

Public admin in disarray

Politisation root cause

RATHER than contributing to efficiency and better performance, the recent spell of promotions has led to a top heavy and imbalanced public administration. Worse yet, many senior officials without work called OSDs, have become a constant drain on the public exchequer. At present the number of such OSDs from the level of assistant secretary to secretary is 343.

The fallout of such promotions based mostly on political consideration or favouritism is that against some 830 approved posts, we have now as many as 1694 deputy secretaries; 622 joint secretaries against 430 posts and 242 additional secretaries against 107 posts.

The officials so promoted against non-existent positions have thus been made virtually redundant and are in a state of limbo. This is a serious wastage of administrative manpower.

While the administration has swollen at the top, the lower stratum, especially at the assistant and senior assistant secretary levels, is suffering from an acute shortage of manpower. As a consequence, work at the field level is being severely affected.

All this points to an administration that is failing to deliver. The government cannot afford to continue this state of imbalance in the administration.

To put an end to the prevailing chaos and restore equilibrium and efficacy in the administration, the government should stress merit and seniority as opposed to political and personal bias in matters of promotion in the bureaucracy.

At the same time, swelling ranks of OSDs should be significantly scaled down to make the administration compact.

Bravo, you did us proud!

A potential asset for future

ATELY the youth of Bangladesh has set some examples which are not only inspiring but brave and ideal to follow for the rest of us.

Fifteen year old, Rashedul Islam Nayem, made such a mark during cyclone Mahasen by saving 38 people in Galachipa Upazila where he lives.

During the morning when cyclone Mahasen hit Galachipa, without thinking about his own safety Nayem went around his village and took children and women to the cyclone shelter. He followed his natural instinct which was nurtured by the good teachings he received at school and home.

A month ago, we saw the dedicated volunteer work of many other youth as the disaster happened in Rana plaza. There too, many offered their selfless services to help victims against stunning odds on humanitarian considerations.

While our country struggles and looks towards our future we should rejoice in the potential power of our youth.

They have seen many changes, political upheavals, natural disasters, and the strengthening of Bangladesh's position post liberation. But through these changes perhaps they have also learned to hold on to the basic goodness of humanity, to stand strong and have compassion and act on emergency situations. It may sound storybookish but the recent tales of bravery of our youth do make us feel proud. We look towards this new light which our youth is bringing to our land, we hope they will help us learn again the meaning of being there for humanity with-

Drone speech misses the mark

CHEN WEIHUA

OBAMA'S speech on drones at the National Defence University in Washington was full of contradictions.

In his new policy to restrict the scope of these counterterrorism operations, Obama continued to justify the drone strikes as "effective" and "legal" although that kind of legality is widely challenged both in US and abroad, and that kind of "effectiveness" is contradicted by his own admission that drones have come at a severe cost to the US relationship with Pakistan.

Obama needs to be reminded that he was the one who ordered to increase drone strikes. And if that escalation was a mistake, he owes an apology to those whose loved ones died as so-called collateral damages.

Obama did not mention whether the US will compensate the families of those civilians killed by drone strikes, including the 16-year-old son of radical Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, both American citizens and both killed during a US drone strike.

Please do not call all these premeditated attacks as "target killings" again. Give them the more easily understood label of assassination, and please also do not gloss over torture as "enhanced interrogation."

Obama said, "Those deaths [from the drone attacks] will haunt us as long as we live," but he did not say whether he has been haunted in the past when thousands of civilians were decimated in drone strikes.

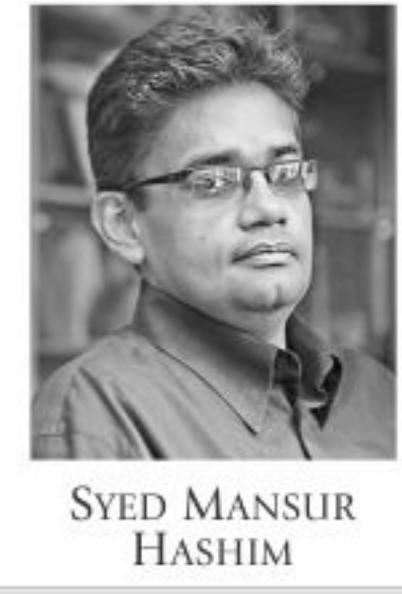
Obama changes the concept of war as he believes that US can use drone strikes wherever alleged terrorists are. Would he dare order drone strikes if a terrorist happens to be in Mexico, Canada, Russia, Britain or China?

Obama did not admit anything wrong on his part -- not on drones or on the Guantanamo Bay detention centre.

Lastly, Obama said: "Imagine a future -- 10 years from now, or 20 years from now when the US is still holding people who have been charged with no crime on a piece of land that is not part of our country. Look at the current situation, where we are force-feeding detainees who are holding a hunger strike. Is that who we are? Is that something that our founders foresaw? Is that the America we want to leave to our children?"

These may be the few sensible words in Obama's much-belated speech, and he should ask the same questions regarding drones.

Overall he has not correctly addressed the public concerns over the years and he has left many questions unanswered.

SYED MANSUR
HASHIM

No escape from energy crunch

AT the recently ended US-Bangladesh partnership dialogue on the energy sector, the realisation appears to have finally dawned upon our venerable policymakers that there is no alternative to developing coal as a primary fuel source. One must thank Mr Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Energy Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister for his candid remarks that Bangladesh must go for coal-based power plants.

Time needed to develop proven coal fields is a long one. Even more daunting are the costs involved. As pointed out by US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy Transformation Robert Ichord, Bangladesh would require at least \$15 billion to implement its energy sector plan by 2030 where coal features prominently. But before getting into the whole argument on why coal has been sidelined for practically the entire tenure of the present government, one should look at the current scenario. With a proven reserve of about 16 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of gas and annual consumption standing at 0.74tcf per annum, the country is set to literally run out of gas in a little over 15 years.

The question here is that why are we discussing coal at the fag-end of the current term of government? What has the government been doing all these years? And to ask for foreign assistance and investments in developing on and off-shore reserves on the premise that Bangladesh has "never reneged on any of our contracts" is perhaps asking for a little too much, especially in the face of the fact that there is no scope for bringing changes to current traffic structure for the onshore fields.

No foreign investment is likely given the present political climate. Until things improve on that front, nothing much is going to happen on any other front. Besides politics, there have been hardly any movement to stop wastage of natural gas, particularly in the gas-guzzling fertiliser factories. The sad fact is that we are in a mess of our own making. We are out of time. Any concrete initiatives for



mining coal if started today, the benefit of getting the coal for its commercial use will take 3-4 years.

While the arguments for developing coal may now be grabbing headlines today, it was effectively put into cold storage at policy level some time ago. And what had been adopted as primarily an interim solution, i.e. the use of rental/quick rental power plants has now become our mainstay for supplying energy to the economy. Today, we are actually being forced to extend many rental contracts since the base-load power plants (running on gas/coal) that had been envisaged have not materialised. Today the national exchequer is dishing out nearly US\$3 billion to pay for the import of oil, a drain that is taking a massive toll. The constant upwardly revision of energy bills (as mandated by the stringent conditions set forth by International Monetary Fund) is, on the one hand eating into consum-

ers' dwindling pockets and on the other, making electricity supplied to industry so expensive that many industrial consumers have resorted to producing their own energy.

So precisely who has benefitted from the rental scenario? Not the economy and certainly not the consumers. Industry is not particularly happy with the tariff and lack of steady supply. Obviously, it has helped a certain coterie of vested interests reap windfall profits. The manner in which such contracts have been handed out have raised questions. Little wonder that a special piece of legislation had to be passed in parliament, namely, Speedy Supply of Power and Energy (Special Provision) Act in 2010 that guarantees immunity from prosecution for actions taken in good faith.

As pointed out in the Editorial of *The Financial Express* on May 27, "there have been many allegations of irregularities by a section of unscrupulous rental power plants. But what has been revealed in a recent FE report may sound incredible to many. Exploiting loopholes, kept, deliberately, or otherwise, in their contracts with the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), the sponsors of a section of rental power plants, which are mere junks, have been exacting a substantial amount of fund from the government in a deceitful manner. These plants, allegedly, generate no power because of their own faults. But those somehow manage to show that they are in fact generating power as required under the contracts. It is none but the BPDB which is blamed by the rental power plants for purchasing less or no electricity from them. However, the refusal to buy electricity has a cost that the government has to pay to the power plants concerned in the form of 'capacity payments.' The rate of such payment to a 50 megawatt capacity generator per day is Tk 3.36 million."

This is ground zero. In military parlance, this is Def-Com 1. Wake up and smell the coffee.

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The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

Saving food for reducing ecological footprint!

MAHFUJUR RAHMAN

THIS year's World Environment Day theme warns the world about existing poverty & inequality of the developed nation regarding food, one of the basic human need and consequences of wasting food on the ecological integrity of the planet. But due to far-reaching and long term effect of this attitude especially regarding food waste, UNEP declared 'Think. Eat. Save' as the theme of WED '13. In fact, this issue is a bit different from the recent years' theme.

Relationship of man with food is as ancient as human existence on the planet. When man was 'ecosystem people,' man derived food from the nature directly. After agricultural revolution, people started to grow their own food but at cost of considerable impact on the environment. In modern time, intensive agriculture uses agrochemicals such pesticides, chemical fertilisers proven harmful to the environment. Interesting issue is that the effects of agriculture are not limited to only toxic substances that have detrimental effects on the ecosystem, rather, its negative impacts public health and acts as a causative agent of biodiversity loss, GHGs emission and thereby climate change. Toxicity gets into human body through food chain and harm human health. Biodiversity loss may happen due to species extinction due to biomagnifications of toxicity as it goes up through the food chain. Greenhouse gas emission such CH4 and NOX can be emitted from wet culture of rice and inconsiderate use of nitrogen fertiliser.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), every year 1.3 billion tons of food is wasted worldwide which is equivalent to the amount produced in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, 1 in every 7 people in the world goes to bed hungry. Alarming news is more than 20,000 children below 5 years die daily from hunger (FAO Report, 2008).

If food is wasted, it means that all the resources and inputs used in the production of all the food are also lost. For example, it takes about 1,000 litres of water to produce 1 litre of milk and about 16,000 litres goes into a cow's food to make a hamburger. The resulting greenhouse gas emissions from the cows themselves, and throughout the food supply chain, all end up in vain when we waste food.

In many cases, food grown in the farms costs pollution of surface water sources by agrochemicals such inorganic fertiliser and pesticides. Eutrophication results from drain off of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilisers into the crop field due to excessive application. Chlorine and phosphate based pesticides cause havoc in aquatic ecosystems. Even if these issues are managed, there are many other issues related to environmental degradation as a result of modern cultivation. In fact, the global food production occupies 25% of all habitable land and is responsible for 70% of fresh water consumption, 80% of deforestation, and 30% of greenhouse gas emissions. It is the largest single driver of biodiversity loss and land-use change UNEP sources publicised.

While the planet is struggling to provide us with enough resources to sustain its 7 billion people (growing to 9 billion by 2050), FAO estimates that a third of global food production is either wasted or lost. Food waste is an enormous drain on natural resources and a contributor to negative environmental impacts. Growing population of this planet puts a growing pressure on the environment as

the number of people already crossed mother earth's carrying capacity in situation where earth resources both renewable and non-renewable are finite. Nowadays, the natural resources are no longer as abundant as they used to be when the population size was below the carrying capacity. Dispose of non-renewable resources is radically altering our ecosystems and even the planet's renewable resources (such as water, timber or fish) are rapidly being exhausted. We have now reached a tipping point where the fertility of soil and productivity of aquatic ecosystem reached to a maximum level. Now, quality of air and water needs to be improved, the level of production needs to be balanced and the amount of waste generated needs to be reduced in way to retain the productivity of the ecosystems and agro-ecosystems for long term use.

The massive consumption of both renewable and nonrenewable resources contributes to a massive loss of biodiversity -- with current extinction rates of birds, mammals and amphibians estimated to be at least 100 times, but possibly over 1,000 times, higher than pre-industrial rates, according to UNEP sources. The poorest population is most affected by such changes giving that they rely directly on natural resources such as wetland, forest and grazing land and harness subsistence livelihood such as fishing, small-scale agriculture or forestry.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Out of bounds

Your esteemed daily photographed a rickshaw puller not being allowed to enter Gulshan-Banani as he was not appropriately clad! Go to: <http://www.thedadlystar.net/beta2/news/ban-slapped-on-lungi-clad-rickshaw-pullers/>

After the tragedy in Mirpur, and seeing the rickshaw puller's photograph in your newspaper, would you agree that as a nation we need to reflect on how we treat our fellow citizens? Our poor young girls and boys make fashion cloths for faraway peoples. Hardworking people deserve respect and recognition and not disdain for their role in society. Those who make fashion clothes for foreigners, do it to subsist. A rickshaw puller sweats for food and impressing the foreigner is not his remit.

Allen

Rome, Italy

Ruthlessly silenced

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder is heading to Capitol Hill, where he's expected to be grilled over by the Justice Department's decision to secretly seize the work, home and cell phone records used by almost a hundred reporters and editors at the Associated Press. Holder defended the move as a necessary step in a criminal probe of leaks of classified information.

It is one more assault in a long series of assault against freedom of information and freedom of the press. And I would, of course, throw in the persecution of Julian Assange at WikiLeaks and Bradley Manning as part of that process. Anyone who challenges the official narrative, who digs out cases of torture, war crimes -- which is, of course, what Manning and Assange presented to the American public -- is going to be ruthlessly silenced.

Ted Rudow III, MA

Encina Ave

Palo Alto, CA

Put house in order

Tazreen garment fire and Rana Plaza collapse have taken lives of many in the last few months. The news of Rana Plaza disaster has also been the headlines of the international media. The government and BGMEA should form a task force to visit all the garment factories and check whether their condition is ok. The garment factories should have facilities to tackle all sorts of fire accidents. The buildings should have strong foundation and proper emergency exits. Garment factories without these facilities should be shut down immediately.

Arif Ahmed

On e-mail

Little master of music

The news item, "A 7-year-old singer enthralls audience" (TDS, May 6, 2013), stated that a little child named Md. Russell held his audience spellbound in Joypurhat. In our country young talents gradually fade away with age. We have seen this in the past (Close-Up 1 star Nolok Babu and Akbar). Young talents require necessary nurturing.

According to the report, seven-year-old Russell has to take up singing as a profession as his family is not well-off. I hope the authorities concerned will take care of such gifted children.

Bidit Chowdhury

On e-mail

Comments on news report, "At cost of people," published on May 26, 2013

M. Ashraf

We need some form of law and order. It seems neither the government nor the opposition has done anything to restore social security.

Mahboob Hossain

People are the victims of greed of political parties.

Peaceful citizen

It is high time the opposition learned how to use proper forums to voice their demands. They can go for a mass campaign, or write in the opinion columns of newspapers highlighting the need for restoring caretaker government system.

A reader

No more hartal, please!

"Let's talk at JS"

(May 26, 2013)

Zman7

The PM seems to be far more democratic than her opposition counterpart Khaleda Zia. Khaleda's party members are not only boycotting parliament, but also enforcing hartals with massive violence.

Ashique

I don't understand why AL backed off from holding private meetings with BNP and asked them to come to parliament. Hasina will talk about how corrupt BNP leaders are and Khaleda will say that the government is doing a terrible job, and finally BNP will walk out.