

New DCs should be urgently appointed

District-level governance vacuum must not persist any longer

We are concerned about the delay in appointing deputy commissioners (DCs) in 25 districts which has resulted in a governance vacuum. At least 13 days have passed since the interim government withdrew the DCs from various districts, including Dhaka, Gazipur, Chattogram, Mymensingh, and Cox's Bazar, reassigning them to different ministries, directorates, and other offices. As a result, additional deputy commissioners are now having to fill in for the DCs.

The DCs serve as administrative heads in their respective districts, playing a vital role in overseeing local governance and ensuring the effective delivery of many public services. They have also been recently tasked with the additional responsibility of supervising zilla parishads and municipalities, replacing mayors and chairmen. Given that, the delay in appointing new DCs is significantly hindering district-level operations. Since the fall of the Awami League government, we have observed increasing difficulty in the functioning of public offices. The resulting chaos within the civil administration has led to numerous disruptions in regular activities and services. And while many of these issues were expected given just how intertwined the previous regime became with all aspects of governance, the interim government should have planned better with respect to appointing new DCs so that some of this chaos could have been better mitigated.

For example, along with transferring the DCs, the government also dissolved the governing bodies of secondary and higher secondary educational institutions, as well as district and divisional sports councils. Consequently, the responsibility for overseeing these institutions and forming new committees fell to the DCs. However, because many of the DCs themselves were transferred, the formation of committees for educational institutions and sports organisations has been stuck in limbo. Additionally, the large-scale transfer of DCs has reportedly alarmed field-level officials who claim that the fear of being transferred is hindering their routine work, which is unacceptable.

Usually, the government first appoints new DCs before transferring the existing ones, or the two processes are done concurrently. However, although it is disappointing that the interim government ordered the transfer of nearly half of the district DCs without preparing a list of replacements, we must acknowledge the over-politicisation of civil service by the previous regime that has been particularly detrimental in this regard. As a result, the interim government has been extremely cautious in appointing new DCs, as it does not want to rely on the list of officials prepared by the previous administration. Be that as it may, the government urgently needs to sort out the DC appointment issue and bring back some discipline so that the delivery of public services is not hampered for much longer.

Take steps to address crop losses

Farmers, who suffered heavily during the floods, need help

After the recent floods, which claimed at least 67 lives, it is evident that a long, painful rebuilding process awaits affected communities even if they are not out of the woods yet, with the Met office warning about potential short-term flooding again later this month. Saddled simultaneously with the challenges of rebuilding homes and regaining livelihoods, these people will need continued help to weather this crisis. One area of recovery that deserves particular attention is agricultural rehabilitation.

According to an estimate, the recent floods have damaged crops worth Tk 3,346 crore, with about 14.14 lakh farmers in as many as 23 districts affected. A total of 986,214 tonnes of crops—including Aush and Aman paddy, vegetables, ginger, turmeric, fruit orchards, chilies, betel leaf, watermelon, papaya, and tomatoes—have been destroyed. Among the crops, paddy production has suffered the most significant damage. The inundation of Aman paddy fields and seedbeds has resulted in 6,85,000 tonnes of Aman paddy being wiped out, while 1,06,000 tonnes of Aush paddy have suffered the same consequence. That means, Tk 2,519 crore worth of paddy alone has been destroyed. Overall, crops were grown on over 14.3 lakh hectares, about 14.58 percent of which has been damaged.

This is a huge loss for the farmers, and a staggering blow to our food security, with its impacts already being felt in the markets. Fields that swayed with the promise of a bountiful harvest even a few weeks ago now lie barren, their crops rotting in the mud. Beyond crops, the devastation of seedbeds and fish enclosures has further deepened the crisis. In the fisheries sector, the losses in 12 most affected districts have exceeded Tk 1,590.36 crore. Add to that the damage caused to livestock, poultry, animal feed, aquaculture infrastructure, etc. In the face of such overwhelming loss, the need for swift action to rehabilitate farmers, especially paddy farmers, cannot be overstated.

One of the immediate priorities is to make agricultural inputs—including seeds and fertilisers—readily available for replanting crops. So the authorities must reach out to all farmers in need of help. Reportedly, the government is placing the highest priority on setting up Aman seedbeds to ensure replanting in ravaged fields. Many have still complained of a crisis of seeds and lack of official help. This has to be addressed. One silver lining in this regard, as in the rescue and relief efforts throughout this flood, has been the support of volunteers, particularly students and teachers from various agricultural universities, who are collecting and preparing seeds to help them get back on their feet.

Their collaboration and coordination will be a big part of the agricultural rehabilitation process, and they must keep up these efforts. They should also ensure that fish and vegetable farmers and entrepreneurs are not left out. We must bear in mind that many of the farmers have also lost their homes and savings, and without proper financial assistance, they will be unable to purchase the necessary inputs or invest in the recovery of their land. Low-interest loans, grants, and subsidies can be made available to help them get back on their feet.

EDITORIAL

The renaissance of Bangladesh Bank and some expectations



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The newly appointed Bangladesh Bank (BB) governor, Dr Ahsan H Mansur, has effectively started the reformation of the country's banking sector without delay. This is most hopeful as it has long been overdue. The new governor, being a strong proponent of macroeconomic governance, started his day with the bitterest task of swooping down on the top financial hooligans who simply emptied the banking sector through a wholehearted pairing with corrupt politicians in power. An objective assessment of what is happening at the central bank heralds the advent of a dark chapter for the oligarchs who plundered both the capital market and numerous banks simultaneously under the interest of the past rulers.

What the governor has kicked off is no less than a renaissance since his actions have begun to storm the castles and forts of the economic mafia who never thought of being caught red-handed because they governed the government. His prime actions endorse the importance of correcting institutions before talking about theoretical aspects. Dr Mansur is a sound pro-market economist who has equal respect for Smithian ethical doctrines, and he has not deviated from that; his market-based rules for exchange and interest rates are a testimony to that. He has remained different from his predecessors by signalling to the market that he will go after the money launderers and bank looters before fixing theoretical macro irregularities.

The revival of Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) is also a significant move. BFIU was like a cat without teeth under the two previous governors, while the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was like an anaemic tiger without claws. Both the institutions are prerequisites for the well-functioning of Bangladesh Bank. The political domestication of both BFIU and ACC impeded BB's desired actions in many regulatory aspects. The judicial tardiness of default litigations at higher courts eventually made BB dysfunctional as a financial regulator. That is why many economists advocated for BB to have some magisterial powers to punish the wrongdoers at its own discretion.

Although the new BB governor has infused blood into the BFIU,

pairing with the ACC or higher courts remains beyond his capacity. And that bureaucratic labyrinth will again give refuge to the wrongdoers when the next elected regime begins. The time has come to make some reform so BB can complete the task of judgement and punishment within the financial regulatory framework. Going to the ACC or courts for straightforward financial verdicts is just a waste of

time and energy—a rigmarole which eventually helps the culprits. This injustice induces new entrepreneurs to default wilfully since dishonesty pays better. People want an end to this culture to make the banking system fair and self-propelled. We believe the banking commission, which is presumably under construction, will figure out what to do in this respect to remove the trap of judicial bureaucracy.

The institutional damage done by the immediate past BB governor, who

will give the Bangladesh Bank a tough time. Economists who believe in ethics and politicians who respect minimum fairness must stand beside the new governor so he can bring some semblance of order in the country's banking system and punish the culprits by seizing their assets to adjust for their thefts. He wants to treat the cancer first before giving vitamins to the patient. And that makes him different from other policymakers.

We hope that the BB governor will

continue the momentum and spirit to bring order and promote the economy. The prime objective of the central bank is to maximise employment and growth subject to maintaining a moderate level of inflation. The governor should require the banks to report their internal employment figures as well as annual profit figures. The banking administration will remain half-broken if the Financial Institutions Division (FID) at the finance ministry is not eliminated. The pay structure at banks is highly hierarchical and unfair. That must be addressed too. The interim government should appoint a competent leader at the competition commission, which is another example of a domesticated species with a retired bureaucrat at its helm. Institutional leadership must be merit-based, not just qualified for clerical work with



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKRABORTY

unquestionable obedience.

Finally, Economic Adviser Dr Salehuddin Ahmed and BB Governor Dr Ahsan H Mansur must step in a highly measured way to form the banking commission, which will delink political clout from banking affairs for the sake of establishing a corporate culture so the financial sector can see some light at the end of the tunnel. To make it happen, the governor's position must be made constitutionally powerful to strike the final note of the renaissance.

Can the student movement free us from dynastic politics?



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Plato, in his magnum opus *The Republic*, portrays his ideal state as one that ensures justice, harmony, and the well-being of its citizens. From this, we can infer that the aim of politics is to increase the well-being of people. In Plato's ideal state theory, a philosopher-king must be an enlightened ruler with a deep understanding of state affairs and the ability to discern absolute truth and justice.

Today, one might question the use of terms like "king" and "ruler."

Regardless of the terminology, the underlying meaning remains the same. However, when politics is dominated by family dynasties or if the state suffers from crony capitalism, the well-being of the people tends to diminish.

The historical events that have most shaped the modern world are the European Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, the Magna Carta, the Glorious Revolution of England, the French Revolution, the Bill of Rights enacted in the US, and the Russian Revolution. The essence of these events is the empowerment of people and, in some cases, a transition from monarchy (centralised power within one family) to democracy (government

of the people, by the people, for the people). This transition aimed to uphold people's interests and maximise their well-being.

When power is concentrated within a single family, people's well-being is rarely maximised. This is why people revolted against monarchies—to ensure that state opportunities were open to all, regardless of caste and creed, so that people could enjoy freedom of choice, freedom of enterprise, and thus maximise their well-being.

In the states in which these revolutions took place, people's well-being significantly improved after the transitions. Amartya Sen's capability approach to development explains that the development of individuals' capacities is key to the overall human development. "Enhancement of capacities" means utilising the inherent potential in humans. When individuals' capacities are enhanced, they can achieve great things. To enhance these capacities, the state must play a crucial role by addressing needs such as alleviating poverty, providing schooling, etc. But in the states in which power is concentrated to one family or where

crony capitalism exists, individuals' capacities cannot be enhanced, that is, human potentials remain unutilised.

A critical aspect here is that people do not enjoy receiving alms from others, be it from individuals or the state. They prefer to stand on their own feet, exert their own efforts, build their own enterprises, and earn their own bread. They do not wish to be objects of pity from "royal families." This inherent aspect of human nature underscores the necessity for the "enhancement of capacities," as proposed in Sen's capability approach.

Family dynasties depend on a psychological phenomenon called "person worship" or a personality cult, often visible in developing countries where people who are not very educated view the family members or descendants of a "hero" as superior. Once people start to "worship" a certain individual, they continue to worship their descendants across generations.

In Bangladesh, the families of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Gen Ziaur Rahman are examples of such dynasties. As mentioned previously, states plagued by family dynasties generally experience lower levels of well-being, and moral issues are even more critical. Every individual, be it someone from a poor family or someone from a rich family, should be able to get to the top of the state ladder. But family dynasties create barriers in every individual's path to success—a rise—leading to the creation of a discriminatory, unfair, and unjust society. Since the recent student

movement in Bangladesh is called the anti-discrimination student movement, we would expect these young individuals with modern values to advocate for the abolition of family dynasties.

This movement is a boon for Bangladesh, which should help us with a tremendous transition. Now, the students can help establish a new political party and free the country from the burden of family dynasties. Those who have already completed their studies may become members of this new political party, while others may join later. They may also invite others with knowledge, integrity, and patriotism to join them. If they pursue this path, I would issue two warnings.

First, I would advise them to consider Plato's idea on forming a new political party and building a new state. Plato advocated for a meritocratic society where individuals are assigned roles and responsibilities based on their own abilities, rather than inherited or acquired status. Education plays a leading role in shaping citizens in an ideal state, with a system focused on rigorous philosophical training, mathematics, ethics, and physical fitness to nurture intellect and moral character.

Second, I would insist that the principle of equality be the core spirit of the proposed political party. We must remember that human emancipation is not possible without social ownership of wealth, for which we must cultivate the spirit of collective life within society and also develop an education system that teaches this spirit of collective life.