

Congratulations Tigers

Let the win make the team stronger

WHEN something is achieved after a long period of struggle, it feels more than just great. That's how we all felt when Bangladesh cricket team broke the jinx and won the one-day match against Zimbabwe on Wednesday. And why not? -- it was their first win in five years after Pakistan lost to them in a World Cup encounter. The victory has come in the wake of losing 47 matches at a stretch. And when the actual win came, their joy knew no bounds, especially because they felt their test status stood vindicated. It is a success we are all going to cherish and want to see replicated.

It wasn't so easy, though; and it never is. We all had the thought of defeat in our mind even during this match. The Tigers scored a decent enough total in their innings, but that surely was not considered enough to ensure a win. In fact, at one stage, it looked as though the match was slipping away from Bangladesh when Zimbabwe scored a formidable 121 for one wicket in just 20 overs. But grit and playing to potential secured the long awaited win in the end. Hopefully, it is not going to be a flash in the pan.

The win in Harare was a late bloomer, but let the players draw on it as an encouraging reference-point. Victory for all the big teams in the world came late. And that's precisely why the celebrations of such a victory are so satisfying. We savour the sweet taste of success. The win has shown us that with the heart and mind at the right place, we can achieve what we set out to -- and more. We only have one message for the Tigers -- don't be tense, just relax and play your game as you did in the trying moments of the last one day.

What brand of democracy is this?

Retaliatory strike abominable

WHILE we reserve our opinion on the emergence of a 'third force' in the political arena and the defection from the ruling party, we cannot but express our utter disgust over the reactive incidents that took place following the developments.

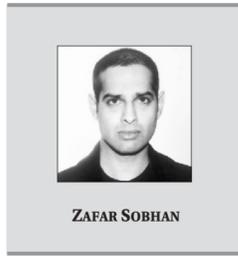
It defies understanding why Dr. B Choudhury has not been given permission for using microphone in a meeting. Then there were midnight attacks on the dais built for holding the first public meeting of the BNP quitters and other like-minded political leaders. Worse still, the private clinic of Dr. Choudhury came under bomb attacks the same night. It suddenly appears that political dissent is an unpardonable sin that has to be punished in the crudest of ways. How else can one explain intolerance of such a kind?

Manifestation of such political vandalism is repugnant to all democratic sensibilities, and, therefore, unacceptable. The question that arises for obvious reasons is, what brand of democracy is the ruling alliance practising? The general masses get the impression that such attacks couldn't have been carried out without some kind of a nod from the leadership of the party in power. It is difficult to wish away such popular belief when power that be failed to demonstrate a minimum adherence to the rules of the game.

But the BNP was not quite known for such treatment of its political adversaries and defectors in the past. Even a layperson should be able to surmise that such activities cannot portend anything auspicious for the party, or society as a whole. Why this journey backwards? The political parties showed a greater measure of maturity when democracy was established after a long struggle in the early nineties. Why have they not learned that in a democratic system there is no room for the highhandedness that the BNP dissenters have been subjected to? The BNP general secretary has said that his party is totally unperturbed by the exit of the two lawmakers. But this nonchalance is not reflected in the incidents that we have witnessed so far.

We do not, however, want to delve into the complex psychological phenomenon of how precisely a party should respond to defections. But what we have to say in clear terms is that nothing should be done in violation of the law. It is not the first time that leaders of a party have quit it, citing a host of reasons in support of their decision. The BNP should have been able to avoid the retaliatory reaction manifested by some of its activists. Let democracy not get any further beating.

Mithu's story



ZAFAR SOBHAN

LAST week I met Shafiq Huq Mithu, the Pirojpur correspondent of the Dainik Janakantha, at a gathering held for the visiting CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists) delegation. I am afraid that there was little pleasure in the meeting for Mithu. He was in too much pain. His right arm was in a cast and lines of distress were etched into his face. He held a glass of water in his left hand and explained that he wouldn't be eating because his right arm was still shattered and useless. At home, he is hand-fed by his family, but he was too embarrassed to ask anyone at the reception to perform this function for him, and did not feel comfortable eating with his left hand. He would eat when he got home.

Mithu had been attacked and left for dead by three hired killers on December 28. The killers repeatedly beat him around the head and body with pipes and other blunt instruments, breaking his right arm in several places and knocking him unconscious. He was only saved by the intercession of passers-by who heard his cries for help and happened on the scene, causing his assailants to flee before they could complete their grisly assignment.

Even though the attack on Mithu took place almost two and a half months ago, he is still wracked with pain. His right arm is far from fully healed and he is hoping to raise enough money to be able to travel abroad to have it properly fixed. The bones are so shattered that simply putting his arm in a cast and waiting for it to mend, as he has done, will not be sufficient if he wishes to ever regain full use of his right arm again.

district who received death threats from an unnamed group for his writing.

On December 17, 2003, Mithu filed a story on the plight of the minority community living on the riverine island of Chor Banari.

The minority community of the island has been farming rice and raising fish there since the 1940s despite periodic attempts by various factions to have them dispossessed and to take over

fish from ponds owned by members of the community. When the locals attempted to resist them, they were severely beaten, resulting in eight locals, including six women, being hospitalised with serious injuries. In the aftermath of this incident, Mithu reported, the members of the island's minority community did not dare leave their homes and were bracing themselves for another attack.

It was in reprisal for this report

disappearing. He was set upon by his assailants shortly afterwards.

One of his assailants, a locally well-known hired goon by the name of Russell was apprehended at the scene of the crime by the public who had rushed to the scene on hearing Mithu's cries for help. Russell was immediately taken into custody, but no charges were framed against him until this week. The police superintendent claimed that he was

freely and has been spotted at political meetings and functions in the past two months.

It remains to be seen whether the case against Russell, Arun and Kamal will come to anything. The government does not have much of a track record in aggressively prosecuting attacks on journalists. Nor is the police making any discernible effort to get to the bottom of who was ultimately behind the attack on Mithu. Despite his statements on the matter as to the threats he had received prior to his attack, and the other persuasive corroborating evidence for who might have ordered his killing, the police have shown no enthusiasm for expanding the scope of their investigation to pursue the real culprits.

Mithu is a brave man. He tells me that the violence he has suffered will not keep him from writing the stories that he believes the public needs to know. But who knows how many other newsmen have been silenced, either through violence meted out to them in reprisal for their writing, or by the threat of violence. The freedom to print stories that might be critical of the government, or cause it embarrassment, is a fundamental right, and is crucial to the effective functioning of a democracy. If the media is not permitted to bring stories of official misconduct to the public eye or is intimidated into not pursuing stories by the threat of reprisal, then there is no mechanism left to ensure the accountability of the government for its actions.

Zafar Sobhan is an Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

STRAIGHT TALK

The freedom to print stories that might be critical of the government, or cause it embarrassment, is a fundamental right, and is crucial to the effective functioning of a democracy. If the media is not permitted to bring stories of official misconduct to the public eye or is intimidated into not pursuing stories by the threat of reprisal, then there is no mechanism left to ensure the accountability of the government for its actions.

Mithu still suffers from blinding headaches due to the severity of the blows that he received to the back of his head, and complains genteelly of the pain he still has all over his body due to the brutality of the beating that he received. Such was the ferocity of the attack on him that there is little doubt that his assailants were intending to kill him. The charge-sheet that has been framed against his assailants charges them with attempted murder.

Mithu's case is instructive. He has long been a bold and courageous voice speaking out against injustice and oppression. His writing had been especially critical of local MPs Delwar Hossain Saidee and Shahidul Huq Jamal. Back in July 2003, Mithu was one of seven journalists in Pirojpur

their land. Back in 1994, one local minority landowner was murdered and over a dozen minority households were burned to the ground in efforts to intimidate and terrorise the local minority population.

Mithu's piece detailed the continuing perils of the minority community on the island who live under constant threat of violence and warnings to leave the area. Mithu's piece specifically focused on the efforts of a gang of hoodlums under the alleged command of a man named Mujibur Molla and supported by the local BNP to seize by force 85 acres of minority-owned land.

Mithu reported how a group of over a hundred gangsters landed on the island and forcibly took over 20 acres of land and looted

as well as his other writings antagonistic to the Jamaat and the BNP, that Mithu believes he was targeted.

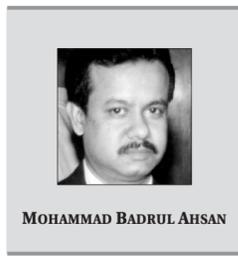
In the days following the publication of his piece, Mithu noticed that he was being tailed by ruling alliance activists. Local ruling alliance activists Akram Molla, Chowra Kamal, Reazuddin Rana and Moulana Shafiq repeatedly sought him out and threatened him. Local political leaders, including MPs Shahidul Huq Jamal and Delwar Hossain Saidee, spoke virulently against his writings at public meetings.

This is the background to the brutal attack Mithu suffered on December 28. As he left the Pirojpur Press Club late that night, he once again spotted Akram, Chowra Kamal and Rana tailing him for a short time before

powerless to act as he was under extreme pressure from influential local politicians.

It was not until after Mithu had met with the CPJ delegation, and they had mentioned his case at a press conference and publicised it in their report that, his three assailants were finally officially charged with attempted murder earlier this week. Despite the fact that he was caught at the scene of the crime, had been identified by Mithu and countless eyewitnesses, and has spent the last two and a half months in police custody, Russell was not officially charged until this week. His two accomplices, Arun and Kamal, whom he has identified, have yet to be arrested by the police, who claim to be unaware of their whereabouts, despite reports that Kamal is moving around

Don't call it marriage



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THERE was a time when marriages worked like magnets: repulsion between identical poles and attraction between opposite ones. Man married woman, and that was it. Opposite sex was the foundation of marriage. But that's not how it goes anymore. Now man marries man, woman marries woman, and marriages work a lot like restrooms. Women go with women and men go with men, never mind what happens in the bedrooms.

You could blame it on love. Man falls in love with man and woman falls in love with woman, when more than friendship it leads to marriage. Nearly 6000 same-sex people got married in the City Hall of San Francisco by the end of last month. What can you say? Birds of same feather like to stick together. And they want to take their vows.

Look at the rest of the industrialised world, where people don't even want to take those vows. In the 15 countries of the European Union, almost no one gets married anymore. In Sweden, 76 percent of all couples aged 16 to

29 are living together. In a Roman Catholic country like France, the number of cohabiting couples is as high as 50 percent.

Say, what is happening to old-fashioned marriage? Of course, nobody is saying it will not be there. But if you take out the same-sex marriage and its living-together cousin, what is left may not come to much. Marriage as an institution is going bankrupt, if you know what it means. It's going the way of an overused joke. Peo-

panionship. You want family, home, and children who will live for you when you are gone. Marriage, I guess, is all about that and it takes two to do that tango, a man and a woman, who can make love, raise children and bring the mysteries of yin and yang.

Take that book and give it a cover, which is the face of people who are involved. Is it the same book when a man covets another man or a woman covets another woman? The answer is no,

thing for woman, and she has the right to feel good and happy.

But think of them as parents by adoption or artificial insemination. Think of children growing up in a house where both parents shave in the morning or trim their beards and moustaches on Fridays. Or, think of a house where both parents are women, its clothesline displaying panties, bras, skirts, blouses and breeches day after day. More importantly, think about a

woman marriage, the liberation of women and their rights harnessed at great costs. But the same-sex couples are throwing it away. It is known that one of the spouses is submissive and another is dominant. The old controversy will start afresh. Who will wear the pants in the house?

Other things also come to mind. Who will touch, and who will blush? Who will wear cologne and who will wear perfume? How will you address them? Will both be

And love is blind, because when the heart opens wide, the eyes get shut. So who can mind when a man falls in love with a man and women follow suit? People even fall in love with animals, and Hindu ritual has it to marry spinsters with the trees.

The same-sex marriage cannot be worse than that, but somehow it grates the mind. Not because it's right or wrong, but the sanctity of marriage suffers in the translation. Marriages are all about homes where families bring heaven on earth, where children grow in the shadow of their parents, one mother, one father, who give them a healthy balance of body and mind. And that balance comes from the draft of air these children breathe, which draws whiffs of both perfume and cologne.

Every relationship has a name. Man is husband, woman is wife, and then children have their father, mother, aunt, grandma and grandpa. Marriage is also a name given to particular brand of relationship, the brand, which speaks of natural union between man and woman. This union both covets and begets. It's a thoroughfare not a dead end.

The same-sex union is as much a marriage as an artificial lagoon is a lake. Two men cannot procreate; neither can two women. Two invaders or two castrators don't make the game. Call it cohabitation, contract, lease of love, or anything else. But don't call it marriage. Inky-stinky. It simply doesn't make sense.

When two people fall in love, it opens up the gates of heaven.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

Every relationship has a name. Man is husband, woman is wife, and then children have their father, mother, aunt, uncle, grandma and grandpa. Marriage is also a name given to particular brand of relationship, the brand, which speaks of natural union between man and woman. This union both covets and begets. It's a thoroughfare not a dead end. The same-sex union is as much a marriage as an artificial lagoon is a lake... Call it cohabitation, contract, lease of love, or anything else. But don't call it marriage... It simply doesn't make sense.

ple may still want to hear it, but don't expect to get a good laugh.

Let us say we understand it, people may want to have the freedom, which is inhibited by marriage. Let us even say we understand why some people may think it's not wise to buy books when there is a public library in town. But how do you explain the other thing, when people are influenced not by the books but by their covers?

After all, the idea of marriage is like a book that tells a story. You want certain things out of life, more than sex, more than com-

panionship and sex may be there, the conjugal touch is missing. Yes, men or women who fall in love with each other might take up the roles of man and wife. But what will happen to the family portrait? It will look like a picture from fraternity or sorority house.

The same-sex affinity isn't new, and it has been there for as long as time. The itch in the flesh can be a glitch, which can lead to an aberration. But this is one closet that people carried inside them until they started to come out. Okay, okay. Man is mortal and let him be spunky for what he likes. Same

boy growing up in an all-female house or a girl growing up in an all-male house.

Even worse for boys, who will grow up with male parents, and for girls, who will grow up with female ones. They will have one-sided view of samesided world, either male or female, where one parent will differ from another not by quality but by degree of sex, more masculine or more feminine, when compared to each other.

Will it not put the clock backward? Mankind has struggled for centuries to bring balance in man-

ners, or will both be missuses? How will census workers show it in their surveys? One man, one woman or two men, two women?

Of course, there will be benefits as well. You will need one wardrobe in the house, probably same size everything so that both spouses can wear them. Each will have a resident best friend, man to talk man things, and woman to talk woman things. One spouse will find another as more of her or more of him. Betcha. It's gonna be lots of fun, I tell you!

When two people fall in love, it opens up the gates of heaven.

OPINION

Whither Karnafuli Bridge?

DR MOHAMMED A MABUD

THE existing Karnafuli Bridge which connects Chittagong city and rest Bangladesh with south Chittagong comprising five Upazilas and Cox's Bazar district will soon go beyond repair and out of use. This will cost not only the people of Chittagong heavily, but also the nation as a whole. Being aware of this impending danger, the people of Chittagong alarmed the previous government, but unfortunately, it did not give due attention to this matter. The present government, soon after assuming power, announced that it would construct a new bridge somewhat close to the existing one and explore assistance from the development partners for this bridge of great national importance.

The members of the parliament, including several ministers who hail from Chittagong promised to their respective electorates that they would give utmost

priority to the construction of the Karnafuli Bridge, if BNP-led coalition was voted to power. The people, in good faith, trusted them and got them elected with an overwhelming majority as far as Chittagong and Cox's Bazar are concerned. Although two and a half years have passed since then, there is nothing on the ground to believe that the present government has done anything credible in this respect.

When Prime Minister Khaleda Zia last visited Chittagong to lay the foundation stone of the Asian University for Women, the people of Chittagong were then eagerly waiting to see that she would lay the foundation stone of the Karanafuli Bridge too. But to their utter dismay, nothing happened and even not an official explanation given about the reasons for inordinate delay by the Ministry of Communication. The people of Chittagong, may the nation as a whole is now anxious to hear the reasons for such long delay.

Sometime in last January,

news media revealed the Foreign Minister Morshed Khan was negotiating with the Japanese government for assistance, while the Netherlands's assistance was reportedly ensured. The truth of this matter is, however, unknown to the general public. Hence, doubt has arisen regarding the extent of Government's efforts in this respect and the outcome of their negotiation.

The communication sector which handles about one-fourth of the development budget that may be in the order to Tk 3500 to Tk 4000 crores per year is supposed to pay due attention to this crucial component of communication. The estimated cost of the bridge could be anywhere between Tk 400 and Tk 500 crores which is roughly one-eighth of its ADP allocation. If the ministry wishes to give due priority, which it deserves, it could start with its own budget allocation. While setting priority, importance wise Karnafuli Bridge deserves to be on the top of the list. Providing Taka-4 hundred crores through

intersectoral adjustment, though difficult, should have been done for a work of national priority like the construction of Karnafuli Bridge.

The government's current foreign policy is based on "Look east" implying that it sincerely wants to establish and culture better relationship through economic and business cooperation with the countries like Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan etc. India is going to construct a long highway up to Thailand through Myanmar to strengthen their existing bilateral cooperation with these countries. Bangladesh is reportedly planning to link itself with that highway through Myanmar upto Thailand. Obviously, such link-highway can only be done through Chittagong. In order to achieve this highway-link with India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway, the government has to construct the proposed Karnafuli Bridge. Therefore, delay in constructing it means the delay in achieving the multiple benefits

which the government's "Look East" policy is intended to bring about.

Due to delay in constructing the bridge, one is inclined to raise some heart searching questions such as: what is being done by the Ministry of Communication? Why has it been silent about the construction of proposed bridge? The reasons for asking these questions are that the people are not seeing on the ground any site plan, nor approach-roads on both sides up to the river Karnafuli where the bridge would be actually constructed. The people are now disappointed to see that these basic prerequisites have not yet been met not to speak of the construction of bridge itself.

The Bridge has a heavy political cost. The political parties perceive the strong felt-need of the people and then they promise to fulfil it. No party can win their heart, if they remain oblivious of their strong felt-need. The need for another bridge was felt soon after the damage to the existing

bridge was caused by strong cyclone and tidal wave during early part of then BNP rule (1991-96). At that time Oli Ahmed was in charge of communication ministry. After the damaged part of the bridge was repaired, the BNP government forgot to construct the new bridge. Needless to say that the existing bridge was found to be defective right from the beginning, and hence, the need for constructing another bridge was greatly felt.

Unfortunately, the Awami League government gave no priority to this important matter. The people got vexed at them and so they did not vote for the Awami League candidates in the last general election. This is, in my view, a major factor for the defeats of their candidates. The BNP candidates could read the minds of the people and they promised to construct a new bridge which might be the main reason for their victory in the election. Now the people of Chittagong have realised that the present government is also

neglecting it and that the trust reposed in them is perhaps going to be belied once again!

Population of Chittagong city has more than tripled in less than three decades. Its estimated population is now 4.0 million. With 5.0 percent annual rate of growth, it will be double in the next 14 or 15 years. The capacity to expand the city itself towards east, north and west is limited. Its expansion is possible only towards the south i.e. on the other side of the river Karnafuli. Hence, the urgent need for a stable bridge over the river has arisen. The Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) has already developed there a big housing estate. The private sector has meanwhile set up several industries and business enterprises. In spite of all these development, it is not understood why the construction of the bridge has been so delayed.

Government has declared Chittagong city as the commercial capital of Bangladesh.

Consistent with this declaration, it needs to take some necessary actions for developing infrastructures, such as this bridge. The Ministry of commerce has not yet shifted the office of the Chief Controller of Export & Import and Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) to cite a few examples of dillydallying. Direct air service has not yet been established between Jessore-Chittagong and Sylhet-Chittagong in order to enable the people of those regions to come for business purposes to Chittagong. In fact, things which the government can do have not yet been done to make the Chittagong city a viable commercial capital of Bangladesh. Perhaps it is high time for the Prime Minister herself to look into these urgent issues.

Dr Mohammed A Mabud is former Division Chief, Bangladesh Planning Commission.