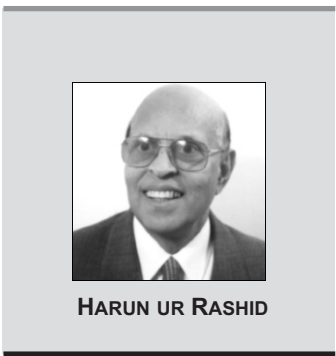


Australia-Bangladesh relations

A new beginning



HARUN UR RASHID

AUSTRALIA-Bangladesh relations have received a robust boost on 16th August last with the first meeting of Australia-Bangladesh Parliamentary Group at the premises of the Australian Federal Parliament in Canberra.

The meeting was jointly organised by the Chairmen of the Group, Hon. Dr. Andrew Laming M.P. and the Bangladesh High Commissioner to Australia, Ashraf ud-Doula.

The primary purpose of the meeting is to engage actively the Australian Members of Parliament (both Senators and Members of the House of Representatives) in strengthening and widening bilateral relations between the two Commonwealth countries.

It is noted that Australia is the first developed country to accord recognition to Bangladesh on 31st January, 1972, immediately after independence and sent a Bangla-language speaking diplomat as its first High Commissioner to Bangladesh. Australia's role during the Liberation War had been overwhelmingly supportive in both diplomatic and material terms and was much appreciated by people of Bangladesh during their difficult days.

Australia's brief profile

No country took formal possession of Australia until 1770, when an English Naval Captain James Cook charted the east coast and claimed it for Britain. The first settlement was a British penal colony, established on 26th January, 1788 in Sydney. After Britain lost America in 1783, it sent the convicts to Australia until the middle of the 19th century. It is estimated that about 160,000 British convicts were sent to Australia.

Australia is a country with its history and geography in sharp contrast. While historically its people are tied with Britain in their way of life, the country is located in Asia Pacific region. Many Australians perceive the separation from "motherland" Britain as a "tyranny of distance".

Its nearest neighbours to the north are Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and East Timor. Australia is very conscious that its danger to security emanates from Asia. It is an "odd man" out in Asia with its political institutions rooted in the British mould and majority of its people are of British origin (about 66%).

Australia's head of the state is the Queen of England and the Governor General acts as the representative of the Queen and is the ceremonial head. The Prime Minister is the chief executive and John Winston Howard (66) has been the Prime Minister since 1996. Elections are held every three years.

The Howard government is a coalition of Liberal (conservative) Party with the National Party (rural-based party), elected during the last election in October 2004. The coalition secured majority of seats in both houses of Parliament -- Senate and

House of Representatives. The Labour Party is the mainstream opposition in the Parliament and they held the power from 1983 to 1996.

Changing priority

Australia has been traditionally tied with Britain and the US. It is a "Western" country and is rich. It largely skipped its relations with Asia in earlier times. Furthermore until early 70s, Australia pursued "White Policy" in its immigration intake. They even were not interested in people from Southern Europe before the Second World War, because their hair was dark. They preferred people from northern Europe to migrate to Australia.

countries of South Asia including Bangladesh and Pakistan. A few months ago, President General Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan visited Canberra and received a red carpet treatment, not ordinarily given to leaders of South Asia by Australia.

Bilateral relations with Bangladesh

Australia has been a modest source of aid for Bangladesh and is a member of the Bangladesh Aid Group. It contributes its aid as a global programme and the aid is focussed on community programmes. In 2004, bilateral aid from Australia stood at US\$45 million. Australia contributed about US\$ 10 million over four years

The participant-members of the Australian Parliament have realised that there is more to Bangladesh than the stereotyped negative image of the country, reported often in the local media. Although the result may not be immediately felt, it seems that a new phase of cooperative and productive relations between the two countries has ushered in to the mutual benefit of both countries. The momentum created out of the meeting of Australia-Bangladesh Parliamentary Group needs to be vigorously pursued and nurtured on continuing basis at both ends.

During the 50s, Australia's "White Policy" drew sharp criticism from Asia's newly-independent countries and in response, Australia was one of the founding nations of the Colombo Plan, under which Australia provided assistance to Asian countries, including receiving Asian students and government officials for training in Australia. The purpose was to mollify the concerns of Asian countries. Australia opened the doors for people of all countries after Gough Whitlam, Labour Prime Minister, won the election in 1972. It has been a multicultural country since then.

During the early 70s, Australia had to adjust its economic relations after Britain joined the European Union in 1973. Suddenly it found cut off economically from "its mother" who was involved in European economy, rather in economic ties with former colonies.

Australia had to turn its attention for economic survival to South East and North Asian countries. Currently more than 60 percent of its exports go to Asian countries. In recent years, China and Australia have increased their economic cooperation including trade, amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars. Australia's export to China consists of minerals, oil, gas and iron ore. Australia now is considering export of uranium to China, provided it is not used in nuclear weapons.

Focus on South Asia

Since 2002, Australia has focused to deepen its relations with countries of South Asia. It is partly because India is emerging as a major industrial power and partly because it seeks cooperation from South Asian countries to combat terrorism (in 2002, 80 Australians were killed in a bomb explosion at Bali, Indonesia).

The Prime Minister of Australia is reported to be visiting India in November to expand and consolidate its relations with India. While it is concentrating its relations with India, it has been also interested to strengthen its relations with the

to a population and health project of International Development Association (IDA).

Bilateral trade has been growing in recent years. In 2002-03, Australian exports stood at US\$220 million, while those of Bangladesh only US\$36.71 million, according to the Export Promotion Bureau of government of Bangladesh.

The potential of bilateral trade and economic opportunities between the two countries has yet to be realised. The failure of private sectors of both countries in penetrating each other's market can be best ascribed at least partly to the weak information base on each other. Furthermore no national airline flies between the two countries.

Meeting of the Australia-Bangladesh Parliamentary Group

In this context, it has been appropriate that the first meeting of the Australia-Bangladesh Parliamentary Group was held on 16th August.

The meeting was held under the Chairmanship of dynamic and energetic Dr. Andrew Laming, MP (39) who has also earned MBA from Harvard University. From clearing landmines in Afghanistan, to delicate eye operations in remote Australia, Andrew Laming has brought breadth of experience to his role as Member of Parliament from the outskirts of Brisbane. As a Red Cross volunteer, he had visited Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Cuba and Madagascar.

It appears that Dr. Andrew Laming has taken seriously his job as the Chairman of the Australia-Bangladesh Parliamentary Group and assured that he would leave no stone unturned to deepen relations with Bangladesh.

From Bangladesh side, the officers of the Bangladesh High Commission and a few Australian-Bangladesh-born academics from Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra were present at the invitation of the Bangladesh High Commissioner.

Charles Stuart, former Australian

High Commissioner to Bangladesh (1996-99) and Ross Hitt (who lived in Dhaka for about six years), currently the Managing Director of the Snowy Mountain Engineering Corporation (SMEC) also attended the meeting at the request of the Bangladesh High Commissioner.

At the beginning, Dr. Laming welcomed the participants of the meeting and declared its purpose. Thereafter Bangladesh High Commissioner Ashraf ud-Doula, in a brief speech, among others, provided a very broad profile on the improved socio-economic indicators of Bangladesh.

He also has emphasised that Bangladesh is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Bangladesh has been and will continue to be a moderate and tolerant Muslim majority country. He indicated that there has been a quiet revolution in women's empowerment in the country through micro-credit financing facilities and employment opportunities in ready-made garment industries.

He invited the members of Australian Parliament to visit Bangladesh and meet their counterparts and see for themselves the socio-economic conditions prevailing in Bangladesh.

Charles Stuart, former Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, (now retired) said that, Bangladesh's economic progress and political stability had always been one of the priorities of Australia's foreign policy. He emphasised that there existed a good market for Australia to sell goods to Bangladesh as the middle class had been rising in the country more than the total population of Australia (20 million). Australia's private sector should be pro-active to capture the market.

The chief of the Snowy Mountain Engineering Corporation, Ross Hitt, provided a picture of safe environment for Australian private sectors to invest in the country. He even highlighted the secure atmosphere in the Chittagong Hill Tracts where there exists a great opportunity for investment in food-processing industries.

The two Australian speakers who have had the first-hand experience in Bangladesh had projected a very good profile for the country to the Australian members of parliament. Their view has created a positive image of Bangladesh in the eyes of the participants of the meeting.

Conclusion

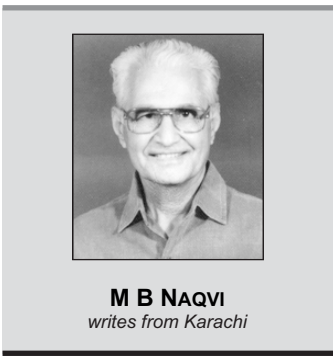
The initiative taken by Dr. Laming, MP and the Bangladesh High Commissioner to Australia is commendable.

The participant-members of the Australian Parliament have realised that there is more to Bangladesh than the stereotyped negative image of the country, reported often in the local media.

Although the result may not be immediately felt, it seems that a new phase of cooperative and productive relations between the two countries has ushered in to the mutual benefit of both countries. The momentum created out of the meeting of Australia-Bangladesh Parliamentary Group needs to be vigorously pursued and nurtured on continuing basis at both ends.

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

A new force arrives



M B NAQVI

writes from Karachi

A right-wing fringe Islamic party organised an attention-grabbing demonstration by exploding virtually simultaneously more than 400 bombs in all the major cities and towns of Bangladesh last week. This is a forceful demonstration by, historically speaking, a new revolutionary force. It is sure to become even more extreme and would probably be more thoroughgoing. Needless to say, its progression will be marked by more terrorist acts against an established Muslim state -- its goal is to establish a new revolutionary Islamic state, on the lines of Taliban Afghanistan.

This revolutionary force rejects what obtains: a more or less secular democratic structure run by mainly conservative Muslim parties. What is desired to replace it is now no mystery. All orthodox Islamic schools of thought in the Subcontinent have now come to approve as truly Islamic what the Taliban did in Afghanistan -- establish a Caliphate. It was run by Mullah Umar whose word was final in all spheres of life: politics, religion, economy, and culture. He was the apex of decision-making and he may or may not consult anyone in arriving at any particular decision. A revolutionary new Islamic state in Bangladesh would have a local version of Mullah Umar as its Amirul Momineen, whose word would be final in politics, religion, economy, and culture. He would be above even the Chief Qazi and would establish total sway of Islam over the society, as he understands it.

Looked at closely, the Taliban Caliphate was a naked dictatorship of one man who had his usual human strengths and weaknesses, ranging from lust for power and greed to other venalities as well as the seemingly noble aim of enforcing Islam -- as an admixture of well-known Islamic punishments with local Afghan culture. The major preoccupation of the Bangladeshi Amirul Momineen will most likely be with the conduct of women. Most of his reforms will have to deal with women's dress and what they have to. Whether they have to observe purdah or not will have to be decided in the Bangladeshi cultural milieu.

Bangladesh is not alone in having to face such a problem. All Muslim states are now prone to it. Only India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are immune from it. Why? Because (a) the majority population in India or elsewhere in South Asia is non-Muslim, and (b) such Muslims, qua minority, can scarcely conceive of an Islamic state in India or elsewhere. But Muslim religious types in India will applaud a Bangladeshi Islamic state. The reality is that the religious fanatics of Bangladesh are planning to institute an Islamic-seeming personalised dictatorship by exploiting a certain new interpretation of Islam. They call it Islamic state or Nizam-e-Islam. The question to be asked is what about the civic rights, guaranteed by their Constitution, of the people of Bangladesh that they enjoy today, being citizens of a largely secular democ-

racy? Would they continue to have the same human rights and guarantees as now in a more thoroughgoing Islamic dispensation of this kind? These fundamental rights are the basis of all democracies and their absence means absence of democracy or self rule.

The question is when a Bangladeshi Caliph would control the administration and law enforcement agencies, what guarantees can his subjects have against harassment by a corrupt police or bureau-

checks and balances on him; his word would be law. The choice is crystal clear. Do we go for a naked dictatorship of one individual who has all the noble and ignoble characteristics of an ordinary human being, or do we opt to treat all citizens of a state as equal, giving them the ultimate authority to run their affairs as they think best?

But then these Islamic innovators claim Islam's sanction for their nostrums. How Islamic it is, is a difficult question on which to opine. The best

PLAIN WORDS

Islam gives no sanction to this new revolutionary Islam. This is a 20th century concept of doubtful parentage. Mainstream Islam everywhere was essentially apolitical. There was no collective duty other than offering prayers and performing other rites. This is what Islamic orthodoxies prescribed, while the Subcontinent's Sufistic tradition was humanistic and had no political implications.



Opposition parties protesting 8/17 bombings.

cracy, especially as the Caliph will stand above the judiciary? There were none in Mullah Omar's rule in Afghanistan. Indeed there cannot be if the Caliph is to be above every department of state.

What economic goals can an Islamic state strive to have is not known. All these Islamic revolutionaries are interested only in methods of conducting social operations and for that they hold the practices of over 1400 years ago to be worthy of copying now in a non-tribal society, vastly different from the city-state of Medina. People of Bangladesh and Pakistan now need proper economic development in which welfare of the common people has to be the main criterion. What an individual as a dictator will decide cannot be entirely predictable because there will be no

way is to have a broad overview of history. This supposed requirement of Islam is a new construct. It is in contradistinction to old Islamic orthodoxies or sects. Old orthodoxies were able to co-exist with all manner of kings: good, bad, and indifferent. Old Islamic orthodoxies had no difficulty in adjusting to even foreign colonial rule. Islam was in no danger during the British rule over the Subcontinent for most scholars of all sects, for instance.

Exceptions there were, particularly in East Bengal. It did produce anti-British movements in the 19th century. But that was because East Bengali Muslim majority comprised tenants who were poor, while landlords exploited them to get rich. Tenants' economic conditions was conducive to supporting revolution-

ary ideas. While the social content of the Faraezi and other movements can be said to be modern and worthwhile, but most of their methodology and beliefs were half quixotic and half orthodox. In the Subcontinent, Islam, qua-Islam, was at peace with the British rule. Darul Uloom Deoband mostly produced Imams for village or neighbourhood mosques who actually survived on community charity. Their politics, by stretching, could only be described as making them nationalist Muslims like Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani was. Deoband did not produce revolutionaries; it produced well-adjusted social conservatives, although generally poor.

This revolutionary Islam is a 20th century construct, mainly promoted by Jamaat-e-Islami and Muslim Brotherhood. It grew in the backwash of the Bolshevik Revolution and it too promised that no one will go hungry in a new Islamic state. It relied on imitating socialist catch-phrases and this went so far as the Jamaat organising itself like a communist party.

But we should note the inspiration of JI; it was a product of the climate of opinion created by earlier Muslim writers and poets in Urdu who moaned about Muslims' decadence and backwardness. They saw European colonialism as an enslavement and a calamitous development. Some poets wrote virtual dirges about the Muslims' decline everywhere. Let's remember also that pan-Islamism has had a particular appeal for the Subcontinental Muslims. Two eminent journalists of 20th century, viz. Maulanas Abul Kalam Azad and Muhammad Ali, wrote, as a rhetorical flourish, the slogan that "Islam provides for all eventualities from cradle to grave." That caught the imagination of all Muslims. More or less the common purpose was to enthrone all Muslims to overthrow western domination from the Islamic world, with special reference to India. But they were not simple communalists, talking to Muslims alone. Their wake-up call was for all Indians to gird up their loins and overthrow the hated foreign regime. They assumed the Hindus were anyway ready to join the struggle. Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood in other Islamic countries were exclusivists -- they talked only to the Muslims.

Islam gives no sanction to this new revolutionary Islam. This is a 20th century concept of doubtful parentage. Mainstream Islam everywhere was essentially apolitical; in practice it actually practised the dictum of rendering unto Caesar what was his, while being good pious Muslims, observing prescribed rites -- jihad being hedged with impossible conditions. There was no collective duty other than offering prayers and performing other rites. This is what Islamic orthodoxies prescribed, while the Subcontinent's Sufistic tradition was humanistic and had no political implications other than the acceptability of a secular, composite Indian nationalism based on Indo-Persian civilisation. What we have here is a new heretical sect leading, in practice, the various orthodoxies.

The visceral enmity between Awami League and BNP is of course legendary and may become even bitter. One wishes to stay clear of old enmities. But people of Bangladesh should prevent that by being watchful. Democrats of both Bangladesh and Pakistan should forge friendly ties to fight the new menace of Islamic extremism.

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Terrorism: America defines its targets

M. SHAHID ALAM

ON September 11, 2001, the United States declared a global war against terrorism. Since then, we have been told ad nauseam that terrorism is the great scourge of our time, and terrorists are evil incarnate. In the twenty-first century, the United States will wage war against a new 'totalitarianism' of the Islamists, a repeat of the war it waged against communism and fascism. The civilized world, led by the US, will win this war, as it won the two previous ones, but it will be a long war, perhaps even a costly one.

Since terrorism is now the grand metaphor for framing global, regional and sub-national conflicts, it is appropriate that we try to understand the nature of this war against 'terrorism' by examining how the United States defines this beast. Let us milk the official US definitions for whatever insights they will yield. It is just possible that we might learn a few things we will never learn from official US communications about this war: why the US wages this war and who are the enemies.

Consider the official definitions of terrorism advanced by the three US agencies that have the responsibility for fighting it:

FBI. "The unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."

Department of Defence (DoD). "The calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to incite fear, intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies as to the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological."

Department of State (DoS). "Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational or clandestine agents, usually intended

When lessons come cheap no one learns anything. The powerful never learned a lesson as long as they could teach others a lesson or two. So, it appears that rocks will be lobbed back and forth until one party or the other, or both, have learned a lesson or two. Till then, the rest of us have to try if we can lie low and protect our heads from irreparable damage.



The United States declared war against terrorism after 9/11.

to influence an audience."

Significantly, the first two definitions do not identify the agents who engage in terror. Instead, they only describe what these agents do: they "intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof," or "coerce or intimidate governments or societies." The reference to "subnational or clandestine agents" in the third definition points to non-state actors, although this is not clear. In principle, this leaves the United States free to level terrorist charges against state and non-state agents.

The official definitions are unanimous in identifying "violence" and "force" as the markers of terrorism; the second definition also includes the "threat of violence." In other

words, terrorism is equated with the use of violent means; this has the advantage of excluding actions that are visibly non-violent but which maim or kill people. This concentration on violent means is politically useful: it overlooks the endemic horrors produced deliberately or knowingly by structures of unequal power.

These definitions are also vague about the proximate targets of terrorism. The DoD does not identify a target, while the FBI does not specify whether the "persons and property" targeted belong to the private, official or military domain. Only the DoS restricts the targets to "noncombatants." However, this is a very broad category. It only excludes those segments of the military that are actively engaged in military hostilities.

It appears that America's enemies are offered few legitimate targets.

Finally, the US agencies define the goals of terrorism with a broad brush. In his goals, the terrorist is no different from other political actors; his goals are "political, religious or ideological." The terrorist seeks to influence an audience, whether it is the government, society or some segment of society. The message is clear: no "political, religious or ideological" goals can be supported by violence.

In the official US definition, then, terrorists are state or non-state actors who engage in, or threaten violent actions, that produce harm to property or persons -- 'noncombatants,' in one formulation -- for political, religious or ideological ends. Alternatively, terrorism is defined in terms of four ingredients. The agents of terror may be state or non-state actors. The terrorists employ violent means, actual or threatened. The instruments employed by terrorists are violent if they result in harm to persons or property. Finally, there are few restrictions on the goals of terrorists.

Consider a quaint implication of the official US definitions of terrorism. They imply that the Boston Tea Party was an act of 'terrorism,' not a legitimate act of resistance. The Party violated British law; it destroyed property; and its intent was to "intimidate or coerce" the British government. A fortiori, according to the official US definitions, the founding fathers, who led an armed insurrection against the lawful authority of the

British in the Americas, would also appear to be 'terrorists.' It is an anomaly that is little noted -- how US ideology of terrorism has turned America's freedom fighters into 'terrorists.'

It should be clear that the official US definitions of terrorism seek to de-legitimise all forms of violence in the service of any political goals. Since it is much harder to criminalise legitimate political goals that are hostile to its interests, the United States seeks to restrict the 'legitimate' instruments available for pursuing those goals. Violence is not a legitimate instrument of resistance whatever the conditions it is opposing. If this approach also indicts America's founding fathers as 'terrorists,' it could do little harm to America's rationale for waging endless wars. Few Americans are troubled by this inconsistency.

The official US definitions of terrorism also suffer from the opposite problem: they fall short in their coverage of terrorism. This is because terrorism can only occur through the use of means that are violent per se. If non-state actors infected with AIDS were to enter a country, and engage in random acts of love-making, eventually producing an epidemic of AIDS, they could not be described as terrorists under the US definitions. In general, the spread of pathogens, whether through water, food, air, syringes, blankets or love-making, cannot be charged with terrorism. No inherently violent act is required to spread pathogens.

The US definitions of terrorism become more problematic when we

use them to judge the conduct of successive US governments. The United States has frequently employed violent actions against civilians -- at home and abroad -- which under its own definitions would have to be described as terrorism. Indeed, in an objective evaluation of global terrorism over the past two centuries, a panel of the world's leading ethicists might well conclude that the United States easily belongs in the category of the worst offenders. Of course, Germany, Britain, France, Spain, Belgium, Italy, the Soviet Union, and Japan would also be jostling for the top positions on this list. If Iraq under Saddam appeared on this list at all, it might just win a place very close to the bottom.

Are there any lessons hidden in all of this? Two easily come to mind. First, no country that lives in a glass house should throw rocks at others. Second, if some angry folks lob a few rocks at you, shattering a few windows, then, before you get too worked up, begin by taking an inventory of the damage you have done over the years to all the houses in your neighbourhood. That would be an appropriate response, instead of pleading virtue and starting to throw rocks at all the houses you covet for their location and treasures.

However, when lessons come cheap no one learns anything. The powerful never learned a lesson as long as they could teach others a lesson or two. So, it appears that rocks will be lobbed back and forth until one party or the other, or both, have learned a lesson or two. Till then, the rest of us have to try if we can lie low and protect our heads from irreparable damage. And while we keep our heads try to put some sense into the heads of those who are busy lobbing rocks all around us.

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Empowering women

Female participation in decision making as well as in senior positions is very insignificant which implies that their voice is hardly counted.

MAHMUDA IMAM

WOMEN empowerment is a catch word now, although nearly half of the country's population is female, the majority of them are excluded from the development process. No significant change has taken place in their overall position in our society. In fact, women have fallen behind in all spheres of life.

Unfortunately our social and political conditions are far from conducive to women working independently with their feminine identity. The society still nurtures discriminatory attitudes towards them although the constitution of Bangladesh has guaranteed equal status of women and men in all spheres of life under the articles 28(1) 28(2) and 28(3).

For many years women are left far behind men. Socio-cultural and religious factors are the main reasons behind this backwardness. And women are dominated by men in the society. They are discouraged to work outside. They are deprived of their rights in many ways. Because of patriarchal attitude in our society, gender situation is worse in Bangladesh than in any other South Asian country.

In working places women are often harassed by their male colleagues (physically and mentally). When a woman has entered in a new working place, whether in government, semi-government, autonomous or private sector, it may so happen if her boss is male. He may not like her and always want to dominate her. Supportive attitudes

and fellow feelings among staff are often absent. Some people do believe men are born to dominate and women are to be subordinate.

But in some cases male colleagues are very co-operative and helpful. So we have to work hard to establish equal relationship between women and men in the society. We have to change the outlook of both men and women.

The concept of gender is an important analytic tool in planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes, as it requires that women are considered in relation to men in a socio-cultural setting and not as an isolated group. So we need to --

= Change the outlook of staff with gender training;

= Create an environment where women's voice on gender issues are heard and problems can be solved in the departments through open discussion with the staff;

= Take disciplinary action against staff who harass, undermine, insult and tease female staff;

= Promote supportive attitude and fellow feeling among male and female staff;

Female participation in decision making as well as in senior positions is very insignificant which implies that their voice is hardly counted in the process of policy formulation and decision making. This is not envisaged. In future we want a society where women will not be neglected and harassed by any of their male colleagues. It will take time. But we must be optimistic with our efforts.

Mahmuda Imam is a freelance writer.