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Senseless violence

Last week I was privileged to be one of the foreign friends to be awarded the Friends of Liberation War Honour for the work I did in 1971 coordinating provision of assistance to about 600,000 refugees in Indian refugee camps. We experienced a beautifully arranged 3-day programme for which the various ministries involved should be strongly applauded and the ministers and staff of these ministries should feel proud for what they organised in our honour.

On the morning of March 26th, some of us went out to the National Monument at Savar where the early morning misty air made the environment very special. The atmosphere was quiet and solemn as it should be while remembering the millions of men, women and children who lost their lives or were violated and injured.

The ministry of foreign affairs had appointed a documentary film company to record these very special three days and to record many individual interviews. Knowing that in January 1972 I had driven from Kolkata to Dhaka (Dacca then!), the film team suggested that they could interview me in their microbus while returning from Savar to Dhaka so that I could recall that very special journey of 1972 in the interview.

With the film crew we came out of the National Monument area to head for the two microbuses that the members of the film crew were using. All I saw was chaos and I was a bit scared. I was told that two groups of young and not so young BNP men were fighting each other to obtain the right to 'Welcome' their leader, Khaleda Zia. Already they had vandalised a few vehicles all window glasses at least Tk. 60,000 to Tk. 100,000 per vehicle? Later, I understand, the Awami League and Jatiya Party ranks entered the fray.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

The film crew were worried about their security, their equipment and 'bideshi' me. For safety, I was bundled into a nearby station wagon which turned out to belong to a retired Air Vice-Marshal.

Soon after, the director of the film crew approached a senior police officer and he, with a number of police personnel, escorted us through the roads covered with broken windscreen glass and waited until we could start safely to Dhaka.

This senseless violence on a very sacred day is inexcusable and reminds me of 21 years ago when, a year after the ouster of Ershad, my Toyota Sprinter car's glasses succumbed to the senseless violence of young people. Cost to the international NGO for whom I was working, Tk.30,000. At that time, I wrote, as I am writing now, letters to Editors. An English daily then, The Morning Sun, put my letter in a black-rimmed box on the front page. I wrote then, 'A year ago, young people shed blood to overthrow autocratic violence. Is democratic violence this much better?'

After so many years of living and working with many wonderful Bangladeshis, I regard Bangladesh as my home, but I do not know how to bring these young people to their senses.

I am very, very sad.
Julian Francis
Banani, Dhaka

Bad behaviour in parliament

Wherever bad behaviour in parliament is serious, democracy itself is threatened as it depends on people being able to talk (Parler = French for 'to talk') and one cannot talk with those out of control.

The reason for bad behaviour in anyone, including children, is the lack of a good example from elders who should also be betters (and who switch off the bad behaviour on the media!)

Male misbehaviour can be a sign of a rebellion that sees obedience as well as generosity-in-words-and-deeds as signs of weakness and that no one can be a 'big man' (Boro Lok) unless he behaves badly! Behind the wheels of vehicles, in the school playground, in all meetings and private homes - whenever some men (and women too!) find those they consider 'inferior' to revile and bully - there is misery and social chaos - and the art of talking collapses.

Some, of all classes, with high standards of behaviour leave for other countries, hopeful that behaviour there is better as well as salaries but failing to train another to take their place! Return, some of you, to uphold the tradition of Boro Lok who are better!

Angela Robinson
Gulshan, Dhaka

Power and darkness

The democratic norm of taking responsibility for any shortcoming and resigning position by ministers and advisers is unknown in our "democracy of the opportunist and for the opportunist." They are voted to power by the gullible public (voters), in the hope of better things to come!

Despite the blasting by the MPs, as reported in all dailies on 9th March, our democratic(!) state minister and energy adviser merrily carry on, unless they are sacked!

Meanwhile, the power situation remains as dark as always, swinging between "black-outs" and "brown-outs". Electric power eludes the ministers, despite all their political power!

The norm for electric power supply in Bangladesh is defined as: "Small pockets of faintly glimmering (low voltage) light bulbs in a sea of darkness." So, the situation becomes a happy hunting ground for 'candle and hurricane lamp' makers! It is still their day, and may well continue so, possibly for decades!

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Murder of Trayvon Martin

Recently a Black teen American Trayvon Martin was shot dead by George Zimmerman, a Hispanic in Florida. Thousands of Americans registered their strong protest against the killing of Trayvon who was unarmed. They demanded immediate arrest of Zimmerman and his trial. Since the unfortunate incident took place, racial discrimination existing between Black and White skinned Americans once again came into public talk. Turning the racially charged case into a personal matter, the first black US President Barack Obama said - "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon" He assured Trayvon's parents that proper justice will be done while dealing with the case.

However, as per the latest media reports, Trayvon had dialed 911 for help while he was going to be shot and killed by Zimmerman. Although the United States is being regarded as a country where law runs its course and people are never deprived of justice, yet it is often seen that some Americans out of their whim and anger opening fire on schoolchildren or on the crowd killing innocent people. I think, control over selling and trafficking of arms should be tightened and vigilance in this discipline should be intensified in the United States.

Finally, it is expected that proper investigation and trial of Trayvon's killer will be done to establish justice.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University
Dhaka

'Sorry' is enough?

In spite of knowing the identity of a university teacher, the RAB personnel beat him up a few days ago. Now they say 'sorry' and ensure 'investigation' into the 'unexpected incident' (DS: 01.04.12). Every cautious citizen of the country knows the fate of the so-called 'investigation' in the end. So, we demand immediate and exemplary action against those who arrogantly make excesses so that others don't dare to commit such offences; otherwise the society will never be corrected.

Monzur Rahman
Mohammadpur
Dhaka

READERS respond

Here are some comments that came in response to Sunday's *The Daily Star* news report headlined "BNP takes back its greetings"

Deep purple blue

Look before you leap!

Quamrul

Don't worry. It was not a big mistake. Are you sure you know the details?

Shafiq Ahmad

At least the acting secretary general (SG) has the courage to admit their mistake. Now we are waiting to see when they admit their other mistakes. The big question is if an opposition party can be carried away by propaganda, why general masses cannot be? By the same token, why should we be carried away by BNP's propaganda?

Saeed Iqbal, Bogra

Why don't we give credit to the ruling government for taking the initiative to solve the maritime boundary dispute with Myanmar? If BNP thinks that their previous stand was wrong, it is clear that BNP cannot read the meaning of anything from the first reading. Maybe the same thing has happened in the case of caretaker government issue. Perhaps they will one day understand that their stand for caretaker government in a democratic country was wrong.

Upfront

Do you still believe that we need a multi-party government system only to confuse and confront the ordinary people of Bangladesh? I think the ruling government is either too weak or fails to take action against false propaganda. We are eagerly waiting to get some kind of reaction from the Myanmar government. There is no need to go back to the BNP table.

Amdem, USA

The ITLOS has given its verdict on the basis of international law; it did not favour any country. Previously, the maritime limit was three miles, then 22 miles and now it is 200 miles for all the countries. There is nothing new in this case.

Concerned expat

The country has so many politicians talking and doing things by mistake, no wonder why the country in 41 years has not yet achieved the dream of the independence. We do not know who won in the legal or territorial context, but if top politicians always conduct themselves by "mistake", why bother trusting them in the first place with the affairs of the state? Should they not retire so that the country could find the people who will not be doing things by mistake?

Nds

Verdict of the ITLOS was not a confidential matter. The BNP leader, also a former PM, is not supposed to give her reaction in parliament on such an important issue without being aware of the content and implication of the verdict.

It clearly follows that the political leaders of our country are least bothered about the substantive issues of public interest. Their only concern is politics of petty self or party interest.

What BNP leaders are saying now sounds not only ridiculous but also reflects their crooked nature of political behaviour. The party in power is also trying to overplay the issue and displaying it as a party instead of national achievement.

Rising prices of medicines

Over the last few months the prices of different medicines have risen considerably. Surely it is an alarming trend that will affect the common people. The existing healthcare system is too expensive for the poor and the low income citizens.

They can hardly afford to visit a specialist doctor even if they suffer from some serious ailment. The recent rise in the prices of the drugs will aggravate the situation. This price hike will hurt the elderly people who cannot live without the medicines.

People are finding it hard to cope with the rising cost of living. They can ill-afford to pay for exorbitant prices of medicines.

Zabed Wali
On e-mail



No one cares!

We are one of the most unfortunate nations to have two political parties who are busy about their own business and not ours. Our government is busy with the war crimes trial, and 'improving' relations with India. Often, they forget important matters like electricity, water and fuel crisis, environment degradation, inflation, and the list continues.

On the other hand, our opposition can call hartal a couple of days before Eid, just because of the fact that their leader is allegedly 'evicted' (not in the way the poor slum people are evicted with nowhere to go).

However, when it comes to public sufferings, they do not seem to have any headache. Have they ever called a hartal with an intention to do good for the people? Our government, too, can spend billions of public money in order to arrange meetings but not for the people.

On our 41st independence anniversary, let us vow to get rid of our past emotions and vote a party without looking at its founders or past glories (if they have any). Tawhidul Islam Khan
The Aga Khan School, Dhaka

Is it professionalism?

The BCB's request to investigate the incident that happened at the final over took the shine away from the nail-biting Asia Cup finals. We will always be proud to the fact that the Tigers went down roaring by failing to overcome a minor deficit of two runs to victory. But the appeal was criticised by everyone as it seemed to be an unprofessional act and that it also showed the world that we are quite stubborn to accept the reality yet.

BCB also fails to realise that in sports these incidents of unfairness occur and that only the brave accept the situation and move on without any hesitation. Perhaps we were unlucky, but what if Pakistan and Bangladesh swapped places there, wouldn't we feel that it was unfair? What if we had won the game, would the BCB still have lodged the complaint? Absolutely not. Thus the BCB has proved that we fail to come to terms with shocking climaxes and that our character isn't worth praising.

Md. Hasin Anjum Khan



Victorious in defeat

Bangladesh cricket team may not have won the Asia Cup, but they have won the hearts of millions around the world. We think it is an immense reward; it is more precious than the trophy. The cricketers have made us very proud and extremely happy, our heartiest congratulations to them.

We hope the trend will continue and they will always perform like this making the nation joyous. Our prayers and best wishes will always be with them.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong