

## Court ruling

### People's right to know upheld

We are heartened by the fact that the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court has taken forthright decisions on two points laid before it. First, it rejected the plea to ban media coverage of the construction work at the JS complex. Second, it did not grant another prayer for a stay of the High Court order that declared construction of two buildings on the site illegal.

It may be recalled here that the High Court had given the ruling on June 21 that construction of the residences of the speaker and the deputy speaker had violated the original design prepared by Louis Kahn. It also directed the cultural affairs ministry to preserve Louis Kahn's architectural monument by declaring it a national heritage.

It must not be forgotten that it is the media coverage which brought the matter into public focus. The concerns of environmentalists, architects and all conscious citizens of the country were reflected in the media reports, which worked as an effective vehicle for bringing up an important issue before the people. So it comes to us as a big surprise as to why there should be a plea against media coverage of the construction work. What will freedom of expression, epitomised by a free press, mean in actuality if the media is barred from projecting a veritable impingement on an architectural masterpiece of great value? People's right to know which is basically served by the independent media is too sacred a matter to be encroached upon or curtailed in any form.

Since a legal battle is raging over the so-called development work at the JS complex -- the result of which will have a great bearing on the environmental and architectural aspects of the JS complex -- journalists have all the more reason to report on it. It is a public concern which the media cannot overlook or evade.

The court has very rightly rejected the plea for an embargo on coverage of the construction activity at the complex. However, it is disquieting to think that such a plea was put forward in the first place. We believe that people have an inviolable right to know what is happening at the JS complex, or any such place of national importance for that matter, and it is the sacred duty of the press to report facts without travesty.

## Education for out-of-school children

### A welcome step

It is laudable on the part of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) to have approved a multimillion-dollar project to provide primary education to two million children who remain outside the school system. Many more need to be reached with the light of literacy. Yet, we wholeheartedly thank the World Bank and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, besides the government of Bangladesh, for their collaborative efforts in embarking on a project that promises to be taken forward.

Fifty thousand learning centres or non-formal schools will be set up over a period of five years to impart literacy, hopefully of the functional type, to the targeted children. A huge and ambitious project that. It will require massive doses of management and administrative skills. Unless proper steps are taken prior to the commencement of the project and during the course of its implementation, risks of pitfalls, even a serious dislocation, cannot be ruled out. First of all, drawing students to the learning centres may be more difficult than apprehended. Especially, convincing those parents, who would much rather have their children engaged in financially gainful work than put them in schools, may not be easy. Secondly, the task of ensuring uniform teaching quality across the board will have to be addressed with a lot of planning and spade-work.

These are the pre-requisites without which the sustainability of the project cannot be guaranteed. The whole project needs to be kept free of corruption and irregularities that are raring to creep into it. And here, in terms of an antidote, the involvement of the local community and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will prove to be crucial.

At the same time, we would like to draw the attention of authorities to the much-neglected adult literacy agenda. This significant part of the non-formal education stream needs to be rejuvenated.

# What does the BNP know that we don't?



ZAFAR SOBHAN

**R**IGHT from the start, it seemed as though the ruling four-party alliance had made the decision that it simply had to win the Dhaka-10 by-election by any means necessary. Too much was on the line and failure was not an option. So the alliance spared no effort or expense to ensure that when the votes were finally tallied that they would show a decisive victory for the ruling alliance candidate, Mosaddik Ali Falu.

But why was so much at stake over a single by-election when the ruling alliance already holds such a commanding majority in parliament? What difference could it make to the effective functioning of the government whether Falu was elected or the BDB candidate Major Mannan?

Let's back up a little to March, when Mahi Chowdhury and Major Mannan resigned from the BNP to join up with ex-President Badruddoza Chowdhury.

The three immediately came under massive and sustained attack, both rhetorical as well as physical. Perhaps the intense harassment and abuse that the three have suffered since they quit the BNP should be read as the sincerest of compliments.

If the BNP thought that the three represented no real threat, then they could have left them to their own devices. Politicians leave parties all the time. Some strike out

on their own. Most sink without a trace.

But the BNP has not been content -- apparently -- to run that risk with the BDB.

From the very start, the three leaders of the BDB have had to face the most appalling intimidation and harassment.

Permission to hold public meetings and rallies has been routinely denied, and when permission has been given, the rallies have been attacked and broken up by ruling party supporters and activists, with

Moving forward to last month's by-election in the Munshiganj-1 constituency which was vacated when Mahi resigned his seat in parliament upon resigning his membership in the BNP as per the rules. Mahi returned to parliament in convincing fashion, but no thanks to the ruling alliance which made strenuous efforts, observed and catalogued by the media and election monitoring watchdog organisations, to rig the election in its favour.

The disappointed ruling party

stituency with images of Falu's smiling face and countless meetings and rallies in his support. The importance given by the ruling alliance to his election was clear to all.

Meanwhile, fighting every step of the way, Mannan had to go again to the High Court to stay the election until the fracas over his election symbol had been resolved, and once again to receive an order for army personnel to be deployed on election day to ensure that the election was above board.

already cast their votes for them. The extent of the farce was so apparent that Mannan had little option but to withdraw from the election in disgust within a few hours of the polls opening.

The four principal watchdogs -- non-partisan and neutral organisations with no political affiliation or axe to grind -- released a joint statement shortly after the election demanding that the by-election be cancelled due to the massive irregularities which were so widespread that they were able to itemise them

been slated for a ministerial berth. But that does not tell the whole story.

The BNP's actions seem to me to be the actions of a party that fears that it is losing its grip on power. Nothing else can satisfactorily explain this counter-productive descent into thuggery. A government that is confident in its mandate and popularity does not need to stoop to these means in order to retain its grip on power or its hold on the affections of the electorate.

It's clear to me that the four-party alliance government is feeling vulnerable and that is why it has resorted to such heavy-handed means. In a word, the BNP is runningscared.

There have been whispers that a significant portion of the BNP parliamentary party is unhappy with the direction the party has taken. Further defections from the ranks of the membership would indeed constitute a crisis for the party.

The message for these would-be rebels is clear. Cross the BNP at your own risk. This is why the BNP has gone to such extreme lengths to harass and intimidate the BDB -- to signal that this is the fate awaiting anyone else who is tempted to throw in his lot with Badruddoza. If Mannan had defeated Falu, this might have emboldened some of the less timid of the rebels into defection. That's why it was so important for Mannan to lose. That's why the BNP staked everything on the Dhaka-10 by-election and could not afford for their candidate to be defeated.

Are the whispers of impending defection true? I cannot say. But it certainly seems as though the BNP is taking them seriously.

Maybe they know something we don't.

Zafar Sobhan is an Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

## STRAIGHT TALK

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the police doing nothing to protect a man who had once been this nation's President, or his supporters.

On one notable occasion, the ex-President was forced to flee for his life along a railway line to get away from an unruly mob that had attacked a BDB rally in Dhaka. Once again, the police did nothing to call a halt to the violence.

Once he quit the BNP and the parliament to throw in his lot with Badruddoza, the fury of the ruling alliance was turned on Major Mannan with full force. Bombs were thrown at his place of residence and his businesses were attacked and vandalised by ruling party activists. The government also (purely coincidentally I am sure) decided that the time was right for an audit of his business interests and froze his bank accounts for good measure.

activists had to content themselves with attacking Mahi's victory procession, killing one of his supporters.

The recently concluded by-election in the Dhaka-10 constituency was a farce from beginning to end.

The first indication that the ruling alliance were pulling out all the stops to ensure the victory of their candidate was when Major Mannan had to appeal all the way to the High Court merely to be awarded the election symbol of his party. That the government would stoop to such petty harassment of an opposing candidate was truly unprecedented and a good indication of the lengths the ruling alliance were willing to go to in order to win the seat.

This was in addition to a more or less non-stop blitz of campaigning that plastered the walls of the con-

As it turned out, in contravention of the High Court order, the army was not deployed on election day inside the 103 polling centres, which were quickly overrun by BNP polling agents who expelled the BDB polling agents wherever present and proceeded to rig the election in favour of their candidate with more or less total impunity.

The rigging was carried on in full view of the independent watchdog organisations that were monitoring the by-election and the media, both of whom were able to catalogue and report on the irregularities in some detail.

From the very beginning it was clear that the fix was in. Thousands of fake voters were bused in from surrounding localities to vote for the ruling alliance candidate, ballots were stuffed, and thousands of genuine voters went to vote only to discover that someone else had

in considerable and convincing detail.

The EC, while conceding that there had been irregularities, astonishingly made the claim that these irregularities were not sufficiently egregious to warrant cancellation of the election. It makes one wonder what exactly would constitute grounds for cancellation. Mannan has once again been forced to seek relief from the High Court.

The question that immediately comes to my mind is why the BNP would go to all this trouble for a single seat in the 300-seat legislature that they already dominate with a commanding majority?

It is understandable that the party leadership is keen to bring Falu, who is one of the most prominent non-parliamentarians in the party, into the parliamentary fold, and there are whispers that he has

## In the mind's eye



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

Another example. Alexithymia refers to a psychiatric disorder whereby patients are unable to appraise and express their emotions. An individual who loses this ability buries his real self under a false image. If you know someone who acts like a king and has grandiose views of himself, someone who thinks he is the best in the world, most powerful, wise, and God's greatest gift in mortal package, then also know that he has got our man. If the world is a stage, then life is a script. God is the producer, the

knife. When human beings grow, they grow like trees, growing tall and branching out their minds while still rooted in the ground. Mind starts from where it begins and the Freudian analysis always goes back to man as a child. Marlon Brando, one of the greatest actors in Hollywood who recently died, said that at times he felt that his life was a long journey to come out of his childhood experiences with a cruel father and an alcoholic mother.

would always be a failure.

But then the mind and the eyes always play tricks on each other. Illusion is when the eyes want the mind to believe what they see. Obsession is when the mind turns the tables on the eyes, and wants them to see what it believes. J. Edgar Hoover was the Director of FBI in the United States, whose chauffeur used to take three right turns to make one left to avoid any reference to communism. The same Hoover liked to dress up as a girl in the privacy of his home. Looks can be

open mind to see all evidences, hear all opinions and weigh all options before coming to a decision. But the saints and the monks work in the opposite way. They close their eyes and meditate to find enlightenment in their improvised darkness.

The irony is that while you can see with closed eyes, you may not always believe with an open mind. At times open mind leads to compromise, which dilutes conviction just like the way seeing too much dilutes focus. The politicians, how-

lives in the darkness, while the other wobbles between the flashes of cloud and lightning, his mind forever floating like a boat in stormy sea.

It is hard to find people who are 20/20 both in sight and sensitivity. Some are born with the damage, and others acquire it in the course of living. But flawed as they already are, human beings become further flawed when response and stimulus cannot transact properly. How can you see a straight face in a shattered mirror? Or, what would you see if a disfigured face looks in the straight mirror? The windows cannot bring light if blocked by an adjacent wall outside of the room. The room cannot receive the light coming through the windows if it has walls propped from inside.

Average men and women go through life without knowing which works for them and which does not, their eyes and minds largely ignored in the fracas of living. It takes exceptional minds with exceptional visions to come to their rescue as leaders, revolutionaries, prophets, messiahs, and reformers. That happens perhaps once in a hundred years.

For rest of the time, it is up to us to balance the act. Break the matter, you find atom, break the atom, you find quark, and break the quark, you find string. You must have the urge to look beyond what you see and that urge comes from within. You cannot look beyond your urge, because you can only act as far as you think. Love or hatred comes from the mind's eye, because it is not what you see, but what you believe.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

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brain is the director, we are all actors, the eyes are the cameras, and the mind is the screen. Understand it is all about stimulus and response, what you see is what you feel, what you feel is what you think, and what you think is what you do. This is where paradoxes come, when damaged brain brings distorted mind, and different people perceive different things in different manners. In other words, the same stimulus can get different responses from different people, which is why one man will try to reason with you during an argument, another will lose his temper, some will break down in tears, and others will chase you with gun or

Larry Ellison, the CEO of Oracle, is the second richest man in the world, yet he behaves in an erratic manner and cannot stand his competitors. Once when he was entertaining on his yacht off the coast of Capri in the year 2000, a smaller yacht caught his eye. It belonged to the world's third richest man, Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen. Within minutes Larry urged his captain into hot pursuit of the other yacht and left a huge and unexpected wake that sent Paul and his guests falling to the decks. It is believed that Larry is still trying hard in his subconscious mind to prove wrong his adoptive father who had told him as a boy that he

deceiving, because what the eyes see is not always what the mind believes and vice versa.

The former U.S. President Ronald Reagan succumbed to Alzheimer's disease ten years ago, entering a psychological twilight when he would rake the leaves out of the pool for hours without noticing that his Secret Service agents were quietly replacing them. His mind was disengaged from the eyes, the connection between seeing and believing lost in that tragedy.

It is said that the mind is like a parachute, which works best when it is open. One of the dominant concepts of modern management is that one must approach it with an

ever, walk the middle path. They make compromises to drive convictions, running ideology like a business model. The rest is history as modern politics slides down the roads of hypocrisy, because leaders no longer practice what they preach.

Blindness and mental disability, if taken in perspective, are two afflictions, which, more or less, do the same thing. A man who cannot see is probably the better of the two, because he can at least hear, smell, touch, and feel. For the mentally disabled, the world shuts out in a crueler way because he does not realise what he sees, his deluded mind having no grasp of reality. One

# Bangladesh needs a political alternative

FEROZ M. HASSAN

Some 70 million people live below the poverty line.  
About 80 million people are virtually illiterate.  
About 90 million people do not have access to health care.  
About 60 million people have no access to safe water.  
About 30 million people are practically unemployed.  
About 110 million people do not have access to electricity.  
About 130 million people have no access to piped natural gas.

country with a wealth of human and natural resources has failed to move forward. We have failed to honour all those who fought and died for our freedom by not building a country they would be proud to call their home. Today, many of the brightest Bangladeshis are leaving the country, not just for higher education, but even to live permanently abroad.

Crime, disease, corruption -- every citizen knows the problems we are facing. What they are looking for are answers. And for thirty three years successive governments, both military and elected, have failed to deliver real development, real democracy, a real vision for our country at the heart of Asia that is leaving us behind.

Bangladesh's politicians have failed to provide the answers.

Why? Because they have failed to listen to the people; they have failed to live up to the trust that has been placed in them.

Some of them failed because they went into politics to advance their own interests, to line their own pockets. They succeeded in making themselves rich, but they failed their country.

But others, including our current Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, entered politics to live up to the highest aspirations of the best leaders from our past.

**The people are eager to see an honest government that works. We will have to replace the current system with an alternative, which believes in being fair and decent. The vision is for a more prosperous country where we become wealthier, and where even our poorest neighbours have the opportunity to get ahead in the world.**

But they have become trapped by political parties that have decayed to become nothing more than vehicles for unscrupulous members who exploit the public service of many party activists by using their party positions to extort and terrorize the public in pursuit of personal gain. The political parties lead village against village, Bengali against Bengali, all for their own benefit. Political leaders are getting richer while the businessman in Dhaka, the farmer in Thakurgaon, the fisherman in Barisal -- 99 per cent of Bangladeshis work harder and harder to get less and less.

The leaders of our parties could not change this situation even if they wanted to, because the terrorists within the parties have too much power and influence. Party leaders are afraid of

the instability that would be unleashed on the country if they seriously challenged the mastans and the mastans' protectors, men who now sit at the highest tier of power.

Reforming the existing political parties is not an option: to achieve a position of influence requires too many ethical sacrifices, accepting too many things that need to be rejected if Bangladesh is to move forward. And for too many citizens, those without access to money or political connections or party mastans, there is no way to get involved in politics. The parties made it clear in the 2001 election that candidates were selected not because they were good people, not because they had ideas to help the country, not even because they had proved their loyalty by serving their party for many years -- they were

selected because they had money.

That's not what democracy is supposed to be about. Giving power to criminals with money is not why we fought against the British Empire, why we fought the War of Liberation, why we marched to end single party rule in 1991. We fought, and many died, so Bangladesh could be a country where everyone has the chance to get ahead in life, to take the unique aspects of our national character and develop them in new and positive directions.

Instead we hear, from the people elected to represent us, that "Bangladeshis cannot govern themselves", that despite other countries that emerged from dictatorships much more recently than us, "Bangladeshis are not ready for democracy." These leaders have no confidence in us, why do we continue to have confidence in them?

Tens of millions of people, with hundred of millions of ideas; all that potential energy and creativity, all of it going unused because our leaders have been too busy trying to control their parties' lawless activists.

Bangladesh needs answers, and we need them now: things are only going to get worse. The answer is not to look to the rest of the world. We need a solution to our problems that's made in Bangladesh, by Bangladeshis. We will learn from others, but we will follow our own path.

And our own path must be on a map drawn by the people of this country, who must for the first time be asked what they want, not told what they need. This new party will do just that; we will ask for the confidence of the people to join and be part of a movement that transforms the country. Reach out to millions of Bangladeshis, living in the plains and in the hills -- Tetulia to Teknaf -- to unite them for social and economic development.

The people are eager to see an honest government that works. We will have to replace the current system with an alternative, which believes in being fair and decent. The vision is for a more prosperous country where we become wealthier, and where even our poorest neighbours have the opportunity to get ahead in the world.

We know we have to rekindle the spirit of 1947, 1971, and 1991. We have proved three times that we can fight for our freedom; the time is now upon us, once again, to show that using peaceful means, through the ballot box, we can finally transform our *Sonar Bangla* into a land of opportunity for all our sons and daughters.

Feroz M. Hassan is one of the founder members of Bikolpo Dhara Bangladesh. He earlier started Notundhara -- a social movement for change.