

Promotions en masse Politicisation in administration becomes entrenched

THE eligibility criteria for promotions in public administration have been turned upside down. It has become a routine feature of the style of governance that as the national election approaches, the flurry of promotions picks up a brisker pace. Considerations of merit, experience, reputation and competence are relegated to a gusto for elevating and rewarding officials for their perceived loyalty and strong lobbying capacity.

Thus we see in the latest move, 345 deputy secretaries being elevated to the rank of joint secretary. Only in March this year, 182 senior assistant secretaries were promoted as deputy secretaries. The third round of promotion said to be on the anvil would mean upgrading joint secretaries as additional secretaries.

The promotions do not correspond to the availability of posts. In fact, those promoted hold their current charges. Understandably, however, they are entitled to the status, salaries and benefits of a higher position. The cost-benefit ratio is to that extent adverse.

In the process, a large number of officials with a legitimate claim to promotion are superseded by the fortunate promotees. This has the effect of demoralising bureaucracy, or in the very least it brings into sharp focus under-utilisation of trained and experienced officials with professional integrity. Add to this, 343 OSDs from the level of assistant secretary to that of secretary as of May 2013 languishing in the backwaters of administration. They have been turned into sinecures. A developing country can hardly afford such a luxury of keeping idlers.

Manpower export in watershed

Recognise problems and do the needful

MANPOWER export in terms of volumes is witnessing its lowest figures over the last seven years. According to Bureau of Manpower Export and Training, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, by far the largest labour markets for Bangladeshi expatriate workers have been closed off for some time. Also the government-to-government labour deal between Bangladesh and Malaysia has yet to bear dividends. With no new labour markets opening up, it is little wonder that the sector is undergoing its most challenging time.

While much hype had centred around tens of thousands going to Malaysia, the actual figure is in a few hundreds. The government may place the blame squarely on the irregularities of private sector operators for the closure of many lucrative destinations, but it has only exposed the fact that it is beyond the capacity of the government to manage the labour market on its own. With proper oversight, rules and regulations in place there is no reason why the private manpower operators cannot be engaged again.

On a brighter note, Saudi authorities are in the process of regularising illegal Bangladeshi workers. Efforts must be made now to fully explore the EU market. The fact that the EU market absorbed nearly 250,000 workers on a yearly basis from 2007 to 2012 speaks volumes of its potential. Hence it has become imperative that new impetus be given by the government to a process of breaking new grounds in manpower market.

Which punishment is more severe?

ABDUL MATIN

THE International Crimes Tribunal recently awarded several sentences to some collaborators of the Pakistan army who had committed crimes against humanity during the War of Liberation in Bangladesh. The sentences include death, life imprisonment and 90 years' imprisonment. I am not questioning the merit of any of the judgments as I am not competent to do so. I am asking a simple question. Which punishment is more severe: death or imprisonment for life?

According to one school of thought, no punishment other than death penalty is acceptable once the crimes against humanity are proven. They claim that the culprits deserve the highest punishment without any consideration. "Did they have any consideration while committing the crimes?" they ask and add: "They killed men and women irrespective of their ages. Why should age be a consideration in their cases?"

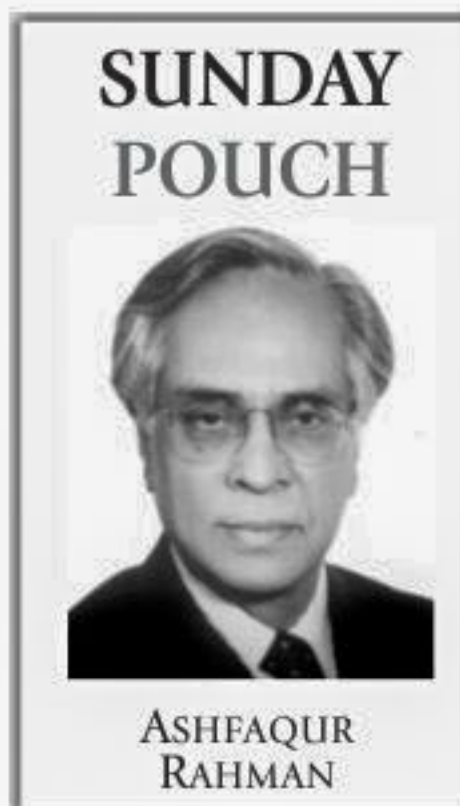
Another school of thought seems to be satisfied with life or 90 years' imprisonment. Their argument is that the most important factor in any judgment is the guilty verdict. According to them, the guilty verdict itself is a great punishment even if the convict is not hanged as he suffers from his guilty conscience as long as he lives.

For further clarification, I put my question to a senior legal expert. According to him, the most severe legal punishment is the life imprisonment if the victim is not allowed to leave the prison till he dies naturally. He argues that in this case he suffers throughout his life. The pain of his punishment kills him slowly until his dies after years of suffering in prison. Slow death is always more painful than instantaneous death, like by hanging, which kills one practically without pain. He hardly suffers for the crimes he committed. As a matter of fact, hanging relieves him from the pain of his punishment.

Obviously, opinions vary. A prisoner undergoing life imprisonment can perhaps describe his agony but how do we know the reaction of a victim who is hanged? An answer to my question will perhaps remain an eternal mystery!

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Why wash dirty linen in public?



SUNDAY
POUCH

ASHFAQUR
RAHMAN

LAST week, a high powered delegation from the ruling Awami League and another one from the main opposition BNP travelled to London to sit with select members of the British House of Lords, the House of Commons as well with the members of the European Parliament, to answer questions on the present political situation in Bangladesh under the rubric of human rights situation in the country. According to press reports, the meeting could not start on time because uninvited supporters of both the parties had gate-crashed into the event. Chairperson Lord Avebury had to clear the room before the proceedings began.

The meeting started with a narration by a researcher from the Amnesty International, who had recently visited Begumganj in Bangladesh to know what happened there when the minority community (read Hindu families) was attacked. First the Jamaat-e-Islami cadres, according to him, had attacked 75 families there and torched their houses. Then elements from the ruling Awami League and the BNP repeatedly looted the belongings of the victims. So he concluded that the government had failed to provide security to the minority community in Bangladesh. His advice was that all political parties must make an electoral pledge that in future they will protect the minority community in Bangladesh.

Lord Avebury then made some initial remarks. He reportedly began with the reasons why Bangladesh was not able to progress much economically. He brought out the twin problem of large-scale tax evasion and illegal transfer of money by certain individuals abroad. In this connection he mentioned about the results of a recent survey conducted by Transparency International which had pinpointed three sectors that were perceived as corruption ridden. They were the political parties, the police and the judiciary.

Then Avebury dwelt on the trials of those accused of war crimes by the International War Crimes Tribunal in Bangladesh. He pointed out that the trials were much below international standards because the government, when instituting the courts, had not followed the recommendations of Ambassador Stephen Rapper. He then sought assurances from the representatives of both the major parties that they will not choose the street to resolve their political differences in the future.

European Parliament member Dr. Charles Tannock, however, praised the way the recent city elections in Bangladesh were held and hoped that future elections in the country would be held in a similar free and fair manner. On the specific question of instituting a caretaker government to supervise the holding of the next general elections, he thought that this question was best left to the political parties of Bangladesh to decide.

Later, Bangladeshi born Labor party MP Raushanara Ali and other MPs and Lords present spoke. Raushanara, however, in a heady way warned that our politicians

should in no way try to influence the British MPs to their own political line of thinking as this inevitably has the opposite effect on them. This led them to be disillusioned about the state of affairs in the country and a loss of interest in the affairs of Bangladesh because they feel that in case they disagree with the views of a political party they are bound to be stereotyped as supporters of the other political party.

In the two hours plus meeting, other than airing and defending their own point of view, nothing substantive came out of the discussions. Lord Avebury is a past orchestrator of political discussions with our political leaders and national stakeholders. Records show that he has over the years commented on the state of affairs of politics in this country. Sometimes his suggestions registered well with our leaders, if it suited their agenda. On most occasions, they fell by the wayside. At best, such meetings had allowed the party in power and the opposition politicians to sit in a room and air their views. This is exactly why the parliament in our country has also been set up for.

But let it be said that Bangladesh has moved forward recently. So have the countries from where parliamentarians and politicians come and sit down in London to advise, cajole and at times reprimand our politicians. The enthusiasm with which our leaders rush to London to attend such hearings is becoming increasingly irrelevant. As our parliament awakens from its slumber, our leaders too are becoming increasingly aware of the national issues, thanks to the national print and electronic media. They are gradually realising that third party analyses, while being informative, are not critical anymore. Also that politicians coming from Europe do not carry the same esteem that they enjoyed in the past. They have their own blemishes to contend with. In fact, the exercises that take place in London each year are just an expression of mutual respect and trust which had devolved from history and nothing more.

Bangladesh has a distinct record of accomplishments in the political, economic and social fields. We also have our challenges. So have been our responses been exciting. Let no one say our politicians are pursuing the attention of elected representatives or non-elected peers from friendly countries for their gratuitous support and goodwill. The Raushanara Alis must stop misunderstanding us and start being reticent on such count.

On our part, we must stop washing our dirty linen in public. This tendency to cozy up to foreigners when we are in political trouble at home must stop. This is what spineless and principle-less politicians have done throughout history. It is immensely embarrassing to hear chatter and read transcripts from non-accountable foreign politicians on matters that are our very own. While being completely transparent on issues that are of public interest there is no reason why we should allow our political swill to be spilled all over the world. We are in no way obligated to do so.

Our politicians must take heed. Like elephants, the people have a long memory.

The writer is a former ambassador and a commentator on current affairs.
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Egypt's revolution at a crossroads

MAHMOOD HASAN

ON July 3, Army Chief General Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi sacked elected Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi after an ultimatum and installed a civilian government headed by Chief Justice Adly Mahmoud Mansour as the interim president. A 33-member cabinet has been sworn in and within the next nine months a new constitution will be adopted, and parliamentary and presidential elections held.

The new cabinet, dominated by independents, has three Christians and three women ministers. National Salvation Front leader Mohamed El-Baradei has been appointed vice-president. Hazem El-Beblawi is the prime minister and kingpin General Sissi retains his post as defense minister and has also taken the position of first deputy prime minister. Brotherhood refused to join the cabinet and rejected Adly's roadmap.

Cairo today is a divided city. Hundreds of thousands of anti-Morsi protesters are at Tahrir Square supporting the new government, while thousands of pro-Morsi activists have dug into Nasr City, few kilometers from Tahrir Square, demanding Morsi's reinstatement. So far, more than 100 people have died since June 30 in sporadic clashes.

What went wrong with Egypt's experiment with democracy? The answer lies in the deep mistrust between the Muslim Brotherhood and the army. Soon after taking office President Morsi dismissed the Chief of 'Supreme Council of Armed Forces' (SCAF) Field Marshal Mohammed Tantawi. He then replaced Army Chief General Sami Anan with General Abdel Fattah al-Sissi.

The army wanted to stay out of political games but certain developments unnerved top generals. Firstly, there were strong rumours that Brotherhood was attempting to infiltrate, indoctrinate (i.e. "Brotherhoodise") and divide the army. Secondly, the Brotherhood's supreme guide Mohammad Badie and several other senior leaders openly criticised the army. Besides, Morsi's close contacts with Hamas in Gaza, his support for the Syrian rebels and his effort to normalise relations with Iran were seen by the army as attempts by the Brotherhood to implement and expand its grand Islamist agenda. There were also the lingering fears that al-Qaeda elements would take advantage of Brotherhood's power to infiltrate into Egypt. The army perceived these developments as serious strategic threats to the state of Egypt.

When Cairo streets were raging with hundreds of thousands of Tamarods (young rebels) and liberal-secularists, shouting for Morsi's resignation the army found it legitimate to move against Morsi and ousted him. The canons of Common Law -- the "Law of Necessity" -- apparently came into play.

Egyptians are proud of their army, the largest in the region, which has fought wars against the British, the French and Israel. The army, since the days of Gamal Nasser, has considered itself as the bulwark against external and internal security threats of Egypt.

Well equipped Egyptian army has over 4.5 lakh personnel under active command with another one million in reserve. The Muslim Officers Corp, trained in the West, is fervently secular.

The new military-backed government has been welcomed by Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Syria's Assad.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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"You can never tell"

Quite a number of years have passed since I read a true story told by a doctor, titled "You can never tell," in the Reader's Digest. It often comes to my mind and I marvel at it.

The story goes like this: One day the doctor, who was then young, attended a woman who was in labour pains. A son was born but the baby was not breathing and the doctor noticed that it was deformed. For a moment the doctor thought there are so many deformed people in the world, why add another one? But a doctor's duty is to save lives, not to destroy it. He overcame the flitting thought and revived the baby. After many years that doctor became a grandfather. His grandson fell ill. He searched for a specialist and found one who bore the same name as his. The doctor took his grandson to him and noticed some deformity of the doctor. At one stage he said that his parents named him after the doctor who brought him to the world. A chord struck in the grandfather's mind and he instantly realised that it was the baby whom he thought would become a burden!

Life is so strange and unpredictable. I think it is Almighty Allah's way of saying, "who are you to decide?"

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Final whistle for AL

Referring to the latest defeat of AL-backed candidate in Gazipur election, TDS in its editorial on July 8, has advised AL to seriously go for soul-searching. The series defeat of AL in all city corporation elections by increasingly wider margins is no more a waking alarm; rather many believe it to be the final whistle for them to get ready for departure.

Like everyone, AL also knows very well why it is being rejected by the people and no serious brainstorming is needed to take corrective actions. But there is no time, and it is also highly unlikely that the ruling party will come to its senses as it is being piloted by a leader who is characterised by arrogance, whims and vengeance. Probably, the unfortunate people of this country will see more hartals, arson, deaths and destruction of public and private property. Mere change of hands in state power will not bring any change in the fate of the nation unless the big two political parties, who are two sides of the same coin, learn from their past mistakes and correct themselves. By this time, all the political parties must realise that the general mass are not fools and know when to throw someone into the dustbin.

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque
East Rampur, Dhaka

Shortage of gas supply in Banasree

We, the inhabitants of Banasree, Rampura are suffering a lot due to gas crisis. Gas supply has been reduced in this area for the last one month. We cannot cook food at the right time of the day. We get gas at midnight when it is time for sleep. Women are suffering a lot as they have to cook for their families. I would like to request the government to look into the matter.

Sheikh Mohammad Ali
Banasree, Rampura, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Gallows for Mojaheed," published on July 18, 2013

Fazlul Bari

Gallows for Mojaheed has been due for last 42 years. Please do not let this criminal go free.

Ken

Hope the execution takes place ASAP, before any razakar lover comes to power and sets them free (or makes them ministers).

Binodbangali

It is sad not to get BNP's reaction regarding the verdict. BNP men were still voted winners in the recent city corporation polls. Now many fear if BNP wins the next general elections, these convicted war criminals will walk free.

Parvez

Will the verdict be executed, or remain on paper only?

"AL happy, BNP tight-lipped" (July 18, 2013)

Wind

Now, BNP is playing smartly with the snake and one day they will understand the effect of this playing.

Nds

An expert and experienced snake charmer knows very well how to play with a snake. So don't be concerned about the risk the BNP runs. The speculators are also seemed to be enjoying the play. So BNP can safely carry on playing with not only snakes but all sorts of reptiles that stalk this wonderland.

Abul Kashem

Nicely explained. Bravo.

truthprevails53

BNP, the Trojan horse of doom. The silence says it all.

hello

Jamaat can still dare to talk because of BNP... shame on these people.

The writer is former ambassador and secretary.