

Shihab murder: Justice not delayed, justice not denied

We, Bangladeshi people are very much used to not getting justice whatever the offence may be. And the process always takes such a long time.

But in Shihab murder case it was an exception. The judgement was not only just it would always be considered as a milestone of disposing a case in such a short time. I would like to thank the present government for monitoring this case with utmost importance. There are many other cases pending which needs to be tried as quickly as this one.

If this can be done people's faith will be restored in our legal system and rule of law may be established.

Md Abdur Rab
University of Alberta, Canada

UNDP's telecom woes

As sad as it is to admit, I am relieved that the UNDP has finally had it with the state telephone monopoly, the T&T Board. I say that only because I know the characteristics of our officialdom. They only notice public suffering when the mighty, the powerful, and specially the West-ern-type foreigners make an issue of it.

The fundamental matter, nonetheless, remains the same. Bangladesh has the worst, most costly, most corrupt, and least efficient telecommunications system in the whole world, the unworlly utterances of the Prime Minister notwithstanding. It is a system, which is built to the hilt to protect and preserve the racketeering gangs, also known as employee/labour unions. No wonder these lords of corruption fight tooth and nail at every mention of competition from private sources. If a private business acted like the T&T Board, it would go bankrupt in a few months and its employees booked on grand theft charges.

The solution to the problem is not easy, but it is simple. Denationalise and deregulate. The state telecom monopoly/thuggery needs to be abolished right now and the telecom sector opened up to everyone to compete with the best possible prices and customer service. And if that means that a few thousand corrupt thieves lose their livelihoods, so be it.

ES
Missouri, USA

Allow me to make a prediction. The BTB will say in its defence that the UNDP should have locked its telephone lines to prevent international calls. They totally overlook the fact that one cannot lock a phone line if it is out of order.

As they are the monopoly in fixed line telephones, they regularly abuse power in this manner. Just recently, BTB disconnected a telephone line and gave it to someone else for "non-payment" of telephone bills, even though all the bills had been paid.

The phone was out of order before the subscriber left the country for two and a half months during which time the phone was not in use. They did not even send a disconnection notice by registered post to him.

However, they claim that they tried to contact the subscriber over phone to inform him that his line was being disconnected. Complaints made by telephone are not valid, as they are not in writing and addressed to chairman, BTB. So complaining over the telephone is not a valid complaint, but informing someone over telephone, even if it is unreachable, about line disconnection is valid?

Now they are willing to reconnect him for an official reconnection fee of Tk 7,500 as and when lines are available. I will not mention the unofficial charges. There is no justice and the subscriber of the phone will remain ungrated for fear of further persecution from the BTB. This is in fact their official procedure and you can confirm it with BTB officials.

Another BTB sufferer
Dhaka

My immediate reaction to the news "Phoney bills irk UNDP" was all individuals involved in this should be identified forthwith, sacked and severely punished.

I am willing to back up and testify in favour of the UNDP Representative anytime. During the period March 1998 through December of 2000, I had the opportunity of working as the Common Premises Consultant for WFP by far the largest of the UN agencies operating in the country. Among others my responsibilities included transferring of the telephone lines of WFP to its current premises at the IDB Bhaban along with the entire office. I must admit dealing with the Telcom part of my responsibilities has been the hardest of them all, particularly once the office began its operations in the relocated premises.

On many occasions I had obtained direct orders from no less an individual than the Chairman himself duly endorsed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By the time I completed my assignment and left, there were still three connections left to be activated at three different residences of Expatriate officials.

Not only that dealing with T&T even on routine day to day follow-up actions has been a nightmare. In all fairness I see no alternative but

"Of immunity, arrogance and accountability"



Bumpy ride ahead?

today praised the Supreme Court. Thanks again to Afsan Chowdhury. Hashim Zaman, Banani, Dhaka

I agree with a great deal of what Mr. Afsan Chowdhury has written in his column about the World Bank and other UN organisations (July 16). I think we'd be hard up to find even one senior civil servant who doesn't consult for these people upon retirement. A number of civil servants also take sabbaticals during their career to do some consulting on the side as well.

This is one hell of a column. It really gives it to the stuffed shirts that work for the World Bank. There is more global literature on the Bank's incompetence than on any other organisation.

And I have personally seen the way the 'local lads' are treated by the international staff. Interestingly, yesterday the World Bank called for establishing an accountability commission and

The UN, World Bank etc. are the feeding trough for all those third world people (women encouraged to apply) with too many PhD's. One of the frequent excuses I hear about why their salaries are so high is that such qualified people would command equal or greater money in the private sector.

Their arrogance, even the drivers' is a wonder to behold. I once almost got into a fight with a *deshi* UNICEF talking head who was hectoring me on my duties towards the poor.

Don't get me wrong, I am for globalisation and even support unilateral trade liberalisation. I am also for removing the dead hand of the government from every aspect of our lives. Therefore I agree with a great deal of what the IMF and WB try to achieve.

Astreix, Dhaka

The response by the Staff association was hilarious at worst and ludicrous at best. Do those people know what people outside think of them? They are the world's most overpaid bureaucrats and miles and miles of resolutions can be written on what they do.

Adnan Khan, Shajahanpur, Dhaka

Why didn't Afsan Chowdhury mention what the World Bank has been accused of in China and Latin America (www.tibet.ca/wtnarchive) What happened to the independent commission report on the topic?
Faruk Hossain, Dhaka

to privatise the Telecom Sector as soon as possible. This will not only improve and streamline the entire service industry but at the same time help the progress of the vital IT sector.

Shamsher Chowdhury
Texas, USA

ETV affair

I am shocked at the recent developments regarding ETV, the most popular TV media in the country. The judgement of the appellate division of the Supreme Court has practically sealed the fate of the ETV.

The ETV is almost on the verge of its closure (at least it seems so) for the illegal act the authority had committed. Who are the persons responsible for this glaring offence? Many ETV officials and employees are now facing uncertainty about their job because of a few people.

I admire your editorial on the issue when you said none should cut corners in the laws. I also won-

while the culprits responsible must be punished no matter who they are.
M Ashraf Huj
Dhaka

Shazneen rape case

I find it rather disgusting to publish the picture of Shazneen-- a victim instead of the accused. She has been violated and murdered. Society has failed to protect her. She was a minor girl only fifteen years of age and a whole life was ahead of her but was cut down short by some animal who deserve exemplary punishment.

She and her family do not need any more publicity and should be left alone. Publishing her photograph would no way discourage rape in the country.

Mohammed Basith
One-mail

Why this grudge?

It seems that our Finance Minister really has a personal grudge against the RMG sector! How else could he

providing employment to masses of hapless women.

Grameen Bank has earned international acclaim for empowering women through extending micro-credit. So, the least that the garments sector expects from our own government is being spared from the verbal abuse every now and then by its minister(s). In absence of this sector would it have been possible for the government to offer any dignified jobs for such a large population lacking literacy?

The turnover of the total sector is supporting countless other people--bankers, insurers, C&F agents, shipping agents, local fabrics/accessories suppliers, to name just a few. Directly or indirectly they are also paying Income Tax, VAT, etc. Instead of castigating his own countrymen the Finance Minister would do better to check the "contribution" of the foreigners in EPZs who get so many facilities/exemptions/incentives.

Also he should seriously check the "bleeding" of the national econ-

The paper on July 15 quotes the Minister as having said "The garment industries are the only sector that contributes nothing to the national economy".

I refuse to believe that Saifur is unaware that the RMG industry employs millions of people both directly and indirectly as well as earning 75 per cent of our nation's foreign exchange. He must know that the packaging, freight forwarding, accessories, embroidery, washing industries and BNP supported garment worker trade unions are all directly dependent on the RMG industry.

It is the contribution of the RMG industry, which allows the government to buy \$500 million frigates that don't work.

Dorji
Dhaka

Who's Bush to threaten Saddam's ouster?

I am baffled, disgruntled and extremely disappointed for there was hardly any anguish or row visible in the world community on Bush threatening to ouster Shaddam! If there is any term as 'state terrorism' be attributed to Iraq, then the first and foremost declaration should be made of USA and Israel in general, and Bush and Sharon in particular.

I hail China's bold declaration that "Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be completely respected", and its "sovereignty should not be violated" and "dealing with state to state relations, should be according to UN charter and norms governing international relations". I am very pleased and happy to note that they are sincerely "opposed to the wilful threat of use of force". Have all other leaders of the world taking a siesta?

Bush has been after the Iraqis 'loving President Saddam Hossain' since he took over power. And after his failure to bring out any result out of his conspiracies to bring the downfall of Saddam he (Bush) has gone berserk and talking absurd to use "all tools" at his disposal to remove Saddam.

Saddam Hussain is the undisputed leader of Iraq. Iraq is a sovereign state and if he has to go it is his people who will decide that. Who is Bush to dictate or declare that he has to be removed to make the world a safer place?
AF Rahman
Dhaka

MIGS

I don't like BNP but I must now grudgingly give Khaleda Zia her dues for having done a brave thing by putting an end to the MIG black hole.

For quite a while earlier this year, I had argued against the MIGs. My point was basically that they do not fit our defence scenario and given

our limited budget and our strategic threats, there are other means of defence, which would have made more sense, both militarily and financially. For a while I became the most vilified contributor to the letters page, with readers alternatively arguing over military strategy and others suggesting that I am lynched.

So it comes as great pleasure to see that I may well have been on the right track with my arguments.

On a less positive note, was I alone in detecting hints that we might now buy Chinese? The bewailing about our pitiful and unnecessary air force gave hints to that, as well as the lament about not taking up the Chinese offer earlier. I hope not. Apart from being another colossal waste of money, I know next to nothing about Chinese fighters. But one thing I do know though, even the Chinese buy foreign when they can afford it.

I do think *The Daily Star* report may have been more informative if it had gone on to explain why the US discouraged us to buy the MIGs. Was it because the US also considered them a waste of money or was there any other motive? The article disappointingly leaves that question unanswered.

Biggles
Dhaka

Filling station strike

I am a bit confused about the filling station strike. At first I thought it had been called off because the threat of a strike already achieved the dealers aims of selling out all their stock to panicky customers. Now I see that the government has yet again caved in to another pressure group. At this rate the only group who will continue to be taxed will be the middle-class.

The report is quite funny; it says the government will form a committee to propose a logical commission. That is a double logical retreat by the government. In the first place forming a committee in civil service lingo means to shelve an issue till eternity. But the Minister accepting that the government's initial commission was also illogical has taken a double slap in the face.

Then I see that the Minister promised allocations of firearms licenses on a flexible condition. What does that mean? Tankers owned by BNP men will have drivers armed with guns? Madness.
Satyajit, Dhaka

Debate on Ataturk

I am enjoying the debate on Kemal Ataturk and frankly, I didn't understand why Mr. Reazul Mahmud expressed his disapproval and said that the debate on Ataturk in a Bangladeshi newspaper is totally meaningless (July 16).

I understand that we have myriad of problems of our own. But staying ignorant about the world won't solve our problems.

Debating on Ataturk is not irrelevant to us at all. We sometimes need to know the past to understand the present situation and that includes incidents beyond our borders.

As far as Ataturk is concerned, because of our ignorance we are composing prose, poems, and songs praising him. Not only that, we are naming our streets and business establishments after him like Kamal Ataturk Avenue, Ataturk Restaurant, etc...
Chatpoti Tulip
Bhoorer Goli, Dhaka

Subcontinent education

Following on from the article by MJ Zahedi, I think I can throw some light on the university qualifications of Benazir Bhutto-- even though I am a long way away from my address book with the necessary phone number in it to check! She was at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, some years after me. (I was there 1957-61 and again, for a second degree, 1968-70.)

At Oxford, a Diploma is a post-graduate qualification. If she does indeed have a Diploma in International Law and Diplomacy, then she must have taken a bachelor's

degree first, either in the UK or in a university whose standard was accepted by Oxford University. (Not all bachelors' degrees from other countries are accepted as up to UK standards.)

However, the article was also about the new regulation that those wishing to serve national or provincial assemblies in Pakistan should have university degrees. This reveals the touching faith of the sub-continent in education as the communicator of moral values. However, as the song says, "It ain't necessarily so!"

The students here have an appalling attitude to authority - outward respect combined with inward contempt! For such students, when exams come, the only way of passing is 'unfair means'.

does not need to have any formal education, let alone graduating from those "cheap" Bengali medium schools. In real world, it is the graduates of Bengali medium schools who end up doing much better academically and professionally than the students from English medium schools.

I think Mr./Ms. SBS has every right to be concerned about the price hike of the new budget. It is the middle-class people like SBS who contribute the most for the economy whose fruit is reaped by the upper class people. These upper class people are not the ones who are affected by this budget rather it's the poor and middle-class who are working hard to make their ends meet and also dreaming of their kids to be educated in English medium

Editorial privileges



The right to say, the right to edit

I am a great fan of your letters page and I certainly appreciate the time and manpower you obviously give to make it as interesting and diverse as it is. One of the aspects I particularly like is the full-page format. It just seems more conducive to productive as well as frivolous entertaining arguments than the usual quarter or half page letters sections.

In regards to the recent letters about Editorial privileges I wouldn't agree that it is intimidating to write confrontational letters to the paper. *The Daily Star* is usually quite generous in printing letters critical even hostile to its reports particularly its editorials. To err is human and often the editorial page has articles that are erroneous or simply biased. I think almost every editorial writer has faced the barbs of angry readers through the letters page. I suspect that the readers of *The Daily Star* are particularly alert to the point of being pedantic about perceived manifestations of favouritism and historical or political misinterpretation. But that's what makes it so enjoyable and the writer's jobs so much more difficult.

Of course when you write a letter attacking one of the senior editorial writers, it is understandable to wonder if the Editor will abuse their privilege and print the letter out of context. I am constantly amazed that my letters are printed at all and having written quite a few letters highly and personally critical of *The Daily Star* staff, I can say with a good deal of confidence that the Editor's do not try to excise negative views. I think that may be one of the reasons why the letter's page is a lot of peoples' favourite.

The editor of course has the right to amend for content, length etc. No one likes to have their letter edited but it is a perfectly acceptable and normal occurrence. I do not agree, however, with the editing for personal references and religious sentiments. That seems to me to be dangerously close to censorship. What's wrong with printing a letter insulting or insinuating something against a Minister, for example? If I were to write a letter attacking Mr. Mahfuz Anam, that would more likely than not, be published prominently. The same applies for expunging letters in respect of religious sentiments. I am not saying that hateful malicious letters be published. But letters critical of a particular politician or for the matter the predominant religion of our country should be permitted for the sake of diversity.

The Editor however does occasionally not just edit letters but rewrite them. To the extent that what is eventually printed is totally out of context to what the writer had intended. In such cases where eighty per cent of the letter printed is rewritten wouldn't it make more sense to use an assumed name rather than the original writer's?
MA, Dhaka

Learning to be clever does not necessarily mean learning to be wise.

All in education should take note of the dictum - "Education just turns devils into clever devils."
Angela MV Robinson (Rev Mrs)
Dhaka

"New budget for a middle-income family"

This is in response to the series of letters regarding "New budget for a middle-income family". I find it absolutely ridiculous and audacious of Mr. Jahir to make the derogatory remarks about Bengali medium schools. His attempt to implicate students of Bengali medium schools for the sorry and pathetic political system of Bangladesh is simply outrageous. Perhaps Mr. Jahir has forgotten that in order to ascend to a cabinet position in Bangladesh one

schools. Surely the budget seem to be welcoming to the upper class people since it literally reduces tax burden of the rich people while penalising the poor.

It is the middle-class who creates uproar about the budget because for them every paisa is hard earned unlike others who live on others and dream about sending their kids to English medium schools. It's not the question of English or Bengali medium, it is the question of affordability and making of a good honest human being.
T Sengupta
Canada

JCD

I am amazed and shocked. Not that JCD men are extortionists, nor that they were arrested although I am a bit surprised that the police dared to arrest these soon to be prisoners of conscience. My amazement is that the PM hasn't yet accused the media of distorting the reports. I had half expected to see a report in one of those Pravda type papers that these JCD men are actually BCL pretenders who wanted to tarnish the reputations of the loyal JCD chaps.

Well what does the Deputy Secretary General of the BNP and soon to be PM, have to say about this? Can BNP still claim with a straight face that their mandate was to restore law and order?
Shonku
Dhaka

Telephone trouble

We all heard about Saifur Rahman's announcement about decreasing installation charge of land phones. But from when? Will it take next five years for this government to fulfil this? We all were delighted hearing that the demand money for land phones has been decreased from 14,400 to 10,000 only. We saw several reports published in the national dailies. The Radio and the TV also broadcast the same. But when a client goes for a demand note for land phones, he is asked to give the same amount money one used to pay earlier. So nothing has changed has it?

Hamida Ali hands over charge: Who's benefited?

I have been curiously following the news regarding recent turmoil in Viqarunnisa School. Rather than commenting on this very situation I would like to share my different observation with other fellow readers.

The socio-political situation of our country has reached in such a point now, that everything seemingly tends to tie itself up with nasty politicisation. And it's very easy for the vested quarters to manipulate any situation whenever they are able to hook it up with a political issue. Nobody really pay heed to what the laws are and what should be done for the greater interest of the society.
Zafar Hadi
On e-mail

Mrs. Hamida Ali, Principal of Viqarunnisa School and College, had to leave the institution under the blunt tactics and nasty moves of the government. To impose its decision, the government denied the decision of the governing body of the school to extend the service of the Principal. They prevented the students from entering the school by imposing barricades by police at different roads. They closed the school so that the students can't demonstrate their support for their Principal.

When nothing was working to cool down the sentiment of the students, guardians and teachers, they dissolved the governing body and made one of their own. They took fresh resolution not to extend the service of the principal. The government gave no importance to the sentiments expressed by different quarters of the country nor they felt obliged to show any respect to one of the most successful teachers of our country.

Outwardly, the government might have won this small battle but in reality they lost more grounds from the heart of the people who's silently observing the autocracy of the government.

BD
Chittagong

The PM has expressed her desire to ban student politics, which is widely acclaimed. But the incident of VNSC principal stinks of politicising the education system.

MAH
Dhaka

I read the news of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College with keen curiosity. It seemed that finally the war came to an end. After reading the news a few questions were buzzing in my mind.

The Principal of VNSC has done a great job for the school. She has been an effective and committed educational leader. She deserves a great deal. I also think the governing body acted very responsibly and rationally.

My questions are why did the resolution of extension of the Principal submit to the Chairman of Dhaka Board on July 8, 2002, while her previous contract ends on July 9, 2002? What did they have in their mind for submitting it at the eleventh hour?

The governing body and the Principal, I am sure, know the service rules of the board very well. Then why did the governing body and Principal decide what is unlawful and not practised? If the concerned parties were really interested and sincere about keeping the Principal another tenure, why did they not consult the Dhaka board about this? The board has legal consultant to deal with such issues. Why did the concerned parties not prepare or look for a competent Principal with enough time in hand to sustain the good will?

I am really interested to what are stories behind the story?



Education or politics

Leo Pereira
University of Portland

This refers to the Education Minister's reaction to the Hamida Ali issue at Viqarunnisa School. If the students of a private educational institution want a teacher to continue his/her duty, the Ministry should by all means let it be.

Daiyaan Murshed
Ispahani Colony, Dhaka