

Light things float and heavy things sink

Govt. backtracks on fuel price cut

Surprising decision!

WE are taken aback by the government decision not to slash fuel prices after all! This is very awkward, particularly because the finance minister had announced earlier that fuel prices would be reduced phase by phase. The rationale offered by the state minister for power and energy on January 17 was that fuel prices were showing an upward trend in the global market. The argument is a fig leaf. We would like to point out that when the prices of fuel were pegged, it was done when the cost per barrel was above USD 100 and the price was not cut until it had fallen to the USD 40 mark, and that too after a lot of hue-and-cry from all quarters. The price is suspected to rise up to USD 60 very soon, which even then would be well below the mark that was used to determine the fuel price in Bangladesh. To quote a World Bank forecast of the rise of fuel price for the next one year is very expedient for the government to not slash prices. The fact that the BPC has been making bumper profits selling fuel at inflated prices is not lost upon anyone. The benefits of slashing fuel prices on the economy have been discussed umpteen times and there is no need to repeat that argument. We would, however, like to restate that there is no merit in keeping fuel prices high so that BPC may keep reaping windfall profits while the poor and the middle class are ripped off. We urge the government strongly to reconsider its decision not to slash prices.

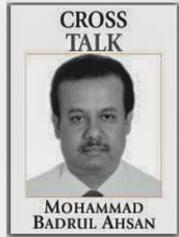
Another intra-party clash ends in deaths

AL must rein in its errant men

ON Tuesday, a clash between local Awami League and a former Jubo League men in Sunamganj left three people dead and 20 injured. The fight, which has been ongoing for three years, was over the control of the Jarulia waterbody. The disputed waterbody was leased to Nagergaon Matshajibi Samabay Samity for six years which was allegedly backed by Mosarraf, also the mayor of Dirai Municipality, who kept control of the waterbody through AL leader Mashuk Miah. However, Ekrrar, the former Jubo League activist also claimed to have purchased a sub-lease from the organisation for six years and was in control of the waterbody. The surprising fact here is that this dispute between the two groups had been known for a long time. The chairman of Dirai Upazila Parishad says that the row over the control of the waterbody was discussed in the annual district law and order meeting last year too. So how were matters allowed to escalate to proportions where three people have died already?

The incident is reminiscent of the intra-BCL clashes over the last few years. Party insiders have been quoted in national dailies indicating that these clashes are mostly centred on economic gains or control of businesses. On top of that, the perceived impunity and lack of action from the party and law enforcement has only fuelled these disputes.

It is high time the ruling party reins in its men. As much for the perception of the public as for saving the lives and property of those who are caught between these clashes, the Awami League needs to take action so that party men do not keep leveraging the party name to engage in unabashed displays of power and violence.



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

CROSS TALK
 AFTER Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu came to power in 1965, he called himself "The Genius of the Carpathians". He had even made a sceptre for himself, which prompted Spanish painter Salvador Dali to personally send a telegram to him mocking the said sceptre. Little that the deluded Ceausescu understood the concept of satire, he had Dali's letter published on the front page of the newspaper. A dictator is a ruler, who is ruled by his delusional mind.

The delusion works both ways. The deluded ruler deludes his sycophants, who further reinforce that disorder in him. A minister of the Haryana state in India said last week that Narendra Modi is a better brand than Mahatma Gandhi. The zealous minister even went as far as saying that Gandhi's picture would soon be removed from the bank notes. What he left unsaid is that Modi's photo will fill that space.

Every ruler is a performer, who draws inspiration from his audience. And, those who surround him form the first line of applause. In the first press conference of US president-elect Donald Trump held on January 12, his supporters and staff clapped every time they deemed their man had responded to a media question with supposed vengeance. Flattery is a given in a despotic regime like laughter track is in a recorded comedy show.

And this delusion devalues everything amid raging inflation. All standards but the standard of blandishment are lowered, magnifying the power and persona of a ruler beyond and above his human condition. The ruler also returns the favour with equal amount of exaggeration.

One example is Chinese leader Mao Zedong, who had arbitrarily declared a completely unremarkable soldier named Lei Feng as the nation's greatest hero.

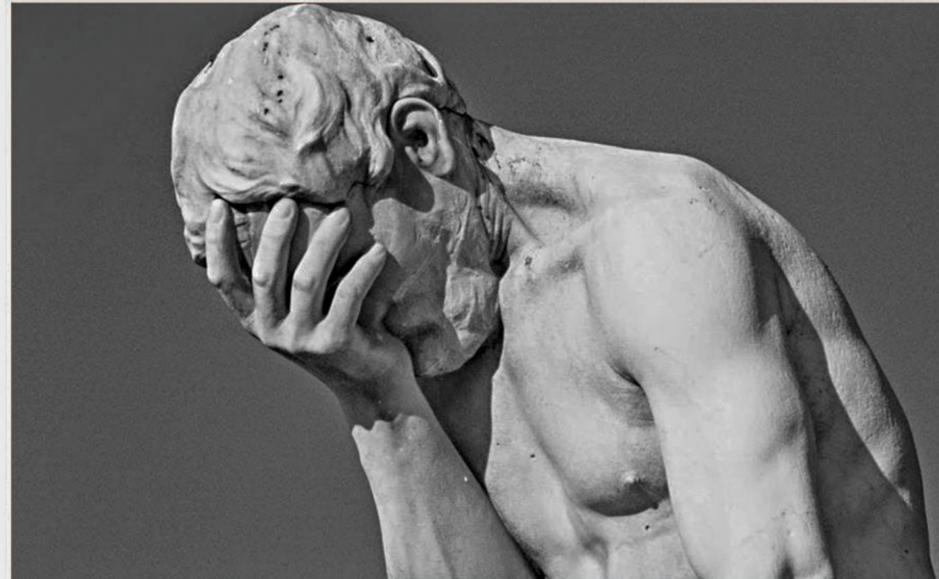
Those who elevate this individual also gets elevated themselves, all postings, awards, rewards and commendations evolving like a shuttle going back and forth in a loom. It relentlessly weaves the warp of self-interests in the weft of opportunities.

Feng had died in an unremarkable fashion after being hit by a telephone pole. But staged photos depicted him doing good deeds, and stories of his heroics were inserted into textbooks. A diary belonging to Lei was supposedly found after his death and it contained nothing but flowery praises for Mao.

The danger of this mutual fawning is that everything in a country gets diluted. Focused on one particular individual, all the attention flows to and from that same individual. Those who elevate this individual also gets elevated themselves, all postings, awards, rewards and commendations evolving like a shuttle going back and forth in a loom. It relentlessly weaves

into the entire population of the country with the ripple effect. That's the genesis of cult following, which paralyses an entire nation under the widening gyre of gracious ingratiating.

More times than not, ingratiating usurps common sense and wellbeing. The soothsayers once advised Burmese dictator Ne Win to change the currency into denominations of 15, 30, and 90, so that he could live to be over 90 years old. He immediately decreed that the older, "unlucky" denominations would cease to be legal tenders. Most Burmese hiding their cash in biscuit tins, the entire country lost its savings overnight. Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha had forbidden the



Wikimedia Commons/Alex E Proimos.

the warp of self-interests in the weft of opportunities. This weaving process destroys institutions like termites eat wood. Titles are tilted, dishonourables are showered with honours, appointments in key jobs are disappointing, and recognitions are reprehensive, because everything smacks of foul play. What comes out of this putrid culture is the despair that a flunky is hiding behind every accomplished person.

This disturbing decadence percolates through every layer of a society, resulting in the singular process of sucking up to the higher authority. And every achievement is inlaid with suspicion, because it depends more on truckling than talent. The country produces body counts of award winners and title holders in the same manner mannequins represent humans in a store window.

Which fires off a chain reaction of impositions. The ruler imposes himself on his lackeys, who impose themselves on their coteries, who impose themselves on their votaries. It spreads subservience far and wide

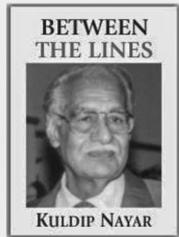
ownership of colour televisions and typewriters all the way until the 1980s, because they were a distraction from the true Albanian way of life: communism. He had even banned beards.

In Greek tragedy, character is fate. If a nation builds its strength on puffery, it diminishes its people every time they draw breath. It creates a make-believe world where absurd begets absurd, erosion of standard taken as a standard unto itself. Delusion runs wild, while the nation ignores the wheat and concentrates on the chaff.

Water always freezes from top to bottom. That's also how bootlicking pervades people. The top is frozen first before it reaches the bottom. One more thing to learn from water is how the highest minds rise from the lowest, not by dint of merit but servile interests. One has to observe water to understand that dynamics. Light things float and heavy things sink.

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Ridiculing the Mahatma



KULDIP NAYYAR

BETWEEN THE LINES
 IT is hard to believe that the government financed Khadi Board printed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's picture in the familiar pose of Mahatama Gandhi sitting behind the *charkha*, spinning the yarn, without PMO's permission. Probably somebody at the lower level allowed the Board to go ahead. The furor in the public was so strong that the contradiction was inevitable.

Even then PMO was not as strong as it should have been. In fact, a stern warning should have been issued there and then so that such examples of indiscretion do not go unpunished in future. This might have chastened those who, on one pretext or the other, violate the dignity of the Republic, not realising that they are insulting themselves.

Only the other day, the standing of people was made mandatory when the national anthem was played. People still do not respect the order and open the doors of cinemas even though they are bolted from inside. They think that it was a government order which they did not have to obey.

They do not seem to realise that the national anthem and the Republic's flag are sacred because they represent the nation's honour and sovereignty. People would have to realise themselves that no order or law can instil patriotism. It is their own feelings which should assert whenever the choice is between what benefits the nation and what benefits an individual or party.

Gandhiji himself was conscious of people's feelings. As I wrote earlier he stopped his prayer meeting when someone objected to the recitation of Quran. He resumed it only when the person concerned withdrew his opposition. Gandhiji was, however, more successful in Kolkata where the then Chief Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy had declared the Muslim League's action plan in response to the Congress Satyagrah. The action plan turned into a massacre of Hindus and Sikhs with the

connivance. There was retaliation, taking the lives of thousands. Gandhiji went to Kolkata and asked the people to give him their weapon. Even the most affected ones surrendered the arms within 24 hours. Lord Mountbatten, who was then the governor general, remarked that the armed forces were of little consequence and one man force had done the job.

India has traversed a long way since then. It has less faith in pluralism than before. The border drawn on the basis of religion has diluted secularism. But the fault is that of Congress, not that of Muslim League which had demanded

whatever their number, leaves much to be desired. There are forced conversions and marriage of non-Muslims to Muslim boys.

The Maulana's warning has come true. Roughly 18 crore Muslims have practically no say in the governance of the country. Their plight, as the Sachar report on Indian Muslim said, was worse than that of Dalits. Politically, they have ceased to matter. Nor do they assert themselves lest the Hindu chauvinism should take a still more virulent shape.

However, the Muslims are themselves hardening their position. The Kashmiris are already behaving as if they are

came to power after winning the 262 seats in the 540-member Lok Sabha.

The example of Zaira Wasim from Kashmir is before us. She acted admirably in a film and, as Amir Khan, director and producer, said in a message that she was brilliant. But the pressure of separatists in the Valley was so much that she had to say in a TV interview that she was 'ashamed' of what she had done, disowning her role in the film. Her message was poignant: Girls should not follow her example as if she was telling them about the ordeals she had gone through.



PHOTO: TWEETED BY NARENDRA MODI

from day one the grouping of Muslim majority provinces into a separate, sovereign Islamic state. The Congress which represented secular ethos is itself going away from its ideals.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a tall Muslim leader, had warned the Muslims that if they did not feel safe in the undivided India where they could say that though less in number they were equal shareholders in post-independent India fortunes. But the Muslims were bent upon having even a 'moth eaten Pakistan.' They have inherited a country that discriminates between Muslims and others. In fact, the living condition,

independent. At the time of accession, the popular leader Sheikh Abdullah had supported the Maharaja because he was fighting against the tribals including regular troops. It is a different story that he opposed New Delhi when it went beyond the three issues: defence, foreign affairs and communications.

Chief Minister Mahbooba Mufti has been criticised by the Kashmiris for having met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who they said was the 'Hindu's leader'. They conventionally forget that he is India's Prime Minister. Whether they support his views or not -- many do not in India -- is not relevant because he

That means that those who are wanting to establish the separate, sovereign Islamic Republic in the Valley are far from satisfied. They know that their opponent was the Indian army. But they go on fighting to register Kashmir's demand for independence. I found them, when I went to Srinagar, relentless. New Delhi would have to talk to the separatists and see if they could accept real autonomy within India, asking them that India would not spread itself beyond the three subjects: foreign affairs, defence and communications.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
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Preparing for a post-Trump world

Sweeping changes will be set in motion on January 20 as Donald Trump officially gets command of the White House. It raises the question of whether Trump will work against NATO and sacrifice EU to make Russia happy.

US-China relations are bound to take a major hit by the war of dominance on global trade. Hard sanctions may be on the way for China, and out of it a Pakistan-China-North Korea tripartite alliance may emerge as a global hegemony of autocratic rulers, fundamentalists and sectarians disturbing global peace and prosperity. I don't believe Trump will open fronts with both Russia and China at the same time. Closer US-Russia ties are not favourable for China and EU, but it will help India to strike favourable deals with US and Russia, with Pakistan and China on the anti-US platform. However, for her own diplomatic, economic and defense ties Russia needs to avoid antagonising an economically emergent India. Fixing the sour US-Israel relationship will be an acid test for President Trump, who cannot afford to lose a strong collaborator from the Middle East. I believe that Trump will sacrifice the Palestinian cause to realign once again with Israel.

Overall, a sea of changes, both positive and negative, is on its way. Let us prepare for the worst and hope for the best out of this new change in the geopolitical order!

Saikat Kumar Basu
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