

Case for lowering oil prices

Govt should uphold public interest

DESPITE the Finance Minister's verbal indication that oil prices will be lowered in a matter of weeks, we see an apparently negative approach taken by high officials of the government who are opposing the idea of reducing fuel prices, arguing that the BPC still has a huge debt and other liabilities.

We find the government's inaction in lowering oil prices despite a more-than-fifty-percent fall in prices in the international market absurd, tantamounting to extortion. Some energy experts have made the point that the BPC will still make good profit if it sells octane at Tk 50 per litre, 50 percent down from the current selling price.

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), the sole oil importing government agency, is making bumper profits by selling Octane at the same Tk 99 per litre although global oil prices per barrel have flattened out at around USD 40-45 from a stiff \$110 a barrel last year. The consumers are feeling the pinch and it's about time they got a relief. If the government is in any business then it must be conducted keeping public interest uppermost in their mind. The public sector simply cannot run like profit-maximising enterprises taking advantage of a monopolistic market.

Instead of utilising the opportunity to reduce dependence on subsidy, BPC is trying to extract money from the consumers rather exploitatively. At this point we urge the government to intervene immediately to cut fuel prices, which the Finance Minister hinted at last week.

Poor quality medicines

Stricter monitoring required

WE are informed by the Directorate General of Drug Administration that some 153 sub-standard drugs have been detected, of which, 43 had already been marketed and awaiting registration. A survey carried out by the Administration found the spurious drugs and cases were ongoing against some 499 drug manufacturers during the January-July period. Drugs that have been banned are used for treatment of common ailments like fever, pain and also diabetes. While cases are filed, fines are imposed and parties found guilty are incarcerated, the problems associated with dispensing low quality medication remains a major headache for health authorities.

The infamous case of toxic paracetamol that resulted in the death of scores of children came to a decisive end after hanging fire for two decades. There will always be a section of manufacturers who will try to slip in drugs that do not meet the standards. The battle against such illicit activity requires greater scrutiny and continuous monitoring of markets on a nationwide scale. Given the size of the market for such drugs, it becomes all the more necessary to take proactive measures. There is also the question of imported counterfeit drugs landing up in the domestic market.

While we are sure that the drug administration directorate is doing its best to tackle the situation, we cannot but reflect on the lengthy and uphill legal battles against lawbreaking companies. Perhaps the time has come for tougher punishment and heavier penalties for errant manufacturers and dealers who choose to peddle substandard drugs.

COMMENTS

"Seven ex-officials of Oriental Bank get life" (August 26, 2015)

Russel Khan

There are other people who have misappropriated funds many times as this amount. Where are their sentences?

Ralia Anan

Big thieves in Bangladesh hardly get caught!

"Dhaka vs Kolkata" (August 25, 2015)

Mohammad Anisuzzaman

I have been to Kolkata and it is a far better city than Dhaka, undoubtedly. It is unfortunate that while Kolkata is improving significantly, Dhaka is now ranked as one of the least liveable cities.

Nurul Alam Anik

I think one of the main reasons is that people who live here come from different parts of the country. They don't really love or care about Dhaka. They just live here in order to survive. And most of the government and city corporation officials are busy making money for their own pockets and we, the public, already accepted that they will never work for the city. So we are simply letting the city die.

Shopnil HB

It's because of the lack of our social awareness.

Mohammad Monir Uddin

We have to be conscious to keep the city clean.

Anwar A. Khan

Alas! Where are we living!

Why revolutions can't be successful these days

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

A revolution can either explode or implode, but it can't do both. The French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Chinese Revolution exploded when the rage of people shattered old regimes and installed new ones. The most recent example of implosive revolution is the Arab Spring that collapsed violently inward after toppling a few old regimes but failing to create any of its own. A simple

illustration entails the difference. The successful revolution is an explosive hurled at targets; the failed one is that which explodes in the thrower's hand.

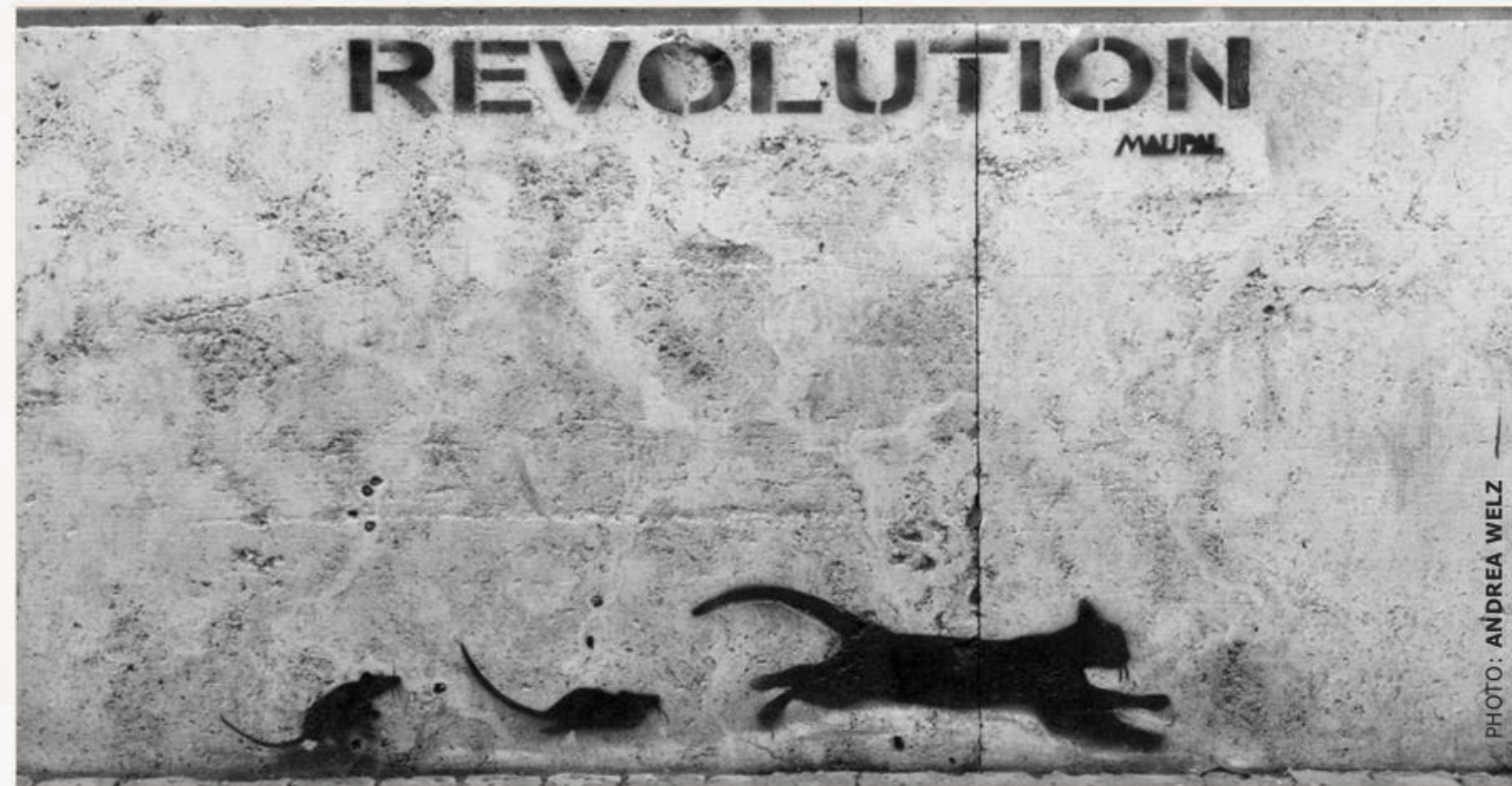
In his book *The Rebel*, Albert Camus argues that there has not yet been a revolution in the course of history. He said what has happened is rebellion and then distinguished between the two phenomena. Rebellion kills men, while revolution destroys both men and principles.

It's because every revolution devours its own children. Power struggle turns the revolutionaries against each other, before the revolution loses its focus. In the end, children also devour their revolution due to lust for power, lack of vision or error in judgment. That explains why the Arab Spring must have fizzled out like torrents reduced to drizzle.

These days the drizzle of the Arab Spring is falling in non-Arab countries. Every Friday since last May, thousands of Hondurans have been marching with torches to protest against corruption at the highest levels of their government. The Guatemalans have been doing it every Saturday since April this year. Political analysts are calling it the Central American Spring.

Thus the spirit of the Arab Spring is still giving off sparks. The first of these sparks was ignited by a vegetable vendor in Tunisia who set himself alight to protest against the corruption of municipal officials. Two weeks ago that protest had a more creative manifestation in Afghanistan when artists painted a blast wall outside Kabul's presidential palace with a huge pair of eyes in bright, almost psychedelic colors. Alongside the eyes, a slogan reads: "Corruption cannot be hidden from God or from the people". In faraway Zambia, billboards are gently exhorting the public to say no to corruption.

More than anything, corruption has been a silent disaster. Experts claim that if not for corruption, the



GDP growth in Bangladesh could pick up another two percent. Corruption hurts people's life besides being morally wrong.

Nicholas Ambraseys of Imperial College London and Roger Bilham of the University of Colorado at Boulder have established the connection. They show that the extent of corruption tells us not only about poverty in a country but also about the consequences of earthquakes. Their study found that an earthquake of a given magnitude is more devastating where corruption is more virulent.

Because, bribes make it possible in highly corrupt societies for buildings to be thrown up without regard for codes and regulations. When shaken by earthquakes, these buildings are completely obliterated, killing their inhabitants. For example, the earthquake that measured 7.0 on the standard scale in Haiti in 2010 killed more than 300,000 people, while a magnitude of 8.8 earthquake in the same year killed fewer than 1,000 people in Chile.

One of the interesting sides of corruption is that it follows the same bulk rate for crime that is followed by the postal service for mail. The petty crimes are punished, but big ones are given concessions. That explains why corruption doesn't spur the indignation it should. In hugely corrupt societies, people even forget corruption is wrong for the same reason fish don't drown in water. The corrupt mind creates its own logic, before that logic creates its own mind.

In fact, corruption is the generic name for crimes, which are known by their brand names: theft, robbery, pimping and extortion. Every corrupt person commits at least one of these crimes, some committing more or all of them. Bribery being a combination of theft and extortion, commission is robbery, embezzlement is theft, solicitation is pimping, influence peddling is pimping mixed with extortion, and blackmailing is extortion in its more sinister form. If these are the methods of corruption, its scope includes abuse of discretion, favouritism, nepotism and clientelism.

Revolutions always erupt against decadence, which is moral or cultural decline characterised by excessive indulgence in pleasure or luxury. Corruption is a barometer of that decline showing how a nation degenerates at its own expense. Whether a revolution explodes or implodes depends on the depth of that degeneration. When the infection goes beyond the ruling class, a nation loses its strength to seek renewal like trees cannot be transplanted once roots are deep into the ground.

The Occupy Movement is another revolution that in recent times lost its momentum before running its course. Corruption destroys principles taking men to its logical conclusion. They can only kill each other because the principles they destroy are also destroying them.

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No prospect of normalcy

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

MY reading is that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has had second thoughts on the talks with India after fixing the meeting of the chief security advisors of the two countries.

Otherwise, he would have intervened to clear the air and said that when he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ufa, Russia, they had agreed to confine their talks to tackle terrorism which was bleeding the two countries. It is possible that the army pulled the rug out from under Nawaz Sharif's feet. It is hard to buy this theory. Pakistan would not have fixed the meeting's date if its Chief of Army Staff had been opposed to the talks.

The criticism of the Pakistan army in this regard is not fair. What seems to have happened is that the omission of the word Kashmir from the joint statement issued by the two prime ministers at Ufa, infuriated the radical elements in Pakistan. It is they who put their weight behind the demand to not have talks if Kashmir was not on the agenda. Even tactic-wise, Pakistan went wrong. While talking on terrorism, it could have raised Kashmir during the meeting. If India had walked out, it would have lessened its stock in the eyes of the international community.

Unfortunately, the impression that has gone around is that the talks between India and Pakistan can never take place. Naturally, people on both sides are disappointed because they had expected some sort of normalcy to return and a let up in violations of ceasefire at the Line of Control, bristling with troops and weapons. It must be hell for the farmers who have stretched their cultivation right

up to the border. The breakdown in talks has left a feeling of emptiness which may further increase the distance between the two countries. It may take months before the thread is picked up again. Behind-the-scene-channels take time to come into being and function fruitfully.

Nawaz Sharif could not sell to the army and radical elements in his country the idea that the talks are only confined to terrorism, without discussing Kashmir. Their reaction in Pakistan was hostile when the people there did not see the mention of Kashmir in the joint statement issued after the meeting between the two prime ministers.

Where do we go from here? Much

Ali Bhutto. When the 90,000 Pakistani soldiers were India's prisoners after the fall of Dhaka in 1971, Pakistan had agreed not to demand the third party in the future to settle the matters between India and Pakistan.

Two, which country in the globe is altruistic in its approach to the world problem? A third country would try to introduce its own point of view, keeping its own interest at the top. There is no alternative to an uninterrupted dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad. True, nothing has come out from the attempts made so far. But war is no solution either, particularly when both countries have nuclear weapons.

Modi still has more than three and a half years of his rule ahead. He should abandon measures which have not yielded any fruit and adopt new ones which will help the country to develop.

would depend on the outcome of the meetings between the directors of military operations and chiefs of security forces on the border. Pakistan's National Security Advisor Sartaj Aziz said even after the cancellation of dialogue between the chief security advisors that meetings at the other levels would take place as scheduled. Fortunately, the meeting between the chiefs of the BSF and Rangers has been fixed. However, I wonder if they would come to anything concrete when the main talks did not take off.

Voices from Pakistan say that the two countries should have a third party that would mediate. One, it would violate the Shimla Agreement between Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Zulfikhar

Both Modi and Nawaz Sharif will be in New York to attend the opening of the UN General Assembly session. They should meet to clear the impediments in the way of a dialogue. The partition is a reality. I wish the line drawn had not been on the basis of religion. This has created bad blood between the two countries. Muslims in Pakistan may have benefited. But Muslims have ceased to count in decision making in India. The two-nation theory has affected the Muslims of India and they lost the importance which they enjoyed in India before partition. The hostility between the two countries has affected relations between them. There does not seem to be any prospect of their normalising

relations, much less striking a friendship.

I never liked the Modi-type of politics - parochial and point blank to the right. His hand behind the killings of Muslims in Gujarat in 1992 made me even more distant. However, when I found him getting an absolute majority in the last Lok Sabha election, I tried to search qualities in him so that I would be positive in my comments.

I really believed that his claims of *ache din ayenge* (good days will come) had a ring of truth. After one year of his prime ministership, I feel I was led up the garden path. There is not even a semblance of change from the slow, slovenly rule of the Congress government.

True, economic reforms have a gestation period. But some seeds should have sprouted by this time. In fact, the agriculture sector has come down from the four percent growth to mere one percent. The industrial sector is shrinking relentlessly. And the much-needed employment has not expanded at all. There is no implementation of steps promised for development or improving the lot of the common man.

Modi still has more than three and a half years of his rule ahead. He should abandon measures which have not yielded any fruit and adopt new ones which will help the country to develop. The plus point in his favour is that despite the relentless criticism of the Congress party, people on the whole expect him to do something for their betterment. Now it is upto him to take stock of the situation and introduce reforms and other measures to let the economy grow. For this, as he must have already realised, relations with Pakistan have to improve.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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"Dhaka vs Kolkata"

I enjoyed reading the above titled article published on TDS dated 25/08/15. There was so much truth in that article. In the 70s, Dhaka was a green, clean city while Kolkata was the opposite. Today Kolkata is a clean, well-organised city while Dhaka is one of the worst cities in the world to live in.

The very people who are responsible for the city's well-being are buying property abroad. They seek medical treatment and even educate their children abroad; they don't care about our city. Our mayors made so many promises before being elected, but now all those promises seem to have been forgotten. The situation is getting worse. Nothing is done about the city's drainage system to prevent flooding during monsoon season. Garbage keeps clogging the drainage system. The list goes on. Everybody seems to understand the problems but there seems to be no solutions.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

Man's brutality

Man's brutality against animals has crossed all limits. Bears are awakened from hibernation and shot at point blank range, flayed, cooked and served on dinner plates in Siberian cafes; bears' bile is used for Chinese medicine. Chimps, monkeys and mountain guerrillas are barbecued by some people. Tigers are poached, poisoned and their cubs stolen in the Sundarbans for their skin and body parts.

Poaching of endangered species like elephants, rhinos, bears, tigers, lions are going on unabatedly. It's a flourishing international trade comparable to drugs. Last year alone 30,000 elephants

and 1000 rhinos were killed for tusks and horns. The number of tigers dropped from 350 to 106 in Bangladesh. The trade volume exceeded a staggering twenty billion dollars! How much longer will it be before we hear the last roar in the wild?

We should raise our voice against those involved in crimes against animals. The rangers and police should be equipped with the most sophisticated arms and tracking devices to confront the poachers and stop this hunting spree.

Yusuf Azad
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