

Hail the Super Patriot

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distortion of what Bhattacharya said while referring to Rahman's selective use of statistics as "bad comedy" implying that ultimately it does not do any good to the country as foreign investors have access to all relevant facts. In fact, a more forthcoming approach is far more effective because there are many positive elements to attract FDI.

Just for the sake of argument, even if Bhattacharya did say what Rahman claims, does that forfeit the former's right to citizenship? How dare he question anybody's right to citizenship? It is the birthright of everybody everywhere in the world and nobody but nobody has the right to question it (except the Israelis who question the right of Palestinians to citizenship in their own land).

Rahman can question anybody's views, which he could have done far more sophisticatedly. Though on false grounds he went to court, we can still live with that but not with his questioning Bhattacharya's right to citizenship. And as such, we condemn it in the strongest of terms.

The question that boggles our mind is why a difference of opinion on economic analysis should go to this extent. Why should five most eminent citizens of the country have arrest warrants against them? Is there a method in, what apparently seems like, total madness.

Rahman's defamation suit is, as claimed by him, based on the alleged comment of Syed Manzur Elahi that he was a "collaborator". Fine, then what is the "crime" of the others?

Professor Rehman Sobhan and Laila Rahman Kabir hardly said anything that day. M Syeduzzaman had nothing to do with those alleged comments, which caused Rahman's umbrage. So, why arrest warrants against them? Syeduzzaman said Rahman did not know the background of CPD trustees, otherwise he could not have called them "shameless liars and traitors". How can that constitute a case for defamation?

Now let us come to Syed Manzur Elahi's comments. As repeated replay of Tuesday's CPD press conference by the electronic media yesterday showed the nation that Elahi said nothing close to what has been claimed by the Bol chairman.

So, why the case? The answer is simple -- to intimidate any dissenting voice and those looking at things in an alternative way. There is one official line and that must be echoed, otherwise your patriotism will be questioned and even your citizenship will come under scrutiny.

It is our hope that all this is the act of Rahman alone and that the government has no role in it. This hope is belied by the action of the lower court which, as we know, is

under direct control of the executive. It is difficult to believe that warrants against some of the most eminent citizens of the country were out within minutes of Rahman lodging the case without a 'green signal' from the highups. That directly points to collusion with, if not the government, then certain powerful sections within it. We still believe that saner sections within the government were not in the know of it all. So, we think there is still time to rein in the super patriot and saviour, and save Bangladesh from further losing its most precious international credential -- that of its democracy.

A fundamental feature of fascism is to intimidate its citizens and civic bodies. This it does by twisting, distorting or even falsifying what they say or stand for and then using the legal framework to harass them or even put them in prison. And in doing this, they use super patriotism as the overall cover.

In Bangladesh today, we are seeing clear signs of such tendencies. The ruling BNP and its leadership must choose which direction they will take.

5 eminent citizens

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The five are renowned economist and Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan, its Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya and CPD trustee board members former adviser to caretaker government Syed Manzur Elahi, former finance minister M Syeduzzaman and former president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Laila Rahman Kabir.

As the matter was the talk of the town for the last two days, lawyers, litigants and many others were curious to observe moving the bail petition for them and its outcome.

Dr M Zahir, barrister Mainul Hossain and barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud moved the bail petition while many other lawyers were present to assist them, if needed.

The petitioners' counsels argued in their submission that in a defamation suit, court usually issues summons but a different situation has been created through issuance of arrest warrants in this case.

They also submitted that the petitioners (five eminent citizens) did not call Mahmudur Rahman a "Razakar" and that a case has been filed against them on the basis of a distorted news item.

The counsels argued that the five petitioners are eminent personalities. As a magistrate's court hurriedly issued warrants of arrest, the petitioners apprehend they would not get justice in that court. And for this, they came to the HC for bail.

Opposing the bail petition Deputy Attorney General Mokhesur Rahman said since it is a bailable offence, the petitioners could seek bail in the magistrate's court.

He also submitted that yesterday was not fixed for hearing of the bail petition. So, it should not have come up on the list for hearing.

Soon after getting bail, Debapriya expressed his satisfaction.

Mahmudur Rahman, also adviser to the energy ministry, said on Wednesday that Debapriya has no right to stay in this country.

Debapriya told newsmen on the court premises yesterday that it is not the duty of Bol to decide who should stay in the country and who should not. If it does so, what will be the investment situation in the country, he asked.

Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mohammad Mujibul Haq issued the arrest warrants after Mahmudur Rahman filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka.

BDR, BSF

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numbers of Indians and documents were recovered from their possession.

A tense situation prevailed in the villages between Uttarkul and Amolshid border outposts since June 23 when BDR men foiled BSF's attempt to "adversely possess some farmland" near the border, a top BDR official said.

He said the land falls in the criteria of article-3 of the land boundary agreement signed between Bangladesh and India in 1974. The agreement allows both the countries use the lands under their control, he added.

On June 23, BSF crossed the river in boats and tried to occupy the farmland. BSF and BDR men also traded around 100 bullets that day. The 256-acre land had been under Bangladesh's control since 1947.

The BSF again made an attempt on June 28 to occupy the land. Inhabitants of the surrounding area had to leave their homesteads after BSF and BDR exchanged over 1,800 bullets that day.

A battalion commander level flag meeting between BDR and BSF at India's Hari Nagar camp on July 4 decided that neither parties would show aggression concerning the disputed territory and they would work to bring back normalcy in the area. They had also agreed to withdraw additional troops and ammunition supplies.

During the gun battle, a septuagenarian died of heart attack on Wednesday midnight. Khalil Uddin, 70, could not be buried in his village due to the tensed situation prevailing there. His family members buried him at Anandapur, four kilometres off Amolshid around 2:00pm yesterday.

No class was held in any of the educational institutions in the area and no call for prayers [Ajan] were heard yesterday.

Documents doctored

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relax the time limit from four years to six years in case of reconditioned cars.

NBR Chairman Abdul Karim admitted the foul play in vehicle import and said he recently asked both the Chittagong customs commissioner and Benapole customs commissioner to step up vigilance against such menace. "We will not allow such violation of import policy and counterfeiting to evade taxes."

About 80 per cent of the country's annual demand for reconditioned cars and pick-ups -- around 8,000 -- are imported from Japan by the BARVIDA members, and 3,000 new vehicles are imported from India by Benapole-based importers.

New car importers meet the demand for about 1,500 cars annually.

Verdict in graft case

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for judgment when the defence lawyers in September 2003 stated that their client would not get justice from the court. Then it was deferred again in July 2004 due to illness of the judge.

In the case filed with Ramna Police Station, it was alleged that Ershad, while in power, paid Tk 7,43,416 as income tax for six years (1983-1989). Later, he withdrew Tk 2,76,324 from the income tax money without submitting any documents in favour of his action.

The now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption filed a corruption case accusing Ershad and three tax officials on July 27, 1992.

The investigation officer however submitted charge sheet against Ershad as the lone accused on December 19, 1992. The court framed charges against him on January 26, 1994 and the trial began on June 26, 2003.

Voter list

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The field workers will now continue visiting door to door until August 20. The time for preparing the supplementary list has also been extended by 10 days until August 30.

The list is being updated based on applications received for inclusion and deletion of names from the existing voter list prepared in year 2000.

The EC first decided to complete the door-to-door visits by July 30, but later extended the deadline to August 10. The time for compiling the data was also extended to August 20.

The EC took the decision yesterday after reviewing the door-to-door visits, progress of which is very poor in the capital. Even the visit is yet to begin in many rural areas.

The EC Secretariat however claimed 1.22 crore people have so far applied for including their names and 14.46 lakh applications have been received for deletion of names.

Officials at the EC Secretariat said the field level officials would be able to reach over 30 lakh people eligible for being voters within the extended time.

As allegations have been raised that underage people are being allowed to apply for registering their names as voters in many areas, the EC warned the field level staff of punitive actions in case any underage people is listed or if anyone is listed twice.

Though no specific time was allocated for displaying the updated voter list, the EC secretary yesterday said the updated list would be kept open for public inspection as soon as the field work and compilation of data are completed in any district.

"The updated voter list will be kept open for people's inspection till August 30," he said.

The list will be made available at the offices of the registration officers, assistant registration officers and Union Parishad and the ward offices of municipalities and city corporations, the EC Secretariat said in a press release yesterday.

"The objections, if filed any, will be resolved by August 30 and then we will start the voter list printing process from September 1," he said.

The existing electoral laws provide for allocating 15 days for people's inspection and raising objections regarding the draft voter list before its publication.

But some district election officers working as registration officers for updating the voter list said the time allocated for public inspection of the list is inadequate. They feared that they would not be able to display the updated voter list within the short time.

"To keep the updated voter list at the designated places including our offices, we will have to make several copies of the list. But the EC secretary is yet to allocate any fund for it," another district election officer said.

ORDER ON OFFICE DISCIPLINE

The EC Secretariat yesterday issued an office order asking its officers and employees to attend office in time and not to be at others' office rooms without any work.

Punitive action will be taken if any official fails to turn up by 9:00am and does not discharge duties at their own office rooms, said the order.

"Some officers and employees do not attend the office in time. This is against the office discipline," a source said quoting the order.

BIDS shocked

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silence in a situation that could threaten independent research and dissemination, as well as throttle freedom of speech and free thought," Dr Quazi Shahabuddin, director general of BIDS, said in a press release yesterday.

The release also said there is a long tradition of independent research and dissemination in Bangladesh, including well-developed norms for expressing differences in opinion about data or methods. "It is unfortunate that in recent times such norms appear to have been eroded," it added.

The release requested all concerned to demonstrate greater maturity and responsibility. Meanwhile, different political parties and rights groups also protested the defamation case filed against members of the CPD board of trustees.

Supra, a civil society campaign for good government, formed a human chain near the Shahbagh intersection yesterday protesting against Mahmudur Rahman's filing the defamation case against the five eminent citizens.

Members of different organisations including Faith and Hope Welfare Association, Swadhin Bangla Garmant Sramik Federation, Safal Trust, Fido, Pradip and a number of Dhaka University students joined the human chain, a Supra press release said.

Following the human chain, they held a rally where the speakers termed the defamation case a threat to free speech and thoughts.

Chief of the Supra Secretariat Aminul Rasul Babul, its coordinators Mohammad Zakaria and Mostafa Kamal Akanda addressed the rally among others.

Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) and

11 JCD men

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The names dropped from the charge sheet were Aminur Rahman Jalali Mukul, Mohammad Ripon, Anwar Hossain, Aminur Rahman Jamali and Shaikot. The four arrestees who made confessional statements had told the magistrate that Shaikot, a JCD leader led the operation along with others.

A team of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) picked up the 11 on July 30 at CMMU of the health ministry on charge of creating obstacles to those who intended to buy or drop schedules.

Sources said August 1 was the last date for buying the schedules for three projects involving around Tk 400 crore under the development budget. August 2 was the last date for dropping the tender schedules, which were being sold at 36 places across the country, the sources added.

Paban

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lawyers, the prosecution told the court that Paban was directly involved in the incident.

Detective Branch (DB) of police on June 7 this year arrested Paban on Bailey Road in the capital with a stolen Toyota car, which was hijacked by three criminals from its owner at Motijheel on October 13 last year.

DB produced Paban before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court on June 8. The court then ordered to send him to jail rejecting the bail prayer.

Karmajibi Nari in a joint statement condemned the filing of the case against five renowned citizens. The statement signed by Roekya Rafiq Baby and Dr Fostino Perera said such cases hamper citizens' democratic and constitutional rights of free speech.

Leaders of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, Jatiya Sramik Jote, Movement for Effective Parliament and Barisal Division Awami Forum also sent separate statements protesting against the filing of the defamation case.

Malaysia offers

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He said the move would particularly benefit tourists from China who had difficulties in obtaining visas to Malaysia.

Rafiq said the visa, offered at a cost of 100 ringgit (27 dollars), would be available throughout Visit Malaysia Year 2007 and afterwards if no problems were experienced.

"As long as it doesn't threaten Malaysia's security... it will depend on the situation and we will monitor to see if it is good for Malaysia," he said.

The government has said it hopes to attract some 20.1 million tourists in 2007, up from 15.7 million in 2004.

Tourism is Malaysia's second-largest foreign exchange earner, but it is facing stiff competition from neighbours including Singapore and Thailand.

Arrivals from China in particular have been dropping, from 550,000 in 2004 to 350,000 in 2005, in a decline blamed partly on negative publicity over the treatment of Chinese nationals here.

Shamsur Rahman

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Rural development and Co-operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan visited the ailing poet separately yesterday, says a press release.

They inquired about the poet's physical condition and wished for his early recovery.

Both ministers assured the poet's family of assistance for his treatment.

Poet's daughter seeks PM's help
Poet Shamsur Rahman's daughter Sumaiya Rahman Sumi yesterday appealed to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to send her ailing father abroad for better treatment.

Sumi called on the prime minister at her office and made the appeal.

The prime minister gave assurance that the government would extend all possible cooperation for the poet's treatment on advice of the doctors.

Sumi expressed gratitude to the prime minister for her personal care for the treatment of her father.

Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury was present.

Meanwhile, the condition of poet Shamsur Rahman remained unchanged, attending physician MA Karim said yesterday.

The 77-year-old renowned poet, who has been suffering from heart, liver, kidney and lung problems, is now under treatment at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) Hospital.

The poet is in the ICU of the hospital under artificial life support. A nine-member medical board was formed on Wednesday.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka visited ailing poet Shamsur Rahman yesterday.

Polls observers

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we are not backed by Jamaat. You (journalists) better prove that these organisations are Jamaat backed."

An organisation named Election Monitoring Group (EMG) was formed with 29 organisations to monitor the last election. Now 14 of those organisations have been left out and 20 new organisations included to float the EWG, said sources.

Nari Progoti Sangha, PIT Trust and renowned election monitor BROTEE are among the ones excluded.

"Many of the organisations that we called on to join us did not show interest," Jahrul Alam, director of EWG, said at the press briefing held at its office on Panthapath in the city.

Sources said DemocracyWatch, Khan Foundation, Fema, MMC, Jatiya Nirbachon Parjebekhan Parishad (Janipop) and Lighthouse are the key organisations that combined to form EWG.

Taleya Rahman, wife of a pro-BNP newspaper editor, is the leader of DemocracyWatch while Rokhsana Khandaker, wife of ICT Minister Abdul Moyeen Khan, leads the Khan Foundation.

Besides, the authorities of Lighthouse, an NGO based in Bogra, are said to be very close to the Hawa Bhaban. BNP lawmaker Ziaul Haque Mollah is one of crucial figures behind the organisation.

"Every individual may have political leanings, but things are different when it comes down to professionalism. The people of EWG will work professionally to carry out their responsibilities," Taleya Rahman told the reporters in the meet-the-press.

Action on Disability and Development (ADD), which usually works for the disabled people, has also been included in the EWG.

At least six NGO chiefs are directly involved with the ruling BNP and will work at the 130 seats where the incumbent lawmakers were elected on the BNP ticket, the sources said.

The Asia Foundation authorities will meet a delegation of Awami League (AL) to discuss the opposition's reservations about the NGOs, added the sources.

Expressing surprise at the launching of EWG, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, political secretary to the leader of the opposition, last night told The Daily Star, "It is unfortunate and unexpected, and we are simply disappointed at the recent developments. We have already communicated our allegations to The Asia Foundation."

Firoje M Hasan, leader of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh and former official of Fema, said, "The people don't trust the CEC and two other election commissioners to conduct a free and fair election, so why the international community should contribute a huge money for the election observation."

Referring to the neutrality of the EWG, Jahrul at the press meet said all the members of EWG have committed themselves to abiding by the EWG code of ethics that include, among others, maintaining a strict political neutrality in carrying out its activities.

The code of ethics, administered by the EWG Ethics Committee, also includes a code of conduct for the EWG secretariat and for all field staff and volunteers to ensure neutrality, he said.

He also said if an allegation of flouting the code of ethics is raised against any EWG member or individual, proper disciplinary actions including expulsion will be taken against them.

Referring to the funding, Jahrul said so far about \$4.2 million of a required \$6 million has been mobilised.

Taleya Rehman, executive director of DemocracyWatch, said, "We will also work towards developing an awareness among the people of their voting rights."

Munira Khan, president of Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (Fema), said, "We too want the electoral reforms, registration of the political parties and the election commission (EC) secretariat to be independent of the prime minister's office."

Kim McOuay, country representative of The Asia Foundation, AHM Noman, president of Bangladesh Manobadhikar Samonony Parishad (BMSP), Nazmul Ansan Kalimullah, chairman of Janipop, Angela Gomez, Numan Ahmed Khan, executive director of Institute for Environment and Development (IED) also spoke at the press conference.

Judges killing

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Bangla Bhai and five other militants, and acquitted one in the sensational case for the killing of two judges.

The five others to walk the gallows are the banned JMB's Majlish-e-Shura members Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdul Awal and Khaled Saifullah, suicide bomber Iftekar Hasan Al Mamun and Asadur Rahman Arif. Of them, Arif is absconding.

The DAG submitted that the convicted confessed their involvement in the killings and also revealed how they conspired for this.

The government-appointed defence counsel for the convicts started his submission yesterday.

Plot to blow up planes

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chemical" device.

"The police acting with the security service M15 are investigating an alleged plot to bring down a number of aircraft through mid-flight explosions, causing a considerable loss of life," Interior Minister John Reid said.

The plot to blow up airliners targeted at least three major US carriers on flights from Britain, with destinations that included at least five major US cities, a US intelligence official said Thursday.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said United, American Airlines and Continental Airlines were among the carriers targeted although the targets might also have included non-US carriers.

The destination of the targeted flights included cities that were "primary tourist attractions," including New York, Washington DC, and Los Angeles, the official said. "You'd have to add Boston, you'd have to add Chicago. Kind of like the big hubs if you will," he added.

The US Department of Homeland Security raised the threat level for all commercial aircraft to high and US authorities banned liquids, including drinks, from all US commercial flights.

Britain's security services raised the threat level in the country to "critical" from "severe," the highest of its five ratings, which means "an attack is expected imminently."

The British Airports Authority said it had asked all European carriers to suspend flights to London's main Heathrow airport where new security measures caused severe delays.

The news came amid high international tension over the war in Lebanon and the weak British Prime Minister Tony Blair headed on holiday to the Caribbean.

London police said they believed the intention was to target flights from Britain to the United States.

Shares in European airlines fell on the news, with British Airways shares opening nearly 5 percent lower. The pound also fell against the dollar and the euro.

Blair's office said the prime minister had briefed President Bush on the operation during the night and had been in constant contact with Britain over the situation.

Reid said it was a "very significant plot."

"We are doing everything possible to disrupt any further terrorist activity," he said in a statement. "This will mean major disruption at all UK airports."

Air passengers found they could take little on board.

"We cannot take on anything except wallets, passports and medicine," Dana Cojocaru-Ivoska, 28, trying to get on a flight to return to her home in St. Louis, Missouri.

The security alert comes 13

months after four British Islamist suicide bombers killed 52 people and injured about 700 on London's transport network.

In a speech on Wednesday, Reid said Britain was in the most sustained period of severe threat since the end of World War Two and warned there was no room for complacency.

A police source said more than 15 people had been arrested.

"We don't think that it was planned to happen today," the source told Reuters. "We had intelligence and we had to move against what was a planned attack."

"The plan was to take a ready-made explosive device rather than something which would be made up on board," the source said.

Independent terrorism expert Paul Beaver said hand luggage was a weak spot in airport security.

"A laptop computer can carry enough explosives to blow up an aircraft," he said. "Hold baggage and cargo can be snifed for explosives. You can't do that for hand luggage at the moment. The technology is there, but it's time consuming and expensive."

Beaver said the nature of the alleged plot suggested a connection to al-Qaeda.

"In the last two months al-Qaeda promised that it would avenge Iraq and Afghanistan by attacking British and American aviation assets -- I see a direct link with that," he said.

Britain has come under fire from Islamist militants for its military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Blair has also come under strong criticism at home and abroad for following the US lead and refusing to call for an immediate ceasefire in the conflict between Israel and Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas.

British Airways said no hand baggage would be allowed on any of its planes leaving British airports. It said no electrical or battery powered items would be allowed in the cabin, including laptops and mobile phones.

British Airports Authority said all passengers on flights to the United States would be subject to a secondary search at the boarding gate and all liquids would also be removed.

The Home Office Web Site showed the threat rating had been raised to "critical" from "severe" earlier on Thursday. Britain has a five level rating for security threats, ranging from low to critical, which is the highest level.

Israel puts

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within around 8 km (5 miles) of the border but Wednesday's decision could bring the army to the Litani River, some 20 km (12.5 miles) into Lebanon.

Israel's Channel Two television reported on Wednesday evening that the expanded offensive was under way, citing movement of troops and tanks from the northern town of Kiryat Shmona toward al-Khiam. But the army said the incursion was a local operation against Hezbollah rocket crews in al-Khiam.

Earlier Israeli troops seized the Christian towns of Marjayoun and Qlaiah in south Lebanon on Thursday, witnesses said, even though Israel says it has put off plans for a broader offensive against Hezbollah guerrillas.

A Reuters journalist said Israeli troops had moved on foot through Marjayoun, about 8 km (5 miles) inside Lebanon, as well as Qlaiah and the nearby village of Burjal-Molouk.

They were followed by tanks, which deployed on roads nearby, drawing intense Hezbollah rocket and mortar fire.

"I can see two tanks burning some 500 meters from Marjayoun," one resident told Reuters by telephone.

A third tank arrived later and removed several casualties, he said, adding that Hezbollah fighters were raining rocket and mortar fire on the Israeli force between Marjayoun and Khiam.

Hezbollah said in a statement it had destroyed 11 Israeli tanks,