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Journalistic credibility

Recently, I read a news item in one of our national English language dailies which reported killing of a rickshaw-puller Rafiqul Islam (35) by an influential person's associates just because the former's hands touched the latter's body. This unfortunate incident took place at Adabor in the capital.

As I was going through another national Bengali language dailies of that day, a news caught my attention. It seemed that this was the same news as mentioned above but surprisingly presented in a different way. This report said that a businessman named Rafiqul Islam (30) was beaten to death by some persons when the former during his evening walk collided with a passer-by. This incident also reportedly occurred at Adabor. Both the news reports mentioned that the police had recovered Rafiqul's body from a roadside ditch.

Well, I am not going to comment on the tragic incident but the question is which news is based on fact? Meanwhile, I am really disappointed to record the big differences in the presentation of the news by the reporters of the two leading newspapers.

It is known that journalists should always seek the truth, absolute truth before reporting an event. Credibility is one of the important pillars of journalism. Credibility refers to the objective and subjective components of the credibility of a source or message. According to the code of ethics, professional integrity is the cornerstone of journalistic credibility. Integrity is the consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, and principles. Before dispatching news, a journalist should test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent errors and distortion of the content of the news. A journalist should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know. In case of print journalism, journalists should always keep in their minds that people have trust on printed words as these are documented. Presentation of wrong or distorted information may cause a serious loss to individuals around whom the news has been composed and to those who read the news in the newspaper.

So, journalists need to be always critical in upholding credibility and professional integrity. Professor M Zahidul Haque, Professor Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka

Unconditional surrender!

Bolstered by emergency powers, the caretaker government at one time appeared mighty powerful in their mission. Wholehearted support of the army pushed their image to an enviable height. They arrested both the former prime ministers who still enjoy robust popular support. They were so sensitive to unlawful assemblies that a few political workers were arrested in Sylhet while having their lunch at a fellow politician's home! They languished in jail for many months for their illegal (?) activities. In Khulna a former state minister was arrested from a private house allegedly for playing cards. They were prosecuted. Such examples of zero tolerance are abundant during the 19-month tenure of the CTG. We appreciated their firmness as the fallout of the great mission the CTG was going to accomplish.

But all their resolve and strength melted down when they faced religious bigots, be it at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram or elsewhere. The most glaring one is the latest drama around the secretary general of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Perhaps it is the first time in the world that a man facing arrest order held meeting with the chief executive of the government. No doubt it is possible during war-time, but in peacetime it is not conceivable in a civilized society.

Recent removal of Baul statues following the threat of a few bigots adds more insult to our administration. Vandalism at the office of the VC of Dhaka University by some Madrasa students is also not an isolated incident.

The days of the caretaker government are coming to an end. The 11 respected persons who came to power without any popular mandate got immense popular support at the beginning of their route. In course of time, the support and acceptability waned. Even then we, the ever-optimistic people, expected a happy ending. We still hope that they will deliver a universally acceptable election on 18 Dec/08.

Their unusual lenience towards religious bigots definitely cast a shadow of doubt on their strength and ability.

M. Sanaul Haq
Uttara, Dhaka

Religion and politics

At the outset, I will draw your attention to the news reports published recently in The Daily Star:

- 1) Fugitive Mojahid seen prominently at CA's meeting.
- 2) Sculpture dismantled due to Islamic group's campaign.
- 3) District administration cancelled cultural programme paying heed to religious groups' threat.

Apparently, there are some confusions or conflicts between religion and politics in our context. Religion and politics have to do with two different spheres of activities in the life of an individual. One who belongs to a religious group is also a member of a particular society or political entity. So when someone performs his religious activities, he has to be careful about his society, state etc. But if we go deeper, we will find that such confusion is actually baseless. All confusions have been created by the opportunists.

To my mind, there is no genuine reason for the debate on Religion and Politics! But there have been debates, because some quarters (read politicians) have created it for their own benefit. If we go to the book titled 'Volga Theke Ganga', we will find a clear picture of that legacy. Later the politicians interpreted (have been doing that till today) religions on their own will just to gather maximum worldly benefits, not for the afterlife. Some political scientists paved the way for using religion to acquire political benefits.

I think most of the Bangladeshi politicians are great followers of Machiavelli. Most of them are not so religious, but they try to prove themselves as more religious than others. Some interpret religion for their own convenience. It is very easy to do so as most of our people are emotional about religion, but are not so serious about following religion in practical life. This helps

politicians to use or misuse religion as a political force.

What about the elected governments? What about the political parties claiming to have huge popularity? They can do many things, but when popularity can be gained so easily, then why go the hard way? That is why they try to start their election campaign from a 'Mazar'. They have very little positive contributions to convince the voters!

Where are we going? Is there any hope? Think of this government. Members of this government inspired us to be courageous and hopeful, we were dreaming, and we thought the bad days were over. But things have not changed at all. Then which existing party will make Bangladesh secular and democratic? We have no answer till now. We have to wait.

Md. Mujibul Haque Munir

Coordinator (M&E)

Coast-Shouhardo

Unprecedented vandalism

A news item was published in different dailies regarding the unprecedented massive vandalism at the VC office of Dhaka University. How could they escape from the place without the law enforcers' trying to arrest them? The university authorities should take immediate action against the attackers to prevent repetition of such incidents in the future. There could have been a constructive negotiation between the authorities and the agitated students on the issue of admission handled by the respective departments.

Let me ask the authorities concerned why the respective departments took this unfair decision against the Madrasa students. Some students with such background are now working as good teachers in a few departments. According to the report published

in various Bangla and English dailies, the education boards have been evaluating and offering the same grade to the students from different madrasas as the HSC for the last couple of years. So, where is the problem?

We want a quick decision in this regard.

Tonmoy Anowar

Ex-student of DU

Uttara, Dhaka

Simply outrageous

The outrageous activities of religious fundamentalists are increasing day by day. The photo showing some madrasa students trying to pull down the Baul sculpture is only comparable to Taliban activities.

But the meek surrender of the caretaker government to the fundamentalists' demand is even more alarming. They are trying to defuse tension, but this is certainly further emboldening the religious zealots. Now they are threatening to destroy all the sculptures in the country!

Solaiman Palash

East Jurain, Dhaka

Power game

The caretakers and the political parties have come to an understanding after so much pulling of each other's legs. What deal they have made will be unfolded gradually in the days ahead. But the caretakers are making one great mistake by trusting these shrewd political people. The very moment the emergency goes, they will show their teeth and claws.

The caretakers should have been very hard while dealing with these political leaders but they didn't care much. As a common man, I am waiting, with a heavy heart, to see some tragic hardball game next year.

Asif Khan

Circular Road

Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Food safety and Bangladesh



Talking of milk products and the inclusion of melamine in the formula are whims that need serious thoughts. I have a different perspective. I have to ask myself what are the acceptable levels in Bangladesh? Who decides these levels? Who ensures these levels are rightly present in the milk or food item?

The regulatory bodies of Bangladesh & the department of health are too busy identifying the melamine levels. But what is acceptable to us and what should not enter Bangladesh are still in

the hands of the businessmen. Who regulates it? Is it food and drug administration?

Further, not a single milk producing/supplying company in Bangladesh furnished their authenticated test results that are internationally traceable.

Then why now and why only milk products? Let's think of imported food products.

We are all talking about Food Safety Management System, but are we talking

about setting the acceptable limits/criteria where all the importers will give clear-cut specifications?

So, we need to question our regulators, nutritionists, doctors, and people concerned how aware we are. We talk so much about food and nutrition, but do we talk about basic food safety?

We should go deeper and find what should be the specification of the food items we consume with backed up data in details, as when we try to export our foods we face lots of international requirements etc. Do any regulatory bodies clear or pass the food items that are imported to Bangladesh? Is it really meeting our requirements?

So, we need to have appropriate data. Nowadays people are talking about Genetically Modified Food (GMOs), are we safe from them or are we a guinea pig to them, as our regulatory bodies have no specification in detail? This is because in European countries it is mandatory to label goods with specific data.

Introducing a food safety management system should be mandatory for all food related industries, importers, preservers, stockists, food machinery producers, etc.

Sheikh Mohsin Ali

One-mail

Baul statues



PHOTO: MUMIT M.

Thanks to DS for making lead news and writing a strong editorial on 'Baul statue' events. I do not know how this small number of 'Islamic fundamentalists' could take law in their own hands and dictate the issues of similar nature time and again. The CTG is playing a very dubious role in curbing the harmful activities of these fundamentalist groups. Apparently, they are not only supporting but giving encouragement to fan up terror under the pretext of religion. The forum which talks about 'Mukti Juddha' is in effect shielding these terrorists from the wrath of the general public who

believe in freedom of choice, expression and individual rights.

Please do not announce any more date for naming the alleged Al-Badr and Al-Shams top leaders. We think very soon the issue will die down under the garbage of a failed attempt to bring these alleged war criminals to justice. We hope the 'Mukti Juddha Forum' can read their future. You might not see any success story of your efforts in your lifetime. Please at least crate a new generation of warriors to keep the hope alive.

A reader

On e-mail

Citizenship issue

I refer to the letter on this topic of 19 October. There are many confusing legal and practical interpretations of 'Bangladesh dual nationality'. However, from my own experience I have learnt the following.

If a person has arrived in Europe or North America after the emergence of Bangladesh with a Bangladeshi passport and citizenship and then became a national of a state therein, his/her Bangladeshi citizenship backed up by his/her Bangladesh documentation to this effect remains in force, unless, say, the passport and documentations are not returned by the foreign authorities or they have cut it up to show cancellation, (which is quite a normal practice).

If citizenship documents are so cancelled or not returned, then the person although legally entitled to Bangladesh citizenship

must apply for fresh documents on the strength of his/her entitlement. The necessity for such application does not mean that his de jure dual citizenship rights are not recognised in Bangladesh law; it is a necessary de facto step to obtain proof of such right.

On the other hand, if his/her old citizenship documents of Bangladesh are returned by the foreign authorities after granting their citizenship in un-mutilated conditions, such documents continue to be valid under Bangladesh law, however passports or travel documents (which include Visa stampings) etc would need to be revalidated on expiry by proper application to Bangladesh authorities in due time. Otherwise, such documents will lose validity and will be tantamount to cancellation, and when trying to renew them after a long gap may require fresh application to confirm citizenship etc.

This is a practical measure and does not reflect on the legal requirements for Bangladesh citizenship or its loss.

Many Bangladeshi citizens with their families (I was one) arrived in Europe and North America with Pakistani passport and identity before the establishment of Bangladesh and all such persons must apply for Bangladesh citizenship and then for Bangladeshi passports or other travel documents which include a 'No Visa Required' stamp on foreign passports from a Bangladesh Embassy, and keep renewing them when necessary by paying the requisite fees. Non-renewal over a long time or loss of Bangladesh documents may require fresh application for its reissue.

The legal position must not be confused with practicalities for its implementation.

Engineer Shafi Ahmed

London, UK

Ominous developments

Due to the current price hike of foods and other essentials, a good number of people have become poorer throughout the globe. The US and its allies are spending a huge amount of money on arms. Many countries are using food grains for producing bio-fuel which is surely a great threat to human beings. Dogs and other pet animals of rich countries are getting such foods which can save crores of people in the poor countries. The haves and have-nots are living in the same world. Yes, Allah, the Almighty, has sanctioned someone fortunes and He will surely examine in the life hereafter how the rich used their wealth.

Karl Marx tried to establish socialism having seen the discrimination and injustice among people and nations. But later his followers failed to establish it.

Harun-or-Rashid

Sobhanbag, Dhaka

Election 2008

The date of national election 2008 has been fixed. But is everyone getting ready for the election in a democratic style?

The main two parties have applied for registration without fulfilling the conditions. The BNP is looking for more talks with the government. Maybe, they want assurance from the government that they will win the election. The AL will participate in the election, which implies that they are very confident. Other parties are echoing the big brothers!

Democracy in Bangladesh had a new beginning in 1991. The two big parties have fought round since then to grab power like warriors. Naturally, the question arises, why are they so desperate? Are they devoted to the distressed people of the country? History says power has rewarded the politicians a lot except the respect and love of common people. Do they have any plan to serve the country?

Redwanur

Shantinagar, Dhaka

Melamine in milk

Melamine has been detected in many brands of baby milk powder. It has become the talk of the city and may be the country. The test reports are conflicting. The newspapers, TV media are hugely covering this news item since it has tremendous news value. People are 'eating' the news coverage quite voraciously. All the mothers are very worried, so are the fathers, brothers, sisters and so on. People are bewildered. They are at a loss what to feed the baby. In the mean while, so called 'fresh cow milk' sellers are making windfall profit from selling their 'cow milk'. A few years back, one 'dudhwalla' was supplying fifty litres of milk from a few cows. A friend of mine got curious and followed him to his house. He found that they were mixing powder milk in water,

boiling it and later on mixing with fresh cow milk. It was sold as 'Khandi gourd dudh'!

As usual, our media is not always very responsible. There is dearth of stories. They jump at any story. And this is a 'jolly good' one. Scaring people is very good business. It started with Y2K. Media hyped it so much that everybody thought that the doomsday was imminent! Interestingly, nothing happened after '2000'. Then mad cow disease scare, followed by bird flu scare. So many fowls were culled. So many people became paupers. A lot more people die from malaria, tuberculosis etc every year. I am neither defending the powder milk producers, nor condoning them. But I am very much against creating panic, scaring mothers, driving them crazy and insecure through media hype.

A judicious coverage in the media will be truly beneficial for the stakeholders.

SN Mamoon

One-mail

Controlling traffic

The steps necessary to control the congestion level in the city are described as follows:

Control the use of private cars:

Determine the parking charge on an hourly basis, or fractions thereof in busy parts of the city, considering the location of parking place as well as the parking time to determine a fair market price for parking.

Impose congestion charge on private vehicles in the busy streets of the city.

Control the licensing of private cars.

Emphasize public transport for offices and educational institu-

tions. Facilitate public transport, fuel-free vehicles and pedestrians.

Properly schedule trains, considering the demand and benefits of people.

Facilitate the inter-city buses to pick up passengers inside the city.

Determine the routes in such a way that people can travel easily by bus throughout the city.

Allocate sufficient space for rickshaw travel throughout the city, given the demand for and many benefits of this mode.

Create separate lanes for cycling above the level of the main street, using the Copenhagen model.

Establish zebra crossing facilities for road crossing and maintain footpaths in good condition, and disallow car parking on footpaths.

Farjana Afrin

Mirpur, Dhaka

HMERshad's interview

The DS is doing a good job by regularly publishing exclusive interviews of politicians. But not all facts were mentioned while interviewing HM Ershad.

He was ousted through a mass movement in 1990 but no mention was made of the elections in 1986 and 1988 in which the JP bagged absolute majority. Those elections may have been questionable but were no different from that of 1979. Both Zia and Ershad held elections under martial law and remained army chief while contesting presidential election. Both used religion for political gains.

At least Ershad's elections were better than that of BNP managed February 15, 1996, boycotted by all except Bangabandhu's killers. In the face of mass upsurge, Khaleda was forced to resign on March 29,

1996.

Most media personalities term Ershad an autocrat. But the fact is that Zia was also an autocrat.

During the eighties, Ershad took a more pro-liberation approach as a known Razakar like Shah Aziz didn't become prime minister. Rather, the post was given to Mizanur Rahman, an organiser of liberation war.

Not a single corruption case against Ershad was proven in the Supreme Court.

There were many politicians at Hawa Bhaban who are believed to be more corrupt than Ershad. Hence, it is unfair to only term Ershad as a corrupt autocrat.

Rahman Talukdar

Lalmatia, Dhaka

DU incident

The report 'Madrasa youths swoop on office of DU VC' was published in an English language daily.

The report said that the culprits of ICS (the so-called student organisation) vandalised the office of the Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University. They demanded something that the university authorities could not fulfil, as the madrasa students didn't have English as a subject carrying 200 marks.

Under such circumstances, we'd like the miscreants to be given punishment and also the VC should not treat madrasa students differently.

Yes, anyone trying to create problems in the name of religion must be resisted. In addition, we never want the innocent to be blamed for any occurrence.

Habibur Rashid Ismail

Jamea Rahmania Fadiul Madrasa

Chaitanyarhat

Chittagong

Mass killing in 1971

Recently, the school of Law of Australian Newcastle University organised a seminar on 'Bangladesh Mass Killing-1971'. This year they incorporated mass killing in Bangladesh in the 'Public International Law' course.

The then Pakistan army killed people of our country with the help of 'Rajakars'. Our sacrifice is getting recognition internationally, but still those 'Rajakars' have never confessed to committing this crime. Rather, they are just trying to change the history of our nation! But the whole world knows the truth.

S. M. Shamim-Ur-Rashid

Tushar

Department of Business

Administration

Shahjalal University, Sylhet

