

Decision time on fuel prices

Benefit of lower price must reach consumers

THE minister of finance has sought the opinion of the ministry of energy on how to revise prices of petroleum downwards. We fail to comprehend why we are being charge so high a price, especially in light of the fact that price per barrel of oil hit \$27.65 on January 21, the lowest since 2003. Putting the burden of unrealistically high priced fuel on the people is in effect, a form of indirect tax. With the re-emergence of Iran as a major player in the oil market, experts believe that the current general lower price of oil in international markets will remain at the level it is now for the near term. The demand for lowering of prices comes due to Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation's (BPC) admission that all its bank loans have been repaid and is now in the green in terms of profit.

So, why is the government foot dragging on the issue? Till date, the bulk of oil purchases have been made from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates at a fixed rate on a government-to-government basis. Now with oil prices flattening out in the global markets, a fundamental rethinking is required on the current arrangement. Additionally, while revising prices downwards, the government must ensure that the benefit of lower domestic fuel price reaches the end consumer. With a large percentage of electricity being generated by private power plants running on fuel, unless there is a renegotiation of the rate at which government buys electricity, the benefit of lower fuel prices will not trickle down to consumers.

Rajuk's demolition drive in the city

Ensure cleared spaces remain cleared

RAJUK has launched simultaneous drives in various parts of the city to reclaim footpaths, parking spaces that were being used for other purposes. While we laud the freeing up of spaces designated for use of commuters on foot and parking lots in basements, we cannot but have our doubts. Such drives are nothing new in the city. The fact of the matter is that once the drives are over, we see a return of illegal structures and the reoccupation of footpaths by vendors and it is back to business as usual. The whole matter has become repetitive and it will take more than the occasional drive by the city authorities to make the changes stick.

Going by what has been printed in this paper, we find that some owners of shops who had bought space in a parking lot from the owner in Dhanmondi area have been lying their business for nearly 20 years. These businessmen have alleged that they pay taxes to the city corporation. How could this happen? And why action was not taken when the shops were being constructed in an illegal area?

It is obvious that the much hyped and declared drives to free up public or private spaces will not bring the desired results unless rules on paper are enforced throughout the year, every day of the year. Property owners must be fined heftily for wrongful use of parking spaces and floating vendors simply cannot be allowed to set up shop wherever they feel like.

To burn a mockingbird

ADNAN R AMIN

IT was a windy August day, 1877 C.E. A young, darkish and mostly unimpressive youth was at Nulo Gopal's door; he wanted to train with the maestro. His name was Tara Prasanna Sinha, he kept repeating. Gopal – then the most famous Bengali musician in Calcutta – was not fully convinced. He only took in serious students with a clean, orthodox Hindu background. And this one did not quite fit the bill.

Of course, this young man wasn't Tara Prasanna Sinha at all. He was young Allaiddin Khan of Brahmanbaria, freshly off the boat in Kolkata, so to speak – and until recently, the musical mainstay of a jatra party (a wandering musical and theatre troupe). Travelling through the countryside up to the city of Dacca, he had become immersed in the rich folk traditions of Bengal. He had been, fortunately, old enough to know that pursuing a career in music was social and financial suicide, but young enough to let passion prevail.

A fugitive from home at the age of 10 – Allaiddin was no stranger to obstacles. Years later, he would literally jump in front of a car in order to be accepted by a master. It was this doggedness of character that eventually got him in with Gopal for a rigorous 12-year programme. The programme gave young Allaiddin a phenomenal foundation, to the point that he could easily notate in his mind or on paper just by listening to a piece of music. These years passed in hunger and destitution, leaving Allaiddin to eat chickpeas and Ganges water, or seek out rations for the poor. He later started working as a session musician at the Star Theatre (of Girish Chandra and Binodini Dasi fame).

Of Allaiddin Khan, his disciple Ravi Shankar wrote, "[he] imposed upon himself an even stricter code of conduct when he was a young man, often practicing sixteen to twenty hours a day, doing with very little sleep, and getting along with a minimum of material things. Sometimes, when he practiced, he tied up his long hair with heavy cord and attached an end of the cord to a ring in the ceiling. Then, if he happened to doze while he practiced, as soon as his head nodded, a jerk on the cord would pull his

hair and awaken him."

Some years later in Muktagachha, Allaiddin heard a sarod (type of lute) performance by Ustad Ali Ahmed and set his mind to the instrument. After Gopal died, Allaiddin gave up vocal training out of grief and went to train with Ahmed. The teacher quickly realised that this student would surpass even him. So he referred the disciple to veena-maestro Ustad Wazir Khan. Wazir was descended from Miah Tansen himself and was convinced only after Allaiddin dived in

families in Indian classical music and died at the age of 110 years, just one year after his student Ravi Shankar performed in the Concert for Bangladesh.

Many of you have read about the Brahmanbaria clashes: about two weeks back, a fight started – allegedly over an overpriced mobile phone – and somehow spiralled out of control. What you may have missed is what happened later: madrasa students and law enforcers clashed and at one point, a member of the former died. This fuelled further

blown up by the Taliban.

The attack on Allaiddin Khan's legacy is baffling. This is not a man one can easily hate. This is not a man who inspires murderous rage in one. His influence on Indian classical music and pedagogy is staggering; as is the number of his disciples, students and admirers. Like ripples he sent out vibrating notes into the ether that soothed, healed, stimulated and inspired generations. It is easily deduced that the attacks could not have been motivated by the person.

Practically speaking, destroying banjos and old letters is unlikely to help any cause or avenge any wrongs. Then why was it targeted? Contextualised aside the vandalising of the Balmiyan Buddhas and city of Palmyra, it all begins to make perverse sense. The only explanation that remains is that it was a symbolic act. And what symbol is being attacked? That of a struggling Muslim boy from Brahmanbaria, triumphing against odds in an India where access to art was limited to only one set of believers? That of seminal Islamic influence on Indian classical music? That of giving back to one's ancestral home? That of the very idea of Brahmanbaria or Chittagong (division)? All these contradictions suggest that the attack was symbolic, but not manifestly ideological. It was mob action, but not exactly spontaneous. Such uninformed, misdirected hate does not come automatically. It has to be taught. And that is the world we live in: some teach hate; others teach the sarod.

Allaiddin Khan's soulful melodies probably make the most fitting accompaniment for the profound sadness that emanates from symbolic deaths and destruction. The ustad's sarod may have been charred and destroyed, but he is survived by his music; by his stories and legends; by students like Ravi Shankar; by Hari Prasad Chaurasia who trained with Allaiddin's student and daughter, Annapurna. The only peril facing the ustad's legacy is oblivion. So, put on one of his records; check out Ritwik Chatak's documentary on him. If we thus remember, his music can live on. And with every flicker of the flame, that music will rise.

The writer is a strategy and communications consultant.



Ustad Allaiddin Khan

front of a running car to prove his dedication. It is said that he gave Allaiddin access to the 'Senia Gharana' or the Tansen School of music.

The rest is history. Allaiddin succeeded his guru and later became court musician for the Maharaja of Maihar. Here he fundamentally reshaped the Maihar Gharana, developing a number of ragas, combining the bass sitar and bass sarod with more traditional instruments and setting up an orchestra. In 1955, Allaiddin Khan established a college of music in Maihar. Alongside numerous awards and titles, Khan was given both India's third and second highest civil decorations. Ustad Allaiddin Khan established the most influential musical

violence, spreading to the station, monuments and offices. Later, about 300 students entered Ustad Allaiddin Khan's residence 'Sangitangan' – now both a music academy and a museum – and destroyed all its invaluable historic and cultural artefacts.

According to the testimony of the principal, items destroyed included a sarangi, pakhwaz, flutes, tanpuras and sitars, alongside historic correspondence and royal tributes. These were reportedly heaped out in the courtyard before being torched and destroyed altogether. There have been national and international condemnations of the incident. Parallels have been drawn between these acts and the attacks on the Balmiyan Buddhas

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Promises to keep in 2016

BILL and MELINDA GATES

WE live in extraordinary times. Each day seems to bring fresh headlines about an unfolding crisis – whether it is migration, economic volatility, security, or climate change. One factor common to all these complex and unprecedented challenges is poverty; so eliminating it will make overcoming them significantly easier.

There is good reason for optimism about progress on reducing inequity. Since the turn of the century, remarkable strides have been taken toward a world in which every person has the chance to lead a healthy, productive life. Maternal deaths have almost halved; child mortality and malaria deaths have halved; extreme poverty has more than halved. And last year, the world signed up to finish the job.

The centerpiece of the Global Goals to which the United Nations' 193 countries agreed in September is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030. We are confident that this is not only possible, but that we will see major breakthroughs along the way, which will provide unprecedented opportunities to people in poor countries. Indeed, we think their lives will improve faster in the next 15 years than at any other time in history – and that their lives will improve more than anyone else's.

But while progress is possible, it is not inevitable. Success will require political will, global cooperation, and human ingenuity – a message we are taking into our various meetings and engagements at the World Economic Forum in Davos this week. For our part, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will focus on the areas of greatest need and take risks that others can't or won't. This year, we are concentrating our efforts in three broad areas.

First, we will continue to support the institutions that helped get us to where we are now.

Since 2002, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has unlocked an unprecedented wealth of human and financial resources to combat infectious diseases that disproportionately affect the poorest. By providing medicines, training doctors and nurses, and building stronger health-care systems, the Global Fund has so far helped save 17 million lives. That is some achievement. And the Fund's pledge conference later this year will be another opportunity to help build a better world. We need to make the most of it – not only to help save up to eight million more lives, but also to support health systems in low-income countries and thereby reduce the risk of future health crises.

Similarly, since the start of the decade, nearly four million more people are alive today because they were immunized against infectious diseases, thanks in large part to the work of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. In the next five years, Gavi and its partners are positioned to immunize another 300 million people, helping millions more children and young people survive and thrive – and thereby boosting developing-country economies.

Second, women and girls will be at the heart of our endeavors.

By any measure, the world is a better place for women and girls than ever before. But it's still not nearly good enough. They need better access to health care, especially family-planning services; expanded economic opportunities; and more decision-making power over their own lives (which in turn requires greater social participation and public leadership). Empowering women and girls to

transform their lives is one of the smartest investments we can make. Improving their health and wellbeing, ensuring they get a good education, and unleashing their economic potential are fundamental to building more prosperous communities and countries. But we need to improve our understanding of how best to empower women to succeed. And in order to overcome centuries of gender inequity, we need more momentum behind this agenda. The Women Deliver conference in May is the next global opportunity to

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push for more action and for donors to demonstrate their commitment.

Third, we will invest in innovation. Scientific and technological advances – from new vaccines and harder crops to much cheaper smartphones and tablets – are among the greatest drivers of poverty reduction. In just the last few weeks, the world has shown that it is prepared to spend more to find new ways to provide reliable, affordable, clean energy sources. This is one of the most important ways to help poor people cope with climate

change. Meanwhile, innovations in health care have already brought the world close to wiping out polio, and we expect to see dramatic results from a new triple drug therapy that could eradicate elephantiasis, which affects 120 million people.

But the hard truth is that current funding for research and development to address the health needs of the world's poorest people is insufficient. And the tools and technologies we have now aren't enough to get us to where we need to be. If we want to achieve the targets established by the Global Goals for maternal health, child health, and infectious disease, we will have to double R&D funding by 2020. That is why we must ensure that R&D is on the agenda at the G7 summit in Japan in May, with a focus on developing and deploying products that both save lives and dramatically improve the economic prospects of the poorest.

Sustained support for institutions like the Global Fund and Gavi, for the empowerment of women and girls, and for innovation is crucial to accelerating progress for the world's poorest people. But much more can and should be done. The world must unite behind all efforts to eradicate poverty as a vital first step toward overcoming the many other challenges – from migration to terrorism – that we face today.

The daily headlines all too often reflect the gap between today's world and a world without poverty. But what the headlines don't reveal is all the ways life is already getting better for those in greatest need. If we keep our promises to them, it will be front-page news.

The writers are Co-Chairs of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2016. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

COMMENTS

"Unruly BRTC buses booked, kudos to cops"

(January 20, 2016)

Arsin Ashraf Alam

Contrary to popular belief, it's not the rickshaws but the government vehicles, police vans, ministers' convoys, public university buses, etc., that break the law most of the time causing traffic jams.

Shakil Ndc

No one should be above the law.

Mohamed Ali Liton

Good news!

"Rashan calls press briefing too"

(January 20, 2016)

Elius Raihan

This is a good example of the destruction of unity by power hungry leaders.

"Total chaos at Shahbagh intersection"

(January 19, 2016)

Briarose Marguerite Deirdre D'Silva

It is we who do not maintain rules whether we are walking on roads or driving behind the wheels.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Traffic congestion in Sylhet

Only a few years back, traffic congestion was rarely seen on the roads of Sylhet, but now it has become a regular phenomenon. The most traffic-clogged areas of the city are: Kean Bridge area, Zindabazar, Bondorbazar, Lamabazar, Mendibagh, Dargahgate, Amberkhana, Chouhatta, Mirabazar and Rikabibazar. The intolerable traffic congestion has now become a nightmare for the people as they can hardly reach their destinations on time. Illegal occupation of roads by small

traders and vendors, lack of knowledge on traffic rules, narrow roads and encroachment of footpaths are the main reasons behind the traffic congestion. Sometimes people are compelled to walk on roads as makeshift shops put up by hawkers along the footpaths occupy a portion of walkways, which also contributes to traffic congestion. The authorities concerned should introduce innovative as well as pragmatic steps as soon as possible to solve this problem. Shajidur Rahman Sujon Student Shahjalal University of Science and Technology

Woes of being an ordinary citizen

I am an ordinary citizen who has to toil 9 to 5 to support my family. Every morning, I start my struggle to survive in this city. My landlord loves to stop supplying water in the morning and we have no rights to say anything about this. The pressure of gas remains very low most of the time in our area. So we have to prepare our foods the previous night, otherwise we have to starve at the morning. The road in front of our house is full of potholes. In the rainy season, it is waterlogged and muddy; in the winter, it's so dusty that one can hardly breathe. I have to overcome all these hurdles to get to the main road to catch a bus. Getting into a bus is like entering into another battle. I am starting to wonder if anyone really cares. Anonymous On e-mail