

## CHT Peace Accord

### Remove impediments to full implementation

THE CHT Peace Accord, signed in 1997, signalled a new hope. Pictures memorialise the breakthrough as it seemed then - full of potential and a permanent end to conflict. And yet, today, after almost two decades, it seems everything has stalled. We can't understand why.

Reportedly only 26 of the 72 clauses of the accord have been implemented. The progress in implementation is a stark example of failure to uphold a long-standing commitment. Although the CHT Land Commission Act has been amended recently, the prime issue, that of land, is far from settled. The CHT remain rife with problems. Yet, 19 years ago, there was hope for actual change. It was undoubtedly one of the greatest steps towards peace by the then Awami League government. The same party is in office now, so there should not be any soft pedaling on the implementation of the Accord.

The CHT regional council is already in place. The onus is now on the government to remove the impediments to its proper functioning. The government should make the implementation of the CHT Peace Accord a priority. If there are issues that militate against full implementation of the Accord, those be resolved by engaging all the stake holders

A very good beginning was made in 1997. The gains made must not be allowed to fritter away. Everything should be done to see that the devolution of power that the Accord guaranteed is realised without further delay.

## The scourge of food waste

### Waste not want not

DESPITE a quarter of Bangladesh's population suffering from malnourishment, large amounts of food are regularly wasted which otherwise could have helped ameliorate to some extent the problem of nutrition in the country. A recent seminar, jointly held by Right to Food Bangladesh and Christian Aid, highlighted the ways in which food is generally wasted and proposed methods to reduce such waste efficiently.

According to Food and Agricultural Organisation's 2011 report, approximately 1.3 billion tonnes of food are wasted every year around the globe. Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies claims that people in the country waste more than 10 per cent of their food consumption daily. Some of the suggestions made by experts in the seminar to mitigate food waste were to raise awareness, control food production and promote a balanced diet.

Around 98 percent of the world's hungry reside in developing nations. Bangladesh, being an LDC with increasing economic growth and population, is thus particularly vulnerable to the challenges posed by food scarcity. Given that more than 63 million people live below the poverty line, tackling food waste should be considered a strategic solution to the nation's development taking into account both the economic and social impact. If the current trend of food consumption is not reversed, then there could be severe consequences in the near future, including the need to produce more food at higher costs due to the effects of climate change.

Furthermore, as an agrarian economy, Bangladesh ought to be more proactive in eliminating food waste, especially at the pre-consumption stage.

LETTERS  
TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net



VVIP Flight of Biman Bangladesh

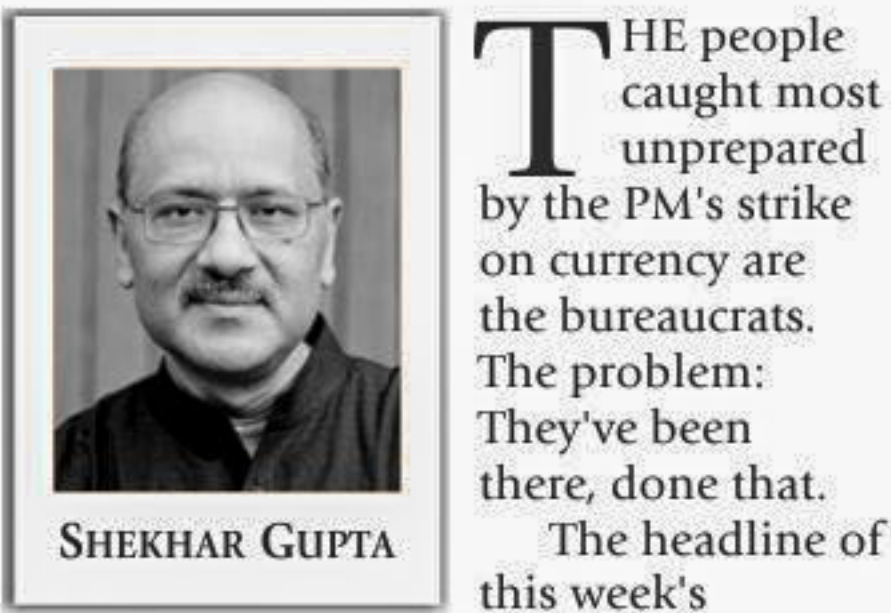
The ground maintenance team of Bangladesh Biman has miserably failed to follow the laid down routine procedures for check-up of aircrafts before scheduled flights, especially for VVIPs. This calls for stringent supervision by the Head of the Engineering and Technical Officials. The aircraft carrying our Prime Minister should have been thoroughly and repeatedly checked for glitches, even apart from the regular the security drill. The timely detection of the loose nut causing lube oil leak by the Boeing 777-300 pilot thankfully saved the passengers and our Prime Minister from any fatal incidence.

We applaud the acumen of the pilot and crew members for taking a prompt decision. The suspension of the maintenance engineers/technical staff is not enough. The head of the concerned department should bear the responsibility for such negligence, and ensure that such incidents do not occur in the future

Sirajul Islam

Retd. Resident Manager, Padma Oil

# Mammaries of the socialist raj



THE people caught most unprepared by the PM's strike on currency are the bureaucrats. The problem: They've been there, done that.

The headline of this week's National Interest doesn't suffer from a mischievous typo. Nor do I claim to be inventing that expression. It isn't even a cheap, but tempting, pun on the way true Punjabis would often pronounce "memories". I wouldn't dare, having started to learn English (from Standard VI, as was the norm then) from that notorious centre of academic excellence called Bhatinda in 1966. I am, in fact, borrowing it from The Mammaries of the Welfare State, the much-acclaimed work of formidable civil servant Upamanyu Chatterjee.

Both Bhatinda, and the year 1966, however, have something to do with this and not because "via Bhatinda" has been the familiar old way to mock somebody for having acquired his academic degrees in a twisted way. It is because this is where Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday made a spirited defence of his demonetisation, or "war against black money and corruption" while laying the foundation stone of a new (and genuine) All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). The year 1966 becomes relevant because that is when Indira Gandhi became prime minister and started building our deepest "socialist" state. She inherited a post-war, chronically famine-struck shortage economy and launched the toughest, roughest and the most irrational rationing in our history.

People put up with it stoically for some time, accepting the reality of ship-to-mouth existence. But within a couple of years, it had gone too far as the bureaucracy discovered more inventive forms of rationing, controls and enhancing its own power. District

magistrates (DMs) were empowered to grant sugar quotas for weddings; *maida* (white flour) and *sooji* (semolina) were then added to the list. Kerosene was already rationed. Cement, too, joined the list (and it was the last one to go). The citizen's view of this government was conditioned by the quality of rationing management. Not surprisingly, the most popular anti-Indira slogan of the Jana Sangh (the BJP's older avatar), was: "*Indira tere shashan mein, kooda bik gaya ration mein* (Indira, in your reign, even garbage sells at the ration shop)."

Undeterred, however, the socialist state marched on. By 1970, cheaper, dull-coloured — may be inspired by Mao suits — cotton was also sold on ration cards. At one point there were school notebooks as well. The civil service felt more and more empowered. They had the power, for example, to determine how many guests you were to reasonably expect at your child's wedding and how much *halwa* you should feed per *barati* (no *halwa* without *sooji* and *sugar*). Until the socialist sarkar brought in its guest-control order, limiting the number to a virtuous 25 at a wedding. Of course, nobody followed it, and soon an arbitrage built, where inspectors charged you per head by the number of additional guests they let you feed, just as the caterer might bill you for feeding them. The crowning glory of the shortage economy was the ban on *khoya* (reduced milk) and other milk products, including *paneer*, *barfi*, *gulab jamuns* and *rasogollas* during summer months when milk was in short supply.

The promise of the socialist raj was to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the ruler and the voter. The result was the exact opposite. The rich continued to get richer, and happily bought (or rented) their way out of the system while the rest were resigned to being colonised by the bureaucracy. We even learnt to laugh at our misery. Example: A farmer (in Bhatinda, where else) applied for a licence for a cannon. The DM asked to see who this nutcase was. "Huzoor," the farmer

said earnestly, "When I applied for five quintals of sugar for my daughter's wedding, *sahib bahadur* (the DM) had allotted me 25 kg. So, now I just need a licence for a pistol, but better to start with (applying for) a cannon."

Or there was Bollywood, with a string of Manoj Kumar-style hits that had the hoarder, black-marketeer, profiteer as the bad guy, villain, murderer, even rapist, but never a *bhadralok* officer. Google the 1974 superhit *Roti, Kapada Aur Makana*, which coincided with our historic inflation peak of 27 percent. Check out its evergreen song "*baaki kuchh bacha toh mehngayi maar gayi...*" How familiar Verma Malik's lines seem now when we queue up to draw a little bit of the latest item on rationing: Currency notes, from our own bank accounts. The song goes on: "*Ration mein jo lineke lambayi maar gayi/Janata jo cheekhni chillayi maar gayi* (endless ration lines kill us, and if they don't, just the pain of protesting kills the masses)."

The decades of socialist rationing created super (sarkari) elites within a society that was always brutally unequal and also generated the most corruption and black money. It is fashionable to self-flagellate and say, we Indians are like this only, genetically designed to be dishonest and corrupt. The fact is, we aren't perfect, but our establishment, or the state, our leaders and in short the "system" left us no chance through these decades of socialist self-destruction. In our most state-controlled *garibi hatao* years, during 1971-83, there was zero decline in the percentage of people below the poverty line. But such was the majesty of the socialist raj that we still hang on to its memories and hail Indira Gandhi as our greatest leader.

The post-Google generation may have no connect with this, but their parents do. As does our bureaucracy. That's why any thought of fresh rationing and controls is mouth-watering. It also brings back the old, socialist, control-raj basic instinct. So what does the "system" do when surprised by demonetisation but dust out old manuals: Rs 4,000 per head with ID

photocopies. Then, as too many come in, indelible ink. When that's not available in a hurry, halve the limit. Still can't manage, withdraw, never mind the prime minister and the RBI both promised they won't until December 30. The state always knows best. The initial list of evidence for drawing Rs 2.5 lakh of your own money for a wedding was drafted by the same person who wrote the wedding sugar allocation rules in the sixties — maybe even literally so, as someone merely pulled out something from the archives and filled in the blanks. This requires more research and detail than is possible in a mere column, probably even a Harvard Kennedy School doctorate on how Indian bureaucracy thinks. Each decision taken since November 8-induced panic harks back to a tried and discarded practice of the socialist past.

You still have doubts, check your old passports. Not too old, in fact, anything until early nineties when P V Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh reform changed things. The last few pages would be soiled with clumsy, mostly illegible entries, rubber stamps and all, by bank clerks listing exchange issued to you for foreign travel (on RBI permits printed beautifully on currency-grade stationery), then exchange brought back and refunded to the bank and so on. And what did our "system" just do to "facilitate" poor foreign tourists who were stupid enough to come to India and get caught in this man-made currency famine and rationing: Offer them Rs 5,000 (USD 71) per week while similarly soiling the backs of their passports. When in doubt, or in panic, and short of ideas, go back to the past, however awful and discredited. You won't doubt Prime Minister Modi's determination to change India. You'd doubt, however, if he can do so by using the same old bureaucracy hanging on to bountiful mammaries of the socialist raj, which fed corruption and black economy in the first place.

The writer is an Indian journalist.  
Twitter: @ShekharGupta

## Sexist politicians are a universal pain



BEFORE Trump, there was Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi who was an early post-truth politician.

He was just 1.65m tall but Berlusconi thought he was God's gift to women and his list of sexual scandals and sexist gaffes is legendary.

Former British Prime Minister David Cameron was roasted in 2011 when he told Labour MP Angela Eagle, "Calm down, dear" which critics pounced on, declaring that his response revealed what he really thought of women: Emotional and hysterical.

Asian male politicians are just as prone to making sexist remarks.

Last year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during a visit to Dhaka, lauded Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her "unshakeable resolve" in fighting terrorism. But then he went and spoilt it by adding, "despite being a woman."

Another Indian politician, Mulayam Singh Yadav, reportedly said at an election rally: "First girls become friends with boys. Then when they have differences, girls level rape charges. Boys commit mistakes. Will they be hanged for rape?"

Over in Japan, a Tokyo city councillor made international headlines in 2014 when he was forced to apologise to a female colleague for heckling her during a meeting.

Akihiro Suzuki told Ayaka Shiomura to "hurry up and get married" when she raised questions on measures to help pregnant women and young mothers.

And then there is Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. The latest incident had him making inappropriate remarks to Vice-President Leni Robredo on her looks and "nice legs" at an event marking the third anniversary of Super Typhoon Yolanda in Tacloban City.

But all these sexist jibes pale in comparison to the unforgivably nasty barb a Malaysian deputy minister threw at an Opposition MP, Teresan Kok, in Parliament last month.

It happened during a heated debate over a rally organised by Bersih, a movement calling for electoral reform.

The Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Agro-based Industries, Tajuddin Abdul Rahman sniggered, "Why is Seputeh going 'kekekeke'? The only woman with a 'Kok' is in Seputeh."

He was obviously making fun of her surname, a common Chinese family name which sounds the same as the slang word for male genitalia. Kok is a fourth term MP for the Seputeh

constituency in Kuala Lumpur.

Tajuddin's tasteless remark ignited a firestorm of protest from the Opposition. He refused to apologise and went to make fun of another woman MP by mimicking the way she spoke.

Tajuddin's sexist remark actually topped backbencher Datuk Bung Moktar Radin's crude dig at a woman MP in 2007.

The then MP for the Batu Gajah seat, Fong Poh Kuan, had complained to the Speaker about the roof in Parliament leaking every time it rained.

Bung, the MP for the Kinabatangan seat in Sabah, jumped up to make a crack: "*Mana ada bocor? Batu Gajah pun bocor tiap-tiap bulan juga.*" (Where is the leak?

The ultimate objective is gender equality and women empowerment by ending discrimination against the female sex.

Significant gains and progress have been made especially in education, employment opportunities and health care.

But there are still big gaps.

Where influence and decision-making is concerned, as of June this year, only 22.8 percent of all parliamentarians are women, a dismal increase from 11.3 percent in 1995 and still short of the United Nations target of 30 percent, according to UN Women, the global body working to ensure gender equality.



**Yes, we should expect better from our elected representatives. But from the many examples we have, such behaviour and attitudes in male politicians are quite universal.**

ILLUSTRATION: ANNA SUDIT

Batu Gajah leaks every month too).

Yes, we should expect better from our elected representatives. But from the many examples we have, such behaviour and attitudes in male politicians are quite universal.

It's been 21 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women which resulted in the Women's Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, hailed as "the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights", covering 12 areas of concerns like education, health, influence and decision-making, human rights, and violence against women and the girl child.

Not only are they a minority, they are subjected to shocking sexual harassment, as revealed by the first Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) report on Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians, released just a month before International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, on Nov 25.

It confirmed what former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard told women aspiring to be politicians: "Threats of violent abuse, of rape, are far too common. A woman in public view may expect to receive them almost daily."

The IPU report surveyed 55 female MPs

from 39 countries and found that 81.8 percent responded that they had "been subjected personally to one or more acts of psychological violence."

This included "sexist or sexually humiliating remarks, gestures and images" and "threats and harassment which fell outside the normal political debate which is combative and even rough by nature".

The survey found that almost two-thirds had been subjected to humiliating sexist remarks and 44.4 percent had received threats of rape, beatings, abduction and even death.

Even worse, 22 percent actually experienced sexual violence, while 33 percent had witnessed sexual violence against female colleagues in parliament.

And who were the perpetrators? Their male colleagues from the opposition and even their own parties.

IPU secretary-general Martin Chungong said the study showed the need for parliaments to tackle sexism.

"Parliaments need to put their own house in order if they want to lead by example and stop discrimination and violence against women in all walks of life," he said.

Indeed, if law-makers and leaders of countries can't guarantee a mutually respectful workplace for men and women, how can we expect other public spaces and workplaces to be any better?

UN Women says across Asia, studies in Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and South Korea show that 30 to 40 percent of women suffer workplace sexual harassment.

But changing attitudes that are so ingrained will not happen easily, especially in many Asian countries which are still patriarchal in structure and treat women as inferior.

So what's the best response to misogynistic men?

Michelle Obama's advice is "When they go low, we go high."

That may be a great sound bite but if going high means maintaining a dignified silence or ignoring the perpetrator, I don't think that's enough. I say give back as good as you get.

Instead of getting angry, get even because showing you're hurt is exactly what these men want to see.

Years ago, as a teenager walking home, I was followed by a man who had been seen lurking around in the neighbourhood before. He turned out to be a flasher.

I managed to remain calm, put on a sneer and even laugh at his pathetic display. The shock on the man's face was priceless. Instead of me running away in tears and fear, he ran off instead.

I never saw him again.

Giving men like him a taste of their own medicine might just be part of the cure.

The writer is Chief Operating Officer (Content Development), The Star, Malaysia, and was the former group chief editor of The Star Media Group Malaysia.

This is a series of columns on global affairs written by top editors from members of the Asia News Network and published in newspapers across the region.