

"The ETV case: How to really serve public interest?"

I have read the opinion "The ETV case: How to serve public interest" by Manzoor Ahmed with great interest. He has argued for ETV in great length for the sake of public interest. The success of ETV is not a success unless it is a success ethically as well as professionally. The other private channels could have mimicked the same popularity like ETV if they were given the same preferential treatment as it was done for ETV. When public interest takes a back seat to political/corporate greed it becomes private want, and our elite should do better than argue for a case like this.

Deal like this has rocketed us to the rank of number one corrupt country in the world. We buy aircraft carrier from Korea, MIG from Russia, and rotten Rice from India. I am very sure all these are done in greater public interest! Why not request the military for martial law to curb terrorism in our country ceasing all democratic process in greater public interest? I don't think that too many people will complain.

The writer suggested a couple of unique remedies to balance (not fix) the injustice, 20 per cent of total airtime for educational or public interest program. If the Supreme Court does not kill ETV this sure will. And why should anybody flex their muscle on a private company to bring in outside directors is something right out of the draconian law book?

My suggestion, plain and simple. Float the second channel for open public (as in public interest) tender. Whoever pays the highest amount gets the channel. If that person has broadcasting license, he uses it for himself. If he doesn't, he rents it to someone (either fully or as time-sharing) who have broadcasting licenses. In the later case, all the private TV channels will have access to the second channel. End result will be better programming, competition, and a level playing field for everybody.

By the way, ETV pays 70 per cent of the highest bid amount as the fee that it did not pay for its past uses of this channel. It is a very small price to pay for ethical misconduct and unlawful enrichment. Ask Arthur Andersen, Enron, WorldCom. M.A. Kalam New York, USA

What does BNP-AL has to do with it?

Afsan Chowdhury has supported the poor and attacked the rich. How BNP-AL politics got into this is mystifying. But like everything else in Bangladesh, every issue becomes clouded by the AL-BNP conflict. And this let's the rich escape in their limousines. Afsan Chowdhury has been 'emotionally' saying what our political leaders are really doing which is to build a country where only the rich gets better and better and the poor gets bashed. If you don't believe him listen to the economists.

The idea is rich are GOOD and greed is BETTER. That's where the problem lies. Every one wants to be rich at any cost because that is good. Who said being poor is better but how is it that the poor remain poor while the rich get better and better? Because GOOD is only for the rich. I read a piece by Afsan

Chowdhury in the PROBE magazine where he suggests that Bangladesh has become more than one country and split into numerous states. That rich Dhaka is one country and poor villages are another. That even within Dhaka, Baridhara and Banani are different neighbourhood--states within the same city.

Just as the rich claim to be good, the English did too. Colonialism was always justified in the name of doing GOOD to the colonised.

Keep writing Afsan Chowdhury. You are hurting those who need to be.

Tarique Humayun
Barbar Road, Dhaka

I do agree with Dr. Ratan (July 15) about the power imbalance between

in favour of Israel and against the Palestine people.

The last issue that touched my feelings is trying to target people residing abroad. Mr. K. Arefeen (July 15) wrote "It's read by the wealthy or the expatriates who have no link with the people he is talking about." How do you know Mr. Arefeen that all the expatriates have no link with these people? Is it just a gross generalisation depicting ignorance of a writer? Mr. Chowdhury suggests Mr. Ahmed Hasan to "visit Bangladesh, go to a village and ask the villagers what they used to do and still call the Freedom Fighters (Muktis)". Why should somebody visit Bangladesh to know what villagers call the freedom fighter? I have lived in close connection with villages for thirty

Afsan Chowdhury responds: If my words have made some people think I am being critical of non-resident Bangladeshis, I apologise. Nothing is further than this from my mind. I have also heard this word--Mukti--very commonly used and never disrespectfully either. I only wish that the readers had focussed more on the topic of the letter-- conflict between the rich and the poor-- rather than dwell on issues like AL-BNP conflict and the status of resident and non-resident Bangladeshis about whom I had mentioned nothing at all in that column.

My sole intention was point out that the plight of the poor never gets noticed while the rich continues to lead a luxurious life.

"The choked lifeline"

Thank for yet another timely and thoughtful editorial "The choked lifeline" (July 14).

What really prompted me to write is a particular statement you made, "The failure is collective and reflects a social indifference in environmental matters." Yes indeed-- our civil societies are much to blame for their apathy not only to environmental issues but also a host of other issues of equal importance, particularly when the issues involve a certain section of the rich and the influential.

How many times have we seen our so-called civil society organising protest marches or raising their "collective" voices of dissent on such issues like rampant corruption of bribery and graft, particularly in the upper strata of our bureaucracy? Same situation exists with regards to loan defaulters or even the Awami League's summersaults and manipulated absence from the floor of the Parliament.

On the other hand, they (the civil society) are quite active when it comes to issuing lofty statements to the media or coming out in the streets to make protest marches involving human rights in order to gain favours or attract the attention of one or more of the leaders of our partisan political hierarchy. Or, for that matter, ventilate partisan grievances. Needless to mention that most of the protest marches and seminars, you name it, are often directed at coterie or individual of profile building exercises. Indeed, along with a serious breakdown of our law and order there has been clearly a serious breakdown of our moral fibre. Do I dare say, at all levels!

Shamsher Chowdhury
Texas USA

Direct election of the President

I read "A citizen's" letter about the election of the President in our country. I agree with him that perhaps we should not expect a party elected President to be neutral. But I don't agree with his suggestion of a directly elected President in a parliamentary system.

Waheed Nabi,
Sheffield, England

Hitting the low on Ataturk

It greatly saddens me to see the descending level of discourse by those who dislike Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. In recent letters, some have found nothing more to attack the Great Turk with except making up

ugly comments about his ancestry, his personal life, and his soldierly abilities. Others, in the same vein, have made disparaging remarks about Turkey and Turks-- a nation and country that Bengalis and Bangladesh share bonds with going a thousand years.

Thanks to the reforms initiated by Ataturk, Turkey is considered a major world power, a friend of the United States, second only to England and Israel, as House International Committee chairman Henry Hyde recently said. Ataturk infuriated a class of people who used religion as a cover for all kinds of backward, cruel, unpatriotic, and tyrannical activities. Obviously, the political descendants of such merchants of religion do and will always hate him. Perhaps they are jealous that while Turkey stands tall as a world power, on the threshold of EU membership, most of the so-called 'Islamic countries' are still squarely in the Third World. The spite which comes out of this jealousy is the greatest tribute to the man the Turks fondly call the 'Father' of their nation.

Indeed as poet Nazrul Islam said, 'Kemal tunc kemal kiya bhai' God knows we need a chivalrous, patriotic, and strong personality like Mustafa Kemal in Bangladesh to put the religion-merchants in their proper place. ES Missouri, USA

This is in response to Mr. Akbar Hossain's letter (July 13) on Kemal Ataturk. Mr. Hossain has accurately portrayed one aspect of this great (!) leader i.e. his being the architect of the modern Turkey and I fully agree with him. Undoubtedly, Kemal Ataturk brought about radical and comprehensive changes in his society, which took his country to prosperity and modernity. However, Mr. Hossain's comment "... His (Ataturk) ideas on Islam were not confused nor he was anti-Islamic" is not only baseless and unfounded but also farthest from the truth.

I think the following words of Kemal Ataturk will be enough for anyone to guess his hostility towards Islam. "Islam, this theology of an immoral Arab, is a dead thing." Possibly it might have suited tribes of nomads in the desert. It was no good for a modern progressive State.

"God's revelation!" There was no God. That was one of the chains by which the priests and bad rulers bound the people down. "A ruler who needs religion to help him rule is a weakling. No weakling should rule." (Grey Wolf, Mustafa Kemal, An Intimate Study of a Dictator, H.C. Armstrong, 1934).

Inspecting some soldiers in Anatolia, Kemal once asked, "Who is God and where does He live?"

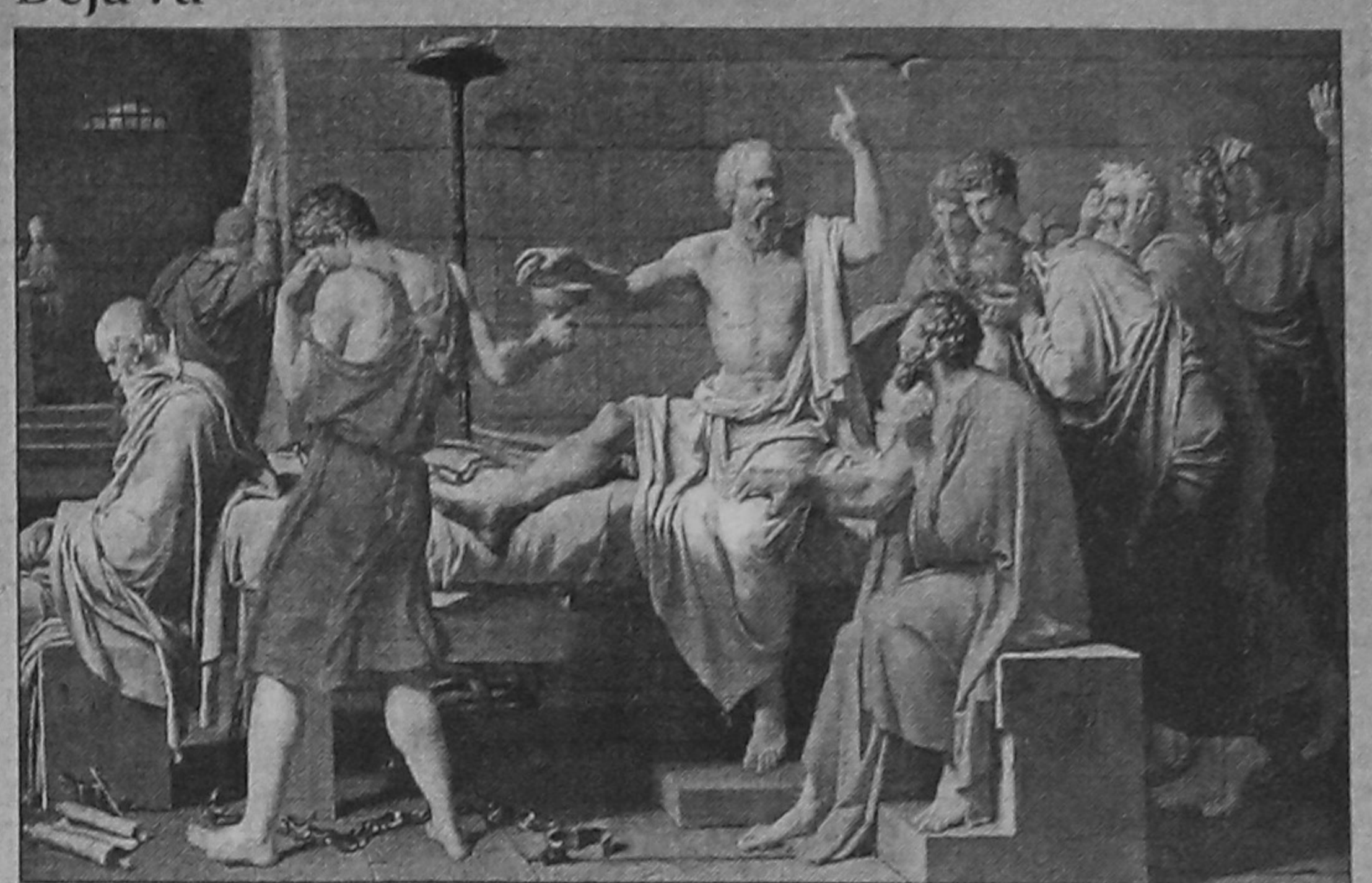
The soldier, anxious to please, replied, "God is Mustafa Kemal Pasha. He lives in Angora."

"And where is Angora?" Kemal asked.

"Angora is in Istanbul," was the reply. (Ataturk, The Rebirth of a Nation, Lord Kipross, 1965).

Therefore, just as Kemal Ataturk is universally known for his vision, patriotism, statesmanship, as he is recognised for his abhorrence, contempt, hostility towards Islam and I hope Mr. Hossain must not be blind to this obvious fact. Monirul Haque One-mail

Deja Vu



The verdict: now and then

In my previous birth I was born in the democracy of Athens and witnessed this spectacle:
Time: 399 BC
Accused: Socrates
Plaintiff: Anetos, Melitos and Lyxon.
Charges: 1) Not showing adequate respect to the ruling gods of Athens.
2) Trying to introduce new gods and goddesses.
3) Imparting these treason lessons to the youth of Athens and leading them astray.
Jury: 501 Athenian citizens.
Verdict: Charges not proven beyond reasonable doubt. Nevertheless 265 jurors found him guilty; 236 gave a verdict of acquittal.
Punishment: Death by taking hemlock poison.
Appeal: Socrates declined any plea.
In my next birth I was born in the democracy of Bangladesh and witnessed the following:

Time: 2002 AD.
Accused: Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury.
Plaintiff: MPs of BNP
Charges: 1) Not showing adequate respect to the late President Ziaur Rahman.
2) Trying to import the concept of impartiality to the office of the President.
3) Setting bad precedents for the posterity.
Jury: All BNP's MP's.
Verdict: Charges not proven beyond reasonable doubts. Found guilty nearly unanimously with one possible abstention.
Punishment: Life spared, but consigned to political death.
Appeal: Dr B. Chowdhury 'resigned voluntarily'.
Bilou Gaharpur Dhammondi, Dhaka

"Dress rehearsal for apparels"

Your July 12 article although well meaning seemed to me off the mark, you write about category 847 and how in the same period last year its export was about \$14 million. Actually that is a tiny amount, about the annual turnover of two medium sized factories. Can you see the insignificance of Cat 847? You article also didn't mention how many dozens of this quota we used to perform, which would have been a better indicator as to whether it was an important category for us. Furthermore you don't explain what Cat 847 is. I am in the garments industry and even I am a little confused about this category, it is a complex blended fabric consisting of silk or silk waste. As far as I am aware the quantity of this category allocated to Bangladesh was very small and orders were few and far between.

A far more prescient article would have dealt with the removal of quotas on jackets from China for export to the EU. In the past we used to have massive orders on jackets for the EU, so much so that any one factory never managed to execute these and had to take on fifteen to twenty sub contractors to do the job. Ever since China became non-quota in jackets, EU outerwear orders have virtually disappeared from the market. Specialised jacket makers like me have switched entirely to the lower value and profit production of trousers. Our export industry in its present

form is simply uncompetitive. Chinese prices are higher than ours, but their turn around time much faster. The solution would be a private container terminal but that would mean handing over the precious Karnaphuli mouth to imperialist Americans.

Bangladesh has a surplus of gas, but unless I want to wait for eternity for my boilers gas connection, I'll have to bribe Titas. Customs makes an annual audit of the Utilization Declaration of all garments factories to see if we have sold fabrics or yarn in the local market. An UD is prepared against each and every order we receive. If everything is in order then the bribe to the customs inspector per UD is two thousand takas. That is a fixed rate and cannot be negotiated. There are just a couple of examples of why our export industry is doomed. With the government plodding along from one self-created crisis to another, there is no hope for improvement either.

Dorji Dhaka

"The good, the bad and the ugly"

This is in reference to the column "The good, the bad and the ugly" by Mr. Hasnat Abdul Hye. In his column he says "If hartal bleeds democracy by fits and starts, boycott of the Sangsad strikes it at its very roots". Most of the common people of this poor country believe this from the

core of their heart but I am sure the politicians do not understand it. I think they do not read these types of columns, or if they read, they do not pay heed at all to the insights of the write-ups.

They know how to topple the economy of the country, how to push the people in hardship by calling frequent hartals to fulfil their political whims, but they do not know how to upgrade the quality of the people's life. That is why the quality of livelihood of the poor has remained the same even after 30 years of our independence. A 30-year period is sufficient to bring about a change in the country's economy. But our achievements are increase of corruption, murder, extortion and terrorism in the campuses within this period and all these are on the rise. Under these wretched conditions, the nation has got its back on the wall. Now, we have no other choice but to move forward to get rid of these social maladies.

At the end of his column the writer has said, "insinuation to smear character or dishonouring the dead is not in good taste". It is really distressing to see our politicians in such silly indulgence. This type of activity can only bewilder the nation. We do not want our politicians to indulge in such meaningless debates that only bring confusion but want them to fight poverty and hunger of the nation. Islam Tangail

Principal Hamida Ali: To remove or not to remove

I am shocked seeing the picture of the kids on the front page of *The Daily Star*, protesting the retirement of Principal Hamida Ali. The government says that she has completed 65 years of age limit, so she is to go to retirement according to the service rules of the teachers of private educational institutions. If this statement is not true, then this government has no moral right to stay in power for telling a lie to the people, and politicking, as says *The Daily Star* editorial, with an educational institution.

If it is true, then I must say that Prof. Hamida Ali is not even eligible to be a teacher. Let alone to be the head of an educational institution, for her using the children, as a means to stay on as the Principal, violating the service rules.

Innocent students should not be used as a tool in any protest, whatsoever, in any case. If the government is telling a lie, let the guardians take to the street, not the children. They should not be dragged into the nasty world of their elders.

If the age limitation is a cause for the said retirement, then I must again say that *The Daily Star* editorial on the matter is not at all tenable. It is shocking that sometime *The Daily Star* editorials put more emphasis on emotion, pushing the law in the second place. Another example of this sort of emotion-ridden editorial by *The Daily Star* is the one on ETV's closure case.

Yes, law is the last thing we pay attention to in our society. If the enlighten section of the society sails themselves off in that trend, then there will remain no hope for this nation.

Faruque Hasan
Dhammandi, Dhaka

The headline read "Viqarunnisa in political web: The popular principal's job on line: BNP leader's wife waits in wings." This is certainly not a news I would like to see in the morning newspaper. As an ex-student of Viqarunnisa Noon School & College, and of course a well-wisher of the institution, here is my opinion. It may differ from other people, but I intend to hurt no body.

May be it is time that Mrs. Hamida Ali resigned. As much as I respect and admire her, it is a time for change. For 19 years, she has worked hard for this institution, has given everything. I believe she has nothing else to give. But, as I said, it is time for her to resign, not for somebody to remove her. It is her choice, supported by the decision of the governing body. The government has no say in it.

Viqarunnisa Noon School & College is an autonomous institution. The governing body is the supreme authority to run this institution. If they decide to give Mrs. Ali an extension, so be it. A democratic government should not interfere. The best they can do is to say that next time, make somebody else the Principal. Of course, this type of statement by the government has to be supported by

adequate reasons. After that, it is again the decision of the governing body. Unfortunately for the government, being a democratic one (as they claim themselves to be), they have to tolerate a whole lot of things, whether they like it or not. The decision of the Viqarunnisa Noon School & College governing body is one of them.

The rumour is that Mrs. Shahida Obayed, the principal of Government Titumir College, is going to be the new Principal of Viqarunnisa Noon School & College. The media seems to be more than happy to point out the fact that she is a BNP leader's wife. For Almighty's sake! She herself is a qualified person. Being the principal of Titumir College is no child's play. It would not hurt anybody to treat her accordingly.

If, on Mrs. Ali's resignation, I repeat, on her resignation, Mrs. Obayed is the best person to be the Principal of Viqarunnisa Noon School & College, why object to that? I personally would like to see the best-qualified person to be the Principal of my beloved institution.

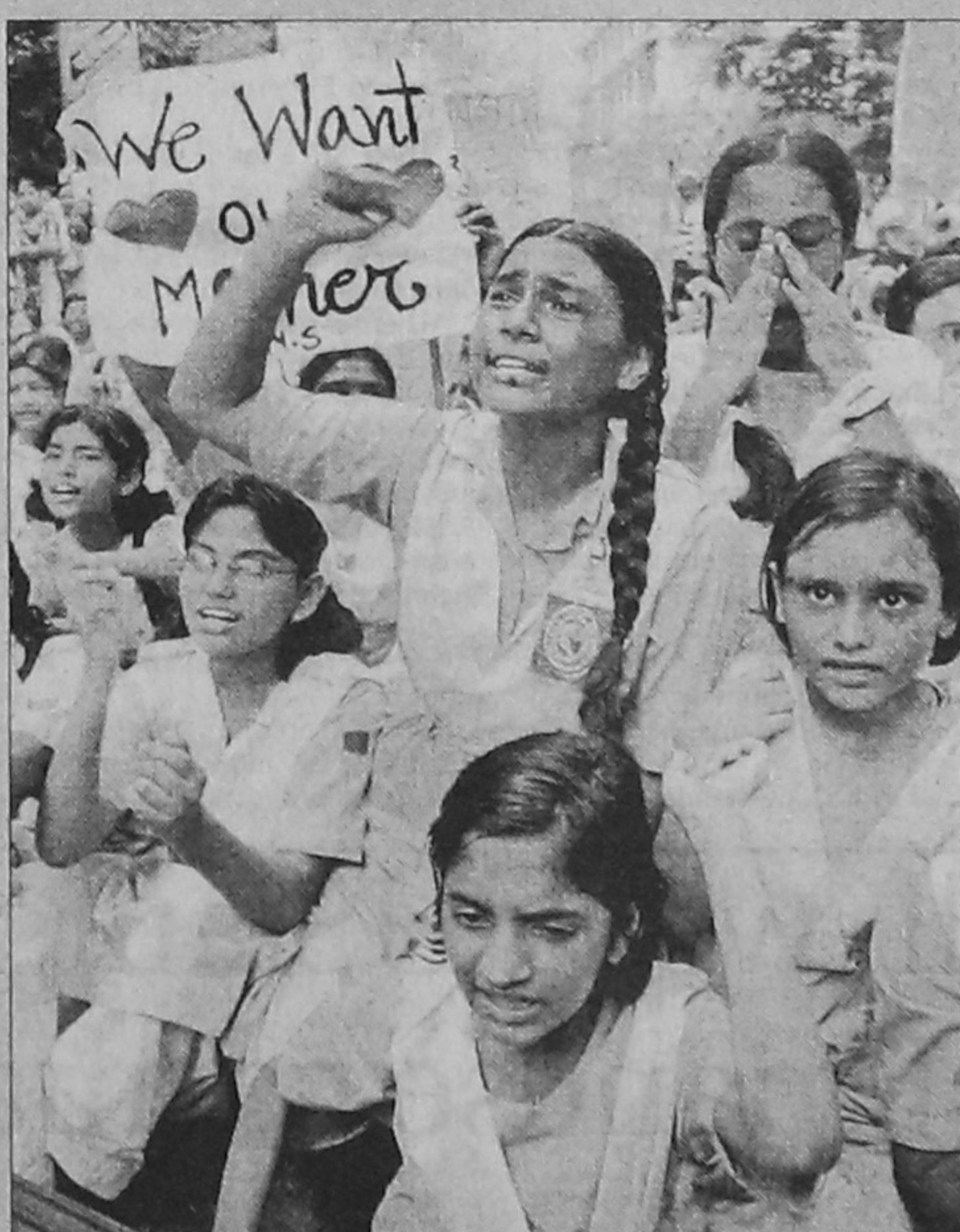
As for the current situation of the institution, strike is not the solution. The teachers and the guardians should know better than calling a strike, if not the students.

I know that the removal of Mrs. Ali is unlawful. But, there are other ways to solve the problem. A team of representatives from the students, teachers, and guardians can go to meet the Prime Minister and the Education Minister. Having a dialogue with them can bring out a solution. But, jeopardising the future of nearly 10,000 students is not a way to have a solution of this problem. Whoever advised the teachers to do that, is not a well-wisher of VNSC. Those people are out to destroy our beloved institution, an institution that has taken 50 years to build. And trust me, it will not take much to destroy the years of hard work. As members of Viqarunnisa family we all should remember that.

An ex-student
Viqarunnisa Noon School & College

What is the basic duty of a democratic government? Isn't it to decide what is best for the people and respect what the majority wants? Then why Hamida Ali Apa have to leave Viqarunnisa? The students, the teachers, the staff, the governing body, the guardians-- everybody wants her to remain as the Principal. Why is it so difficult for the government to comply with the majority's demand?

Leadership; yes Hamida Ali Apa has this rare quality and since 1981 she has proved her quality by turning Viqarunnisa into one of the best educational institutions of the country. She knows how to motivate the students to do something meaningful in life. I



Protest: with or without meaning?

opportunity to show the girls of Viqarunnisa the value of steadfast resolve, tact and civilised protest. Instead their parents are teaching them to damage cars.

Emile Dhaka

After going through the news, your editorial and Education Ministry's clarification regarding removal of Principal Hamida Ali it appeared to me there are two parts of the story. One is "political replacement" and the other is "service rule". If the removal decision is politically motivated to replace Shaheda Obaid, wife of the BNP's Standing Committee member KM Obaidur Rahman, then

this should be condemned and protested.

But the Education Ministry explained that after reaching the age of 60, Hamida Ali had enjoyed extension thrice and completed her 65 years of age limit on July 8 and it would be a violation of service rule if she were given further extension. Therefore, the protest is only for an exceptional extension.

No doubt, Hamida Ali had contributed a lot in turning the institution into an institution per excellence. Everybody has contribution in building a nation as well. It does not mean that one should hold a position lifelong. We cry for democracy, for rules and regulations but take to streets when our interest gets hurt.

Hamida Ali is a respected teacher and we must expect that she will not allow to use her students in protest procession like most of our political leaders who roars for the nation, but care more for personal interest. She should welcome a newcomer who needs veteran Hamida Ali's suggestion to further augment the image of Viqarunnisa.

I also, along with Gopal Sengupta (July 14) request the Education Minister not to be a part of the destruction process of one of the few standard educational institutions of our country. "Children deserve something better than petty politics".

Mohammad Alamgir
Alkaran, Chittagong

I came to know from *The Daily Star* that there are plans to replace the present Principal of Viqarunnisa by the wife of a leader of the ruling party who is the present principal of Titumir College. This is a very wrong decision.

Viqarunnisa has its own governing body so it is their right to change, hire, fire its Principal and it should not be done by any second group. Why should the government interfere with the affairs of a reputed private academic institution? This replacement will only result in the rise of student politics and will lead to a deterioration of standard and infrastructure of the school.

According to *The Daily Star* many parents, teachers and members of the governing body have shown their dissatisfaction towards the plan of replacing the principal. Ever since this government has come to power it is creating a series of problems. I request the government to stop interfering with private organisations and let Viqarunnisa run on its own.

I also suggest that in near future the chairman of the governing body of any of these schools, which are run privately, be a non political person.

Tarif R. Rahman
Cantonment, Dhaka