

Robbing a bank without firing a shot

School teachers' recruitment

Replace SMCs with a foolproof system

TO end irregularities, corruption and nepotism in recruitment of non-government school teachers, deputy commissioners (DC) at a recent meeting with the ministry of primary and mass education suggested ending the involvement of School Management Committees (SMCs). They recommended introduction of regional and district level recruitment system. The DCs' suggestion is not without merit. That's because the committees are mostly comprised of members having little or no professional background, but often linked to local power elites including politicians. They lack accountability, transparency and as such are prone to graft and nepotism by default. So, it is in the best interest of the non-government schools that the present system of teachers' appointment is replaced to provide quality education to students.

But the DCs did not elaborate on the shape of regional or district-based recruitment system they suggested. The aspiring non-government teachers are required to have their certificates issued from the Non-government Teachers' Registration and Certification Authority (NTRCA), so Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid hinted at forming Public Service Commission (PSC)-type body for the purpose.

Given the tainted records of SMCs, we have long been advocating their reform to include professional, efficient and incorruptible members for the management committees. We hope, the government would consider the matter with due urgency and soon come up with a solution that meets the all the necessary criteria of a sound teachers' recruitment policy.

Unrest over arrears in pay

A regular feature in RMG sector

EVERY year, readymade garments (RMG) workers clash with management over arrears in pay and bonus when Eid festivities approach. The most recent incident took place on July 9 when nearly 500 workers blocked the Kuril Bishwa Road in the capital city for nearly two hours over alleged non-payment of two and a half months' salary and Eid bonus. And as expected, law enforcers handled the situation using means at their disposal that left many workers injured and public and private property damaged. Last August, we witnessed a similar incident in Hemayetpur, Savar where angry workers went on the rampage and blocked the Dhaka-Aricha highway for an hour.

The repeated commitments to pay arrears and regular breaking of such promises are hardly conducive to business which comes to a standstill when commotion erupts. And when that violence breaks out and leads to closure of important highway road links, it affects the country at large. Surely, something needs to be done to address workers' demands. In case of serious labour unrest, factory owners go for shutdown and police action only helps to temporarily cap the labour fermentation, which inevitably explodes at the slightest pretext the next time round.

Workers have a right to wages and bonuses. Without proper trade associations and unions functioning at factory level, such incidents will continue to plague the sector. We believe it is in everyone's long-term interest to have collective bargaining agents to negotiate terms of payments and other outstanding issues workers have with managements.

Syed Ashraf vs Zila Parishad

SHAKHAWAT LITON

IT was none but Local Government Minister Syed Ashraf Islam himself who, on Wednesday, made the significant remarks: "We've to think first whether the zila parishad is a necessity or not... The matter requires due consultations." He also said the necessity of the zila parishad will have to be determined before holding the elections.

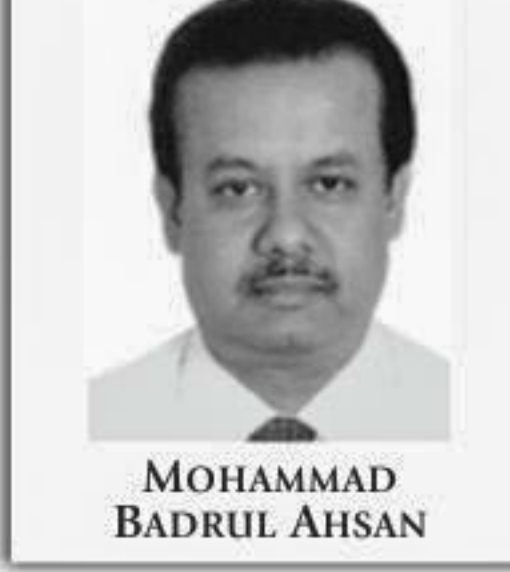
The minister who is supposed to look after the advancement of the zila parishad, the crucial tier of the local government system, questioned the existence of the zila parishad by making the remarks. The message is also very clear. The fate of the zila parishad will remain hanging in the balance for an indefinite period. The minister's remarks, however, exposed the Awami League-led government's double standard centring the local government system. The party had been saying that it will hold elections to zila parishads since the December 2008 parliamentary polls. Even after appointment of AL men as administrators in the 61 zila parishads in December 2011, the government promised to go for holding polls in the next six months. But none of the pledges saw the light.

Now, the LGRD minister has spoken about the necessity of the zila parishad. This means appointment of party men as administrators to run the zila parishads could not satisfy the government policymakers even though the parishads, according to a TIB study, have become political organisations of the AL due to the partisan administrators. Then what does the government want to do with the zila parishad? Does it want to abolish it to empower the bureaucrats to have full control over the district level administration? Is this the way the government wants to satisfy the administration to consolidate the base of its power?

It is significant that the LGRD minister made the remarks about zila parishads to the media after a meeting with deputy commissioners. The DCs attending the conference demanded that the government increase their powers to run the district administration. The government will meet some of their demands, of course, to make them happy. But holding elections to the zila parishads mean elected representatives will take charge over the district administration. And if so, this will in no way make the DCs happy. Think about the current state of upazila parishads. If the government does not want to make the zila parishad really functional in light of the constitutional provision, it should abolish the zila parishad. There is no point in retaining the dysfunctional zila parishads with partisan men at the helm.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

That easy to call it a day after squandering so much of public money! It's also that easy to get off the hook!

Scams in Bangladesh also remind us of games. Chess is an endgame, the objective of which is to checkmate the opponent. Poker is a card game where you shuffle the cards and start afresh. In more advanced countries, investigation of a scam is pursued like chess. Investigators get to the bottom of the crime and bring the criminals to book.

In our country, investigations work like poker. The resignation is accepted, a new chairman is appointed, the board is reshuffled and things move on. This one particular bank scam has been no exception. The new chairman has already given his mission statement. He said he was going to restore public confidence in the bank.

But how is he going to do it when the people of this country are left in the dark? What the people do not understand is why the chairman has resigned in the first place. Did he fail in his fiduciary function? Has he misused his power? Was he involved in the scam? Was it error in his judgment?

Nobody understood it when the managing director of the bank was sacked earlier. How was he involved in the robbery when robbers made off with billions without firing a shot? Was he looking the other way when people under him were churning out dubious loans and cooking the books? Did he do it for money? Was he guilty of any other wrongdoing other than the fact that he never stood up to his boss, the chairman, and told him enough was enough?

So far as we know, the media including this newspaper has been reporting on the irregularities being committed by the chairman for some time. In September last year, this daily had reported that the chairman of BASIC Bank had

spent Tk. 1.5 billion on 11 fishing trawlers, the underlying implication being that the money was siphoned off the bank. Going back further in time, the daily had also expressed its concern in September 2009 over the appointment of directors in state-owned banks based on political considerations.

It brings us to the dilemma captured in the title of the song "Where do I begin" crooned by Andy Williams in the 1970 film Love Story. Where do we really begin? Whose fault is it that these directors down the road proved not only disappointingly incompetent but also downright callous besides being murderously greedy? And if the managing director of a bank is sent home with his tail between his legs, why on earth should his boss get an honourable exit, especially when the boss is the man who arbitrarily approved loans even after the concerned branches had raised objections?

The finance minister has assured us that the chairman would face action if found guilty. Let us say the minister meant what he said, but what more and how long should it take to know if the man is guilty? It's beyond doubt that irregularities have happened. That alone should have given enough ground to fire the chairman. If a Nobel laureate could be removed from the bank he founded for overstaying on the job, why so much consideration for someone who has dispensed public money with such largesse?

As a matter of fact, the outgoing chairman has given enough ground for starting a criminal prosecution against him. He has allegedly funded his own business ambitions with money from the bank. He has splurged bank's money on dubious loans. Above all, there is no evidence that he ever tried to draw anybody's attention to the fact that the bank was in such extreme distress.

By all means, this man should have landed in jail. Charges should have been pressed against him even before he stepped down. Instead, the whole thing has been given a Gandhian spin. The finance minister sees more value in hating not the sinner but his sin.

So, Tk. 45 billion has been a walk in the park for one man, who may not even get a scratch for his involvement in this scandalous scam. If the past is any experience, scapegoats will be lined up to take the blame. Stock market, Sonali Bank, and any other scam, it has been the same old story over and again.

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The Lawless Sea

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY



ANDRÉS VELASCO

region (45% of the earth's total surface) with next to no governance or rule of law is the high seas—nearly two-thirds of the global ocean that lies outside of any country's jurisdiction.

How is this possible? After all, there is the legally binding 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which has been ratified by 166 states and the European Union. When UNCLOS was negotiated, the high seas were protected because they were inaccessible. But technological advances have enabled the exploitation of resources to extend farther and deeper than ever before. Fishing vessels can now operate across the ocean, and deep-sea drilling provides a growing proportion of our oil and gas. UNCLOS has not kept pace with these developments.

Industries and activities such as fisheries, shipping, and seabed mining are all regulated separately. No governance framework is in place for emerging high-seas industries such as energy production. Transparency and accountability are weak, and there is little enforcement of rules.

Moreover, the authorities have limited power to intercept vessels suspected of illegal activity. As a result, international cooperation to counter illegal fishing, smuggling of weapons and drugs, human trafficking, piracy, and the use of vessels in terrorist operations has been greatly hampered.

The consequences are dire. The ocean is our planet's life-support-system, keeping it healthy and productive. But overfishing and pollution are causing tremendous damage.

Marine debris causes the death by drowning, suffocation, or starvation of some one million seabirds and around 100,000 marine mammals (seals, whales, and dolphins) every year, not to mention the hazard posed to shipping by sea junk. Plastic pollution -- including pellets and micro plastics that enter food chains and can endanger human health -- is a growing problem.

Likewise, rising temperatures are reducing the ocean's oxygen-carrying capacity. The increasing uptake of carbon dioxide is causing ocean acidification and unprecedented changes in chemical and physical conditions, which in turn are affecting marine organisms and ecosystems. The very life of the global ocean is under threat.

The time has come to bring the rule of law to the high seas. That is the purpose behind the Global Ocean Commission, an independent international body comprising former heads of state, ministers, and business leaders. I am one of the commissioners. Last week, we proposed a rescue package that offers eight proposals to improve governance and restore ocean health.

To strengthen high-seas governance, the Global Ocean Commission is joining the call for a new agreement under UNCLOS to protect biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. Less than 1% of the high seas is currently protected,

so it is crucial that this new agreement includes provisions for creating protected areas in the high seas.

We are also proposing that an international convention be adopted to establish liability and compensation for both economic losses and ecological damage caused by offshore oil and gas exploration and production, which should also always be subject to legally binding safety protocols.

Despite overfishing, a handful of countries -- including the United States, Japan, and China, as well as the EU -- are artificially supporting industrial high-seas fishing. Without subsidies, high-seas fisheries would not be financially viable. We are proposing that subsidies be capped immediately and eliminated within five years, and that countries be fully transparent about all fishing subsidies, about 60% of which directly encourage unsustainable practices.

Moreover, to eliminate illegal fishing, which strips our oceans of marine life, we are calling for mandatory identification numbers and the tracking of all high-seas fishing vessels, and a total ban on transshipment at sea. By closing loopholes, we will finally close our ports and markets to illegally obtained fish. An independent Global Ocean



Accountability Board -- the creation of which we are also proposing -- should monitor progress on all of these fronts.

In five years, if ocean decline continues and adequate prevention measures have not been implemented, the international community should consider turning the high seas -- with the exception of those areas where action by regional fisheries management organisations is effective -- into a regeneration zone where industrial fishing is forbidden.

We can reverse ocean degradation, and turn the cycle of decline into a cycle of renewal. We know what needs to be done to restore ocean health, but we cannot do it alone. Delivering change will take political will and require joint efforts by governments, businesses, and civil society. It can and must be done.

Join our mission at <http://missionocean.me>. The time to act is now. Unless we respond with strong governance and the necessary tools to enforce regulations, ruthless pirate fishing will continue with impunity, there will be no binding international safety standards for deep sea oil and gas drilling, and plastic pollution and abandoned fishing gear will continue to proliferate. The more the global ocean struggles for life, the more our children and future generations will struggle for theirs.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Couldn't BCB be lenient with Shakib?

Shakib Al Hasan has been drawing controversies for a long time. This time the BCB has taken stern action against him allegedly for breaching disciplines. It is needless to say that BCB has taken this decision for the greater interest of our national cricket. But will it really bring any positive result at all?

Look at history, punishment hardly brought any good result. Andrew Simonds, Kevin Peterson, and Ashraf are a few examples to cite. They have vanished from the sports scene. If the BCB wanted Shakib to play for the country, then it should have been a little liberal to him. Because punishment may turn arrogant Shakib into a docile one but the effect of a strenuous relation with the management may have a detrimental effect on his performance.

So the BCB should consider this factor and lessen his punishment.
Rafiqul Islam
Sunamganj Sadar, Sunamganj

Independent pay scale for varsity teachers

Public university teachers have been demanding an independent pay scale, as the present pay scale does not compensate them for the service they render. The present salary structure for the university teachers in Bangladesh is too meagre to make both ends meet.

To press home their demand for an independent pay-scale and raising the retirement age to 67 years, teachers of different universities on July 6 staged a human chain on their respective campuses as part of a programme undertaken by the University Teachers' Association Federation. We sincerely hope that the government will soon take necessary steps to fulfil their demand.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Shakib banned for six months," published on July 8, 2014

Hafeejul Alam
I believe the BCB has shown more arrogance than Shakib himself. No one should be so harsh on Shakib, the 6th best player of IPL and of course, the only player of Kolkata Knight Riders who speak Bangla. Bangladesh is definitely proud of Shakib. I would request the prime minister to intervene in the matter and allow him to play both national and international cricket.

Snr Citizen
The punishment has been very harsh. This time it could come with a last warning tag plus a fine and 3-month ban. Now only the PM can warn him and pardon him. Or else the cricket in him will die!

Mshafiqua
It is unfortunate that Papon and his functionaries failed to handle Shakib.

Hardreality
It is hard to believe how Shakib could threaten to quit ODI and test cricket for playing county cricket. How could I ever respect him the way I did?

"Ministry, UGC reject TIB report" (July 7, 2014)

Rafat Sadiq
That's right Mr. minister. There is no corruption in the education sector. Questions have never been leaked. No government educational institution has ever sold seats. All private universities are complying with the rules due to the tireless efforts of the UGC. It's all a conspiracy by TIB. Does Mr. Nahid think all Bangladeshis are that naive? Guess who we'll side with in a tussle between TIB and this government?

Monju Huq
We would like TIB to investigate and publish a report about the sources of huge money being spent by Tarique Zia and Koko, living abroad for the last 5-6 years. It is strange that TIB has been silent over this matter! Is TIB scared to do so or is there any sort of unholy alliance?

Molla A. Latif
"A section of officials of the education ministry, UGC, and private universities are involved in illegal money transactions at different stages -- from getting approval to set up the universities and appoint vice chancellors, pro-vice chancellors and treasurers to awarding certificates to students."

The above report of TIB is a flat one for all. One can make this type of report sitting in their offices or homes.

Aasfisarwar
What else the ministry and UGC can do other than denying? Did not the Uruguayan football star Luis Suarez also deny biting an Italian footballer? But unlike in our case, he was caught and punished.