

'Profit' at whose expense?

Let market determine oil prices

THAT the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) is said to have made a profit of Tk 2,000 crore last year may have been cause for celebration had it not been at the expense of the end consumers. Where the global oil prices plummeted to a record low, BPC went on and is selling octane at Tk 99 per litre and consumers and oil-fired power plants have been paying the same old prices for kerosene and furnace oil.

The government has set aside Tk 2,400 crore as petroleum subsidies for 2014-15 and may utilise a mere Tk 200-300 crore of the total fund. The unspent fund may well remain idle. This could otherwise have been used to benefit other government-run programmes such as education, health and infrastructure, to name but a few. It is not without reason that the World Bank has been advocating a market-driven mechanism to be introduced that will automatically readjust prices of petroleum products in line with rise and fall of prices in international markets. That way, benefits of lowered prices could be passed on to the consumer.

As per conditions set by International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the government to avail itself of US\$987 million in loan funds, it is required to narrow the gap between prices of oil in domestic and international markets. This if the difference exceeds Tk 10 per litre. But this has not been followed. The government must introduce measures to deregulate the market and end BPC's monopoly so that private companies can enter the market and consumers can pay the real price for energy products.

New militant outfit busted

Trace and dismantle networks

THE law enforcement agencies deserve credit for the identification of a new militant outfit following arrest of three members of the outfit and one of its arms suppliers. According to the Rab, the outfit's armed wing is called Shaheed Hamja Brigade and consists of three groups, each comprising seven men.

In the course of their investigation, the law enforcers found that the militants had received trainings in classrooms of a madrasa and had been given militant training in a hilly area of Bankshali upazila on how to operate firearms, make explosives and avoid detection. Earlier in February, the law enforcers had discovered a militant training camp in Banshkhali and recovered laptops, memory cards and other audio-video materials used in training in classes.

While we applaud the efforts of law enforcements in apprehending this militant group, we remain deeply concerned about the spectre of militancy and extremist ideologies in the country, and the systematic way in which these militants are being recruited, brainwashed, trained with sophisticated technologies and provided with high calibre arms. We have reasons to believe that there may be more militant groups in the country that are evading detection of law enforcement agencies and operating in remote areas.

Questions remain as to who are the masterminds and financiers of these terrorist outfits, and what links, if any, they have with other local and international groups. Coordinated action is needed to identify the architects of these outfits as arrests of ground operatives will not be enough to deter the terrorists. The government must also

COMMENTS

"Gunter Grass dies at 87"
(April 14, 2015)

Nirjon Rat

It's so sad. He was one of the best novelists of all time.

Ayan Chowdhury

The world has lost a great person.

"PM, Khaleda send greetings to each other"
(April 13, 2015)

PlainSpeaker

They don't talk to each other but send greetings. How strange!

"Why does the Indian home minister have a beef with beef?"
(April 10, 2015)

Snr Citizen

Well, this is border economics.

Salman Zaid

The way the political milieu is changing in India is alarming for neighbouring countries, especially for Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. It is a matter of sorrow that the world's largest democratic country grabs the same path of Pakistan, a state that has muzzled the minority's fundamental rights. The lesser they will realise the matter, the greater the negative impact will be in the society.

Driving Reverse Gear?

NO STRINGS ATTACHED



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

I have a recurring nightmare that plagues me every few months. While the circumstances are not always identical, the feelings of panic and utter helplessness definitely are. I am in the back seat of a car going full speed through a busy road – it could be Green Road or Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. It would be a normal, mundane dream if not for a small detail – there is no driver and the car is going backwards. As soon as I realise that the car is going to ram into a truck or a building I clamber towards the backseat and try to bring the vehicle to a stop remembering my rudimentary knowledge from car school. Is it step on clutch and brake together or first clutch then brake? Thankfully as I feverishly agonise over this life and death decision I learnt eons ago from LSD (don't roll your eyes, it stood for Libra School of Driving), I wake up in a cold sweat.

Now think how I felt when I read the headlines 'Driverless train runs backwards for 27km' a few days ago. To my horror I learnt that the Faridpur Express crossed three stations in Rajbari, going backwards and without a driver. The driver had just got down for a betel leaf brake, sorry break, and had delegated his assistant to check the engine. The assistant checked the engine but in the process made the train carrying 150 passengers go backwards. When he saw he had made a bit of a boo boo, the gallant assistant did what is expected of most individuals in a position of responsibility in this country – he jumped off! It was up to the ticket master with the help of the now quite alarmed passengers to manage to stop the train without any further incident.

This bizarre news, which sounds more like fiction, kind of illustrates the way some things are going – on reverse gear (popularly known here as 'back gear') and without any driver.

The significantly low participation of women in the City Corporation elections would be the latest example. According to

a report by an English daily, the Election Commission records show that out of 336 councillor candidates in Dhaka South City, only six are women. Out of the 280 candidates in Dhaka North City, only 12 are women. In Chittagong, there are only three candidates out of 280. This poor representation is despite having a rule that stipulates that every registered political party must have 33 percent of positions for women at every level of leadership.

Of course the fact that we even need such a stipulation is indicative of the obstacles faced by women who are interested in political careers. Apart from the chauvinism of the male-dominated central committees of political parties, women aspirants face another big



challenge – raising funds for wide scale campaigns, something their male counterparts do not have much difficulty with.

The same English daily also reveals the sheer sexism of election symbols given to the women candidates – betel leaf (because that's all women really do all day – eat paan and gossip), vanity bag (to keep their makeup and money for sari shopping), pressure cooker (they love the modernity that adds to their life of domestic drudgery), frying pan (what else could symbolise the Bangali nari more?), kettle (for making tea – for the hubby of course), shil pata (to partake in the initiation ceremony of all females to domesticity – grinding spices),

steel almirah (a sign of female affluence that keeps all the gold jewellery and benarasis) tissue box (for the endless ocean of tears that she will shed) and radish (because that's what represents women's empowerment in this country – a root vegetable that adds the zing to the food but is also perfectly dispensable). Other rather strange but equally sexist symbols include parrot (women are like birds – colourful and delicate and tend to screech a lot), harmonium (being able to sing is the second most important virtue after cooking, for a woman), swing (because they look so lovely when they swing on a swing with their hair flowing in the wind).

With a woman prime minister, women

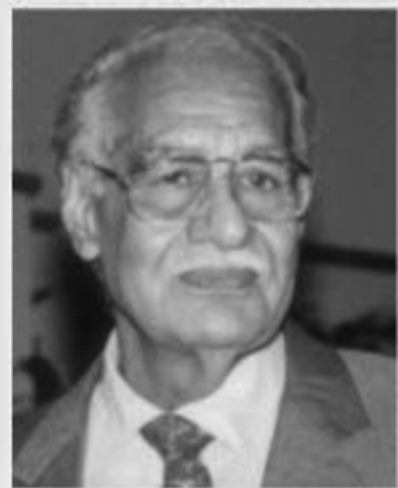


chairs in the opposition parties, a woman speaker, a few women ministers and quite a few women MPs, you would think we are going full speed forward with a very competent driver. But all this is just fluff if we cannot ensure that women are given a fair chance to compete in local government. Until political parties choose to groom and support women candidates and unless the EC stops behaving like a chauvinistic village elder, the idea of women's political empowerment will remain a dream. Or a nightmare with the car going backwards, driverless.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Op-Ed and Editorial, The Daily Star.

Encounter or sheer murder

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYYAR

Hardly anyone of them goes to the state to find out what happened on the ground, as was the practice till recently.

This indicates not only the lessening of interest but also a tacit approval of the excesses committed by the security forces. The Mufti Mohammad Sayeed government which announced to provide an accountable governance does not come out well.

In this murky atmosphere, the return of Kashmiri Pandits, who were forced to leave their homes in the valley, has become more uncertain. Those who are shedding tears over the composite culture which the valley enjoyed when the Pandits were there are doing little to bring them back.

The fundamentalist Syed Gillani was at least honest when he said in reply to my query a few years back that the Pandits' return depended on the solution of the Kashmir problems. That means waiting till eternity. The hardcore people like Yasin Malik do miss the composite culture but he too has reconciled with the situation.

Former chief minister Omar Farooq Abdullah is frank enough to admit that no one in the valley made any serious attempt to stop the Pandits' exodus in 1993. Not a single voice was heard on the loudspeakers at the mosques asking the Pandits not to leave, he said.

Some extremists have defended their opposition to the Pandits' return on the ground that it would disturb the demographic balance, knowing well that the valley with 98 percent Muslims would

probably bring down the Muslim population to 96 percent.

It is a pity that the fundamentalists have the last word. But this is the solution which people are increasingly accepting. That it should happen in Kashmir, which remained undisturbed even during partition, is unfortunate. Yet this is the reality.

The battle over the return of the Pandits was lost in the valley itself. If the population does not assert itself to retrieve the situation, no other force can help. The resolve of composite culture lovers is weakening. Religion is having an upper hand. Both the Kashmiri Pandits and Punjabi Hindus have no

tunate. It indicates that social movements tend to split when they enter the political field. Activist Medha Patkar says that social movements will change the complexion of politics. One wishes this comes true. But power corrupts even those who have spent their entire life in propagating the values.

Encounter became a familiar word during the militancy in Punjab when the then police chief, K.P.S. Gill, was accused of staging encounters to kill the militants to circumvent the long, tedious legal procedures of having the verdicts against the guilty from courts. He always denied the charge and said in defence that the legal system was so defective that a case

head to Tiruttani, not far from the Andhra border. From Tiruttani, they take a bus to Renigunta in Andhra Pradesh but are picked up by police on the way. Encounters take place in Seshachalam forest near Tirupati.

According to one of the survivors, he was with the seven in the bus when it was stopped by Andhra police. While the others were led out, he was spared because he was sitting next to a woman and police thought he was her husband.

Incident after incident shows that the police have followed the same methods which were used during the British period. There is the same cruelty and the same reluctance to go into the matter deep and determine the cause. Rulers do not care about the method used as long as the force delivers what they want. In the last 68 years since independence, the scenario should have changed. But obviously it has not because the target is to secure what suits them, not the method to reach the goal.

The Kashmiri Pandits are an affluent and influential community. If their fate can move the government to solve what is the real cause, their affliction would not go to waste. If the nation were to introspect, it would realise that the excesses committed in the name of governance are sheer indifference and political aggrandisement.

Pre-meditated killings which have the name of encounter should not be tolerated in a democratic society. The National Human Rights Commission summoned the survivors of the Andhra encounter and has recorded their version. In due course, the verdict would be out to either chastise the police or let them go with a warning.

With the passage of time, the incident will recede from the memory of the people. But this should not happen. Otherwise, similar incidents will take place at some other place, at some other time and the police will call its action as encounters.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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GM purple tomatoes & pink pineapples

Genetically modified (GM) heart-healthy purple coloured tomatoes and cancer-fighting pink pineapples are awaiting the concerned authorities' approval for release in the United States. Good innovation indeed. But there are doubts about whether consumption of these genetically engineered vegetables and fruits are beneficial for human health in the first place. More research is needed to determine the real effects of these modified products on humans.

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Open drains in Gulshan

We are very glad to see that the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has finally started the repair works in Gulshan covering Road Nos. 96 and 104. I am, however, very disappointed to see the quality of works being carried out practically without any supervision.

The trenches dug for laying drain pipes are being filled with local clay. These are supposed to be filled with sand. The drains being built beside the roads are kept open inviting passers-by to use them as dustbins, urinals and latrines; thus creating an unhealthy, stinky and unbearable environment in the area. A grill is placed over the drain in front of the main gate of each building to facilitate the

passage of vehicles. The construction of the grill is so poor that it is likely to bend over the years and become a barrier. Moreover, the rods of the grill are placed so wide apart that neither ladies with high-heeled shoes nor young kids with small feet will be able to walk over it safely. They are likely to topple over and get hurt easily. The grill has indeed become a safety hazard for them and for senior citizens.

Under the circumstances, it is requested that the DNCC takes appropriate steps to cover the drains all along the roads with proper concrete slabs so as to keep them clean and to make it easier for pedestrians to walk over them.

A resident of Gulshan
On e-mail