and United Kingdom give up territorial rights in China.
- 1946**
Enver Hoxha, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Albania, declares the People's Republic of Albania with himself as head of state.
- 1957**
The African Convention is founded in Dakar, Senegal.
- 1972**
East Pakistan renames itself Bangladesh after achieving independence from Pakistan.