

Imperative of punishing the profligates

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

LARGE Scale malfeasances and pure criminal action resorted to by highly placed public official and public leaders have shocked the nation. Whether it is the unsettling scam in the financial sector, particularly the banks or the forgery of important State documents like freedom fighter certificates by senior bureaucrats or the suicidal adulteration of foodstuffs or the leakage of question papers of public examination, the public is at a loss to see the spectacle of authoritative inaction or half-hearted

action at best.

The need, quite clearly is to firmly punish the profligates at the earliest. Punishing the bad hats is an urgent priority because we have to once for all put a stop to the rise of dishonest people in the socio-political arena.

It is to be noted that we must not make the mistake of thinking that those who hunger for political profit, or profit in the form of power, are less dangerous to society than those who seek monetary profit. It is time to rein in the unbridled ambitions of unscrupulous money-makers.

Politicians who have visibly plundered national resources and did not feel uneasy with their ill-gotten wealth need to be exposed and punished. Ministers who had helped, and connived with, the transfer of prime government land at token prices for doubtful use by near relations have to answer for their highhandedness and flouting of rules.

The sense of propriety, and the distinction between public property and private gain, needs to be restored. If the constraint of legality is not effectively established by ensuring punishment of the corrupt then the crown would always go to the loudest voices, the biggest sticks and the readiest fists.

The state needs to debar a significant number of suspected politicians from participating in electoral politics in order to ensure the growth of a healthy polity. That goal cannot be achieved if it is not possible to criminally convict a number of politicians.

The state needs to mobilise the best trial lawyers, and experienced and capable investigators, for successful prosecution. Financial remuneration for such jobs should be high and there must not be any bureaucratic encumbrance in this regard.

Punishment of the corrupt would be meaningful when ill-gotten money can be judicially or administratively brought back to the state coffers. In cases of criminal breach of trust and misappropriation, most often the siphoned-off money could not be confiscated by the state. Now that we have signed the International Convention on corruption, efforts should be made to retrieve national wealth by enlisting international cooperation.

The profligates need to be punished because ground realities regarding the imperatives of astute political management of the affairs of Bangladesh deserve serious consideration. It is against the background of such a backdrop that concerned Bangladeshi citizens will sincerely hope and pray that, indeed, politics truly

becomes difficult, so that increasing numbers of brats and non-entities do not occupy the centre-stage of our political horizon.

Such concerned citizens, and the well-meaning folks of our country, earnestly desire that politics becomes the art of wise and patriotic people, and is effectively salvaged from the clutches of the insensitive.

There is no denying that in spite of our adopting a lofty constitution we do not have the ability to follow it. Equally true is the fact that while we are the proud inheritors of a rich and vibrant culture we do not have the wisdom to cherish it. The compounding tragedy is that our resilient people have to suffer and endure in patience, without recognition of their innate potential.

We need to ask ourselves if the apathy of the citizens -- particularly the elite who have almost opted out of the democratic process -- is responsible for the corruption, incompetence and inefficiency that we see all around? We have to admit that as a nation we have paid substantially for our follies in leaving the governance of this country largely to the professional politicians, for many of whom politics is not bread and butter, a means of livelihood, or worse, a means of personal enrichment.

Criminalised and vandalised politics is another indicator with alarming fall-out. Violence and politics have become almost synonymous. The emergence of

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political bully-boys would not have been possible without patronisation by political parties. Violence has had serious negative impact on the political culture of the country.

We have to admit that our ethno-linguistic and religious homogeneity factor has not succeeded in bringing the dynamics of socio-political relations within a manageable limit. Presently, our society is characterised by a significant elite-mass gap. A small segment of society influences decision-making, and allocation and distribution of resources.

The stalling of democratic experimentation in the initial years of independence led to a succession of military and quasi-military rule by a coalition of the higher echelon of the military and civil bureaucracy. Political leaders joined later to complete the "coalition of convenience." The first two groups remained dominant.

Bangladesh polity has failed to forge national cohesion on fundamental values. Inadequate nation building and state building processes is the cause. Lack of mutual trust and prevalence of hostile political attitude have resulted in weak political institutions and weak national capacity to resolve national issues. The process needs to be reversed. Such reversal demands expeditious punishment of the profligates.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Establish public universities in all districts

The admission seekers and their family members face a lot of troubles during the admission process of the public universities. The numbers of seats are limited and the prospective candidates are many. Now time has come to increase the number of public universities in the country. If we can establish public universities in all 64 districts, all the problems will be solved.

The district council chairmen of all 64 districts can be given the responsibility to establish public universities in their own districts. All the existing district council chairmen are experienced public leaders and in all the councils, the secretaries are efficient and intelligent government officials. If they are given the responsibility and at least 5 crore taka as an initial fund, I am sure they will be successful. They will only need the government permission, supervision from the UGC and the initial fund.

The tuition fees and other charges of these universities can be fixed somewhere between the fees of existing public and private universities. Initially they can rent buildings. In the first year of operation, they can appoint the learned people of their own districts on contractual basis as teachers. Gradually they can appoint permanent teachers following the standards fixed by the UGC and move to their own campuses.

Anwarul Hasan Sufi, Ph.D
 Professor, Department of Psychology
 University of Rajshahi

Misuse of ethylene in pineapple ripening

As per ripening behaviour, pineapple is a non climacteric fruit as its ripening is not associated with increased rate of respiration and ethylene production. Once the fruit is harvested before proper ripening, it will not ripen further. Ethylene treatment on pineapple before or after harvest will not promote ripening but will act as a degreening agent to breakdown the green chlorophyll of the peel and prop up yellow colour development making the fruit more attractive irrespective of maturity.

Recently it was reported in *The Daily Star* that pineapple growers of Modhupur (Tangail) regularly applied 'Ripen15' -- an aqueous solution of Ethephon (2-chloroethyl phosphonic acid) -- to the fruits for ripening releasing ethylene. Application of ethylene emanating chemicals is misuse in respect of pineapple ripening. Consumers are tempted to buy artificially induced yellow coloured pineapple but become frustrated as the taste of such fruit is not palatable or juicy with natural flavour. Non climacteric fruit like pineapple has to be ripened naturally while on the plant, for better quality. It is ready for harvest when at least one third of the fruit has turned yellow. Pineapple starts ripening usually after six months of flower induction.

Naturally ripened pineapple has good taste and high market value. Officials of Department of Agricultural Extension and NGOs working in pineapple growing areas should motivate the farmers not to use ethylene for pineapple ripening which costs money and is technically inappropriate.

Dr. S.M. Monowar Hossain
 Lalmatia, Dhaka

An appropriate name 'Dhaka'

Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh. I think the name is very suitable for the city because in Bangla, the word 'dhaka' means 'covered'. Many criminal acts are being covered up here. We do not yet know who murdered Sagar-Runi and where Ilias Ali is. Many murders and forced disappearances, happening regularly in the city, are being covered up.

Padma bridge corruption probe has been laid to rest as the ACC Chairman said at a press briefing that none has been found guilty. But people know better than that; dust will settle on many serious issues and cover those up.

Nur Jahan
 Chittagong

Comments on news report, "Hardly anything safe to eat," published on September 9, 2014

Saint
 Unfortunately, we are going to be a disabled nation.

Earth Light
 Strict exemplary punishment should be given to those who are contaminating food items.

Shariful Alam Tapash
 The whole nation should be united against these people who are involved in food adulteration.

Sayed Rahman
 Almost every food item, from rice to candy, is tainted with toxic chemicals from the very beginning of their production. If things go this way, in near future hospitals will be our permanent abode. We should be aware of those culprits who are committing this heinous crime against the nation. Thanks to the media for bringing out these anomalies to public.

Nakz21
 Why isn't the government doing anything to stop the use of chemicals and toxins?

"Leading jurists call for dialogue" (September 10, 2014)

M. Abdus Sabur Fakir
 How on earth a parliament can make a preamble with incorrect information? It can be undoubtedly said that it was done with a view to misguide the nation as the same had been done to the history of the Liberation War by this undemocratic government.

Death on the tracks

Make eviction permanent

THIS is not the first time we are reporting on the death of individuals on railway tracks in Kawran Bazaar area. Any death is a tragedy and when multiple deaths occur, our hearts go out to the bereaved families of the deceased. What answer will authorities give this time round? That an illegal fish market has been thriving on railway tracks is open knowledge and to feign ignorance will simply not do. Every time a tragedy like this occurs, we the media cover it and point out the obvious. The government launches an eviction drive to remove squatters and illegal structures in the vicinity and make lofty promises of change, which unfortunately are unimplemented. After a few weeks, the structures and the businesses return, until the next tragic incident.

This time round, railway police have been removing the makeshift market on and along the railway tracks. We are informed by the authorities that no such illegal structure or business will be allowed to occupy and operate on railway tracks. The sad reality is that such assurances sound hollow as they have been made on numerous occasions in the past. Investigative journalism by both print and electronic media has revealed that the businesses are allowed to operate on such dangerous premises because a share of the profits goes to the police and the ruling party activists in the form of protection money. Hence, until that racket is dealt with, incidents like the one that occurred on September 11 will continue and promises made by the government will continue to be fake.

Post-flood concerns

Need more serious addressing

THE flood waters are receding in major districts. With that comes the possibility of post-flood outbreak of waterborne diseases. This is nothing new. Safe drinking water has always been a problem in the immediate aftermath of a flood as sources of fresh drinking water become scarce or contaminated. It is not surprising to find large numbers of people becoming sick with dysentery, fever and skin ailments. While relief operations are going on in various parts of the country, the shortage of essential medical supplies such as water purifying tablets have run short. That there was ample warning of floods is evident.

Although public hospitals have been mobilised to tackle any outbreak of water borne diseases, it is necessary to keep ample stocks of medications and other supplies in hand. The recent floods have taken a serious toll on flood embankments of major rivers. We are somewhat baffled that funds reserved for river erosion, repair and maintenance of embankments have not yet been disbursed. While steps are underway to contain spread of diseases within acceptable levels, that measures in protecting physical infrastructure leave much to be desired.

Had embankments and river erosion protection mechanisms been better maintained then perhaps the effects of flooding could have been tolerable in terms of farming and housing losses. The slow pace of implementation of upgrading protection mechanisms needs to be prioritised so that people are better protected from the fury of floods.

Education and Opportunity

THE ASIAN CONVERGENCE



LEE JONG-WHA

EDUCATION is a fundamental driver of personal, national, and global development. Since the beginning of the century, recognition of this has driven many countries to pursue the Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal primary education and eradicating gender disparities at all levels of education by 2015. This has contributed to considerable

progress in expanding educational opportunities and attainment worldwide. But there is much more to be done.

To be sure, universal primary education has nearly been achieved. Moreover, considerable progress has been made toward gender equality in educational opportunities and attainment. Indeed, enrollment rates for school-age females have increased steadily at all levels, reaching near parity with male enrollment globally. As a result, the gender gap in average years of schooling for the adult population -- a widely used measure of educational attainment -- has narrowed.

Moreover, in 2010, for people aged 25 and above, the female-to-male ratio in average years of schooling was almost 100% in advanced countries and about 85% in developing regions. But, in many low-income countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, girls still have far less access to education, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels, than boys do.

Significant global disparities also remain in post-primary education and the quality of schooling. In advanced countries, almost 90% of the population aged 15-64 has attained at least some secondary education, compared to only 63% in developing countries. Likewise, though more than 33% of the working-age population in advanced countries has achieved some level of tertiary education, the proportion is just 12% in the developing world.

Academic research suggests that countries with higher per capita income, lower income inequality, and lower fertility rates tend to invest more in children's education, with public expenditure leading to higher enrollment rates. The logical conclusion is that efforts to promote more inclusive economic growth and improve education systems can raise enrollment among young people in developing countries and reduce disparities between genders and among social groups.

But simply narrowing the gaps in school-enrollment rates and total years of schooling is not enough. Countries must also ensure the quality of their education systems -- a key challenge for the coming decades.

As it stands, poor educational outcomes and inefficient education systems are eliciting deep concern worldwide. In many countries, primary schools fail to provide students with appropriate cognitive skills like numeracy, literacy, problem-solving ability, and general scientific knowledge.

Furthermore, inadequate education at the secondary and tertiary levels, including technical and vocational education and training, is leaving students unequipped to meet the job market's changing demands. As a result, many countries are struggling with a mismatch between the skills that employers seek and those that workers have.

Wide disparities in educational quality, often measured by student achievement on international examinations, are evident within and across countries. The results of most internationally comparable mathematics, reading, and science exams for primary and secondary students reveal a considerable gap not only between advanced and developing countries, but also across the developing world. According to the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, South Korea had the highest average score (590) in 2011 on the science test for secondary students, while Ghana scored the lowest (306).

Though academic performance is determined largely by family inputs and students' individual talents, other factors, such as the amount of school resources available to students, also play an important role, as do various other school inputs, such as teacher quality, class size, expenditure per pupil, and instruction time.

The institutional features of education systems are another important determinant of student achievement. Private financing and provision, school autonomy, and external monitoring and assessment mechanisms tend to influence the quality of education by changing the incentives for students and teachers.

In the future, new information and communication technologies are expected to stimulate the expansion of educational opportunities and to improve educational quality at the national and global level, by offering a variety of innovative learning channels. For example, the ability to use new technologies to build borderless networks among schools can offer opportunities for students in low-income countries to learn from teachers in advanced countries -- and vice versa.

The imperative is clear. Global leaders must commit to enhancing the quality of education and reduce the education gap by increasing school resources, improving the efficiency of educational institutions, and seizing the opportunities afforded by technological innovation. All of this will serve to enrich human capital, which is essential to boosting productivity and incomes.

Indeed, if such efforts are designed specifically to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender or wealth, they will be a boon to the global economy, while promoting social cohesion at the national level. When it comes to improving education, there really is no downside.

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Another Caliphate

EDITORIAL, THE STATESMAN

AS the focus of the West is riveted on the Caliphate declared by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a not dissimilar development has happened almost unnoticed in Nigeria. The Islamist outfit, Boko Haram, has reinforced its fanatical fury with Monday's declaration of a Caliphate or religious fiefdom in the territories under its control. More towns have been seized along Nigeria's border with Cameroon, and the group, given to kidnappings and killings, appears to have graduated from a guerrilla movement confined to the mountain caves to a force capable of holding on to its gains. Just as Iraq today is a truncated state with the northern swathe under ISIS control, so too has Nigeria frittered away its territory to the Boko Haram, which loosely translated means "Western education is sin".

The militants have proceeded as systematically as the Sunni fighters in Iraq. Territorial acquisitions and the hoisting of jihadist flags have been reinforced with the introduction of the sharia in volatile parts of the country. Surprisingly enough, this week's establishment of yet another Caliphate has sparked no response outside Nigeria, let alone a counter-strategy by Barack Obama's USA. Nor for that matter, to be sure, did the West react when the group kidnapped 300 school children. Boko Haram has wrought havoc in Africa's most prosperous nation ~ Nigeria. Yet the obsessive concern of the West remains confined to the Arab world. Of course, Nigeria's oil reserves are of crucial economic interest to Europe and the USA, similar to Russia's gas via the Ukraine. Yet overall, Africa remains a neglected continent in terms of geostrategy... despite the almost relentless mayhem in Nigeria and now the establishment of a Caliphate. Boko Haram is on the verge of ending government control across almost the entire state of Borno and establishing its cherished aim of a sharia state within a state.

On the face of it, the equation between ISIS and Boko Haram might have seemed symbolic. Over time, the relationship has developed into a practical equation with the Islamic State offering advice on strategy and tactics. Small wonder that the two Caliphates have emerged in a span of a couple of months. Effectively, the authority of the State ~ as an entity of governance ~ is under siege in Iraq, Syria, and Nigeria. While the ISIS operates as a predominantly sectarian outfit, engaged in targeted strikes, Boko Haram functions as a conventional army in areas under its control. As the government seems pretty much helpless, it will be hard to resist the conclusion that the "centre doesn't hold". The Nigeria Security Network has advanced a timely advice to the continent and the world ~ "Unless swift action is taken, Nigeria could be facing a rapid takeover of a large area of its territory reminiscent of ISIS's lightning advances in Iraq."

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