

## Golam Azam's conviction

Long awaited moment

WE have the long awaited verdict on Golam Azam. The court has handed a 90-year jail term to the lynchpin of the genocide perpetrated by the rapacious Pakistan Army in 1971. It will, we hope, draw the curtain on a part of a dark chapter of our history. In some measure, it will, we hope, go to fulfill the demand of the people to bring the persons guilty of war crimes of 1971 to justice.

Golam Azam's trial and verdict are symbolic too, because he, as a close associate of the Pakistan Army, had become the icon of all the sufferings that the people of Bangladesh had to undergo during the nine months of hell. And we take satisfaction in the fact that he has been tried and sentenced, even though it has taken 43 years to do so. Understandably, the verdict will have disappointed many, but the court in its wisdom has delivered a judgment which we should respect. In awarding him the jail term the learned Court has taken into consideration his age, which, we understand, is in conformity with international norms.

We would like to emphasize that this is a verdict on a war criminal against whom all the 5 charges have been proved beyond a reasonable doubt. It has nothing to do with politics or religion and we deprecate anyone trying to link the two, as has been done by calling hartal yesterday. That we feel, is trying to foment trouble. And we warn the people to be watchful in this regard. Similarly, we feel that resentment against the verdict should not manifest in violence.

## Reducing disaster risk

Local govt. should lead the way

EXPERTS recommended strengthening local government bodies and good coordination at the grass-roots level for a better disaster management plan in our country. The idea is of course a good one in theory but in terms of implementation it is found wanting.

It is unfortunate that coordination among the ministries is often lacking. The local government and rural development ministry has to work closely with other ministries and vice versa to ensure that all good ideas and programmes are implemented with the best outcomes at the village level.

On the bright side, different village conservation forums and collaborative management committees have developed around forests and wetlands in the last decade. These forums and committees consist of local government representatives, concerned government department individuals and the local communities of given areas. These forums are learning about climate change and developing climate change mitigation plans with the assistance of non-profit and foreign organizations.

The work of disaster management has already started at the grassroots level. Our farmers and other local people already know the basics in facing disasters as they have been dealing with natural disasters throughout their lives. But to formalize this process and to bring in improved management, plans for the intervention of local government, concerned ministries and non-government organizations are highly essential.

We hope the coordination to mitigate climate change and reduce the effects of natural disasters will continue, and our local government bodies will be leading these efforts with the NGOs and communities standing by their side.

# Swallowing the rental pill



SYED MANSUR  
HASHIM

THERE is no denying that power sector management in the country is facing a serious question. As a large section of the quick rental power plants contracts are coming to the end of their terms, debate has once again taken centre stage as to what should be done. As per newspaper reports, approximately 1,500 megawatt of electricity is generated from oil-fired rental and quick-rental plants and most of the present rental contracts are due to expire in 2016. The 3-year quick rental plants' contracts are mostly to expire within 2014, the 5-year rental plants' contracts to expire by 2016 and 2017.

The government consciously decided to implement 3 and 5-year contracts for diesel and furnace oil-based costly plants during 2009-2010 period to urgently address the huge shortfall of power generation capacity. During that period, the government was advised that the fastest way was to enhance power generation despite the exorbitant cost involved in installing rental plants. People had to agree with the solution as the previous governments failed to take necessary steps to reduce the power generation gap between demand and supply. There is no way rental and quick rental plants can become the main backbone of the power generation capacity.

The government was forced to increase power tariff several times to balance the high generation cost due to imported fuel oil. But complacent power managers wasted too much time in planning and developing base load power plants initiatives and arranging primary fuel. As a result, the situation has compelled renewal of the rental and quick rental plants as no reliable alternative has been developed. With opinions sharply divided between those who advocate for contracts to be renewed up to 2020, based on the argument that gas-fired base load power plants are not coming on line before then, and others touting the high cost of generating power using oil-fired plants and subsequent losses sustained by Power Development Board and subsidy footed by the government, the question of what to do remains undressed.

What has come to pass is obvious. The inability of policymakers to see beyond the 5-year term that an elected government has in hand is a handicap when an energy planning an energy roadmap for the future. A country wishing to come out of 'least developed nation' status needs to plan and execute projects, including power

and energy projects that will support its goal to attain the target for a middle income country. Hence, going for short-term contracts spanning 3-5 years for the 23 furnace-oil based and 12 diesel-oil based plants generating an estimated 2,280MW form a major portion of total electricity.

While on paper, the economy is getting the power inked on contracts signed, the reality, unfortunately, is that many a rental and quick rental plant has failed to generate electricity as per contract, since the loopholes in the contracts allowed for old and refurbished machinery to be installed, which have failed to produce desired results. Not only have they failed to generate requisite electricity, the antique equipment installed in certain cases have turned out to be hugely inefficient in oil consumption. Hence, the whole concept of rental contracts, all of which have been inked under the 'Speedy Supply of Power and Energy (Special Provision) Act - 2010,' that guarantees immunity to both the government and the plant owners has merely produced a situation that serves neither the economy nor the consumers.

Had policymakers been of the opinion that they would undertake the major base load energy and power development projects during their 'next term'; the least they could have done was to better scrutinise the quality of rental and quick rental power plant projects. This would have been a logical step as the question of extension would become inevitable after a certain point (as is happening in the present). What is astonishing and demoralising is the fact that policymakers chose favoured businessmen having little background and understanding about the energy sector to implement power projects. The result was predictable. Such haphazard planning has led to failure and unnecessary delay. Consequently, the slogan of eliminating load shedding and reducing power tariff from 2014 has proved to be merely illusions.

The government's failure to ensure pragmatic primary energy development will continue to deliver pain in future. Surely, energy sector managers who enjoyed trust of the prime minister and the energy minister arrogantly ignored the reality, importance and magnitude of primary energy development issue. It led to the inevitable, mismatch of primary energy supply security, cost of supply with power tariff and consumer expectation and capacity to afford the energy.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

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## Make covert agencies accountable

PRAFUL  
BIDWAI  
COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

INDIA'S Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has charged eight Gujarat policemen, including senior officers D.G. Vanzara and P.P. Pandey, with premeditated murder for the 2004 "encounter" killing of teenager-student Ishrat Jahan and three others. They were falsely accused of plotting to kill Chief Minister Narendra Modi.

The police abducted, blindfolded and drugged the victims, and pumped 70 bullets into them after fabricating the First Information Report.

Gujarat has one of India's highest "encounter" rates, for which numerous policemen have been jailed. The targets were always "foreign-inspired" terrorists out to eliminate Mr. Modi -- proving his Great Patriotism!

However, the Ishrat case is special. Deputy Police Superintendent D.H. Goswami has testified that he heard Vanzara telling Singhal that he had Mr. Modi's permission to kill her. Secondly, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) was involved in the plot. According to the CBI, IB Special Director Rajinder Kumar, the operation's "kingpin," conspired with Vanzara to eliminate Ishrat.

The IB has been planting stories against that Ishrat, claiming she was connected with and given arms training by Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT). Even assuming this is true, it would be patently unjustifiable and illegal to kill Ishrat -- instead of trying her and proving her guilt in court.

Nothing can condone cold-blooded execution, even less when it's conducted by the law's guardians.

The IB earlier vilified Ishrat citing Pakistani-American double agent David Coleman Headley's interrogation in the US, alleging her LeT links. But India's National Investigation Agency (NIA), which examined Headley, says his claim is based on hearsay.

The IB clearly overstepped its brief thanks to its officers' overzealousness and grandiose self-image as defenders of national security.

The CBI's case against Rajinder Kumar is "watertight." He vengefully generated a series of false "inputs" in 2002-04. One of the worst pertains to Sadiq Jamal from Bhavnagar, "encountered" in 2003 after being handed over to the Gujarat police by Mumbai's killer-policeman Daya Nayak.

Kumar is likely to be named in the next charge-sheet. In response, the IB is using familiar dirty tactics: planting disinformation, obfuscating the pertinent issue -- extrajudicial execution -- and claiming it was only doing legitimate intelligence-gathering in Gujarat.

The IB has no legal sanction or mandate, no charter, and works in a Constitutional vacuum. It wasn't created by India's Parliament, but by the British secretary of state in 1887. Its main function was to spy upon Freedom Movement leaders.

The IB isn't answerable to the cabinet, leave alone Parliament. It uses secrecy to evade accountability. It famously misled Nehru in 1959-62 on border tensions with China. Successive governments have used it to spy on political opponents, trade unionists and social activists.

Indira Gandhi relied in 1975 on IB "inputs" on opposition plans to destabilise her -- and imposed the Emergency. In January 1977, when Gandhi was planning to lift it, a committee which included the IB's T.V. Rajeswar (later its director and West Bengal governor), reportedly argued for its continuation.

The IB, like the external spy agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), has always stood to the Right of elected governments. These agencies follow the paranoid dictum, "it's better to be safe than be sorry," and exaggerate threats to "national security".

The IB long followed an unstated policy of not recruiting Muslims. With the advent of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, and especially after September 2001, the Islamophobic edge in its counter-terrorism approach got strengthened. This changed only recently (last December), perhaps marginally, when Syed Asif Ibrahim was appointed its director.

Equally pertinently, the IB has a mindset that's suspicious, even contemptuous, of human rights. It perfected questionable means like torture and killing early on -- in the Northeast. Later, with rising extremism in Punjab and Kashmir, it gained unprecedented importance as India's main counter-terrorism agency and colluded in extrajudicial killings in several states.

It's imperative that the IB be brought under public oversight -- if necessary through a special Parliamentary committee on intelligence, which observes discretion on crucial national security considerations. But this must not sacrifice accountability or dilute compliance with National Human Rights Commission guidelines regarding custodial deaths.

However, the extrajudicial execution menace will remain so long as India has policemen who believe in shooting first and asking questions later. They invariably abuse their power, as countless "encounter specialists" from Daya Nayak, Praful Bhonsle, Pradip Sharma, Rajbir Singh to Vanzara, prove. They must be systematically weeded out and exemplarily punished.

Above all, India's public and legal discourse must urgently move towards privileging human life and the highest respect for the rule of law -- regardless of the provocation.

It simply won't do to argue that civil liberties can be subordinated to reasons of state because the fight against terrorism is "asymmetrical." "The enemy doesn't play by the rules of the game," so state agencies cannot succeed if made to follow "rules applicable to common criminals."

Civil liberties are too valuable to be subordinated to state expediency without undermining democracy. It's specious to argue that "war is hell," or "all's fair" in war. It's not.

Wars, even just ones -- when waged against tyranny or aggression -- must also be fought in a just manner, with scrupulous regard for non-combatant immunity, without indiscriminate violence or disproportionate force, or cruel and degrading methods. "Encounter" killings violate these criteria.

Those who think summary killings were necessary to win against Khalistani militants in the 1980s don't understand why that insurgency lost support -- because of the militants' senseless violence. They also underestimate the terrible cruelties visited upon ordinary civilians, exemplified by the en masse cremation of thousands of unidentified bodies in many districts.

"Controlled" killings and torture lead to a slippery moral slope. Once the state stoops to torture, it's liable to sink into tyranny. State tyranny can be far worse than the violence of terrorist groups, as the examples of Salwa Judum, Gujarat, Kashmir, Punjab and the Northeast show.

Many more people were killed in unjust wars in Iraq and Afghanistan than under Saddam Hussain or on 9/11 in the US. Tyranny, however "controlled," can never deliver justice or lasting peace.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist. E-mail: bidwai@bol.net.in

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Breakthrough in jute cultivation

Rezaul Haque's very relevant report on this subject from Gaibandha (TDS June 28) features the significant breakthrough in the cultivation of jute in our country's agriculture. By transplanting jute seedlings, if its yield doubles; then the practice should be spread all over the country.

All our field level agriculture officers should be trained and made aware of this important and significant development. I will appeal to our government, particularly the ministry of agriculture, to follow up on this important development and introduce it all over the country where jute and rice is grown.

And finally, Delwar Hossain (the farmer who introduced the process of transplanting jute seedlings) needs to be officially recognised and awarded for this significant breakthrough in agriculture.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

### Freedom fighters' quota

Freedom fighters are the best sons of the country. They deserve great honour from the nation. But quota in BCS for their children and grandchildren is illogical. Freedom fighters themselves should get facilities, not their children and grandchildren. There are many freedom fighters in the country who are driving rickshaws to make a living. The government should provide special facilities to all the freedom fighters, but not by providing quota in BCS for their children and grandchildren.

Sheikh Zahid  
University of Dhaka

### "Use of loudspeakers in mosques"

Mr. Ahmed Shah has suggested in a letter on July 7, 2013 to follow the Indonesians and put restriction on the use of loudspeakers in the mosques in order to reduce sound pollution and thereby giving relief to the people living close to the mosques. As a Muslim (as the name suggests), Mr. Ahmed Shah knows that the loudspeakers are used for prayer calls, five times a day and lasting only a few minutes each time. Only the morning time prayer call may be disturbing to some people who otherwise normally believe in the proverb, "Early to bed and early to rise is the way to be healthy, wealthy and wise."

Let us speak about and try to mitigate other environmental pollutions and avert hurting the religious sentiment of ninety percent of the people of this country.

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque  
East Rampura, Dhaka

### Comments on news report "Low pay, hostile environment," published on July 13, 2013

#### Vikram Khan

I do not understand why Bangladesh government does not create jobs for these thousands of women in Bangladesh! It is really shameful that people are forced to leave their motherland due to shortage of jobs or a total lack of interest of their government in creating jobs for women.

#### Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Harassment, intimidation on female workers in Middle Eastern countries is an open secret. Our government should stand up to these Middle East countries that hire our workers and behave with them as if they are slaves.

#### Sara

\$120 per month is about Tk.10000 -- pretty lucrative for poor women working as domestic helps. Shame on those Middle Eastern households who treat them as inferiors...

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### "Debacle in city polls rattles AL" (July 13, 2013)

#### Nds

To my mind the party leader has to shoulder the full responsibility for the failure since she is the fountain-head of all powers be it in the government or in the party.

#### Shahin Huq

After all the misrule and corruption, Awami League should not be surprised by these local election results. If Awami League leaders really believed in the ballot, they would not have ruled the country in such a disgusting way.

#### Shahnoor Chowdhury

Most people think PM is liable for everything. Leadership change may help the party.

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### "No quota now in preliminary test" (July 14, 2013)

#### Triple Ace

I congratulate PSC for being pragmatic about quota system. Bangladesh should allow minorities and underrepresented groups to move forward, but there should be a minimum standard for all.

#### Reazuddin

The reserved quota for freedom fighters should be abolished if we really want to honour them. The ruling party and its allies will not be very happy as this will go against their master plan of politicising the admin and civil service to serve their purpose for generations to come.

## Malala's historic speech at the UN

ABDUL MATIN

MALALA Yousafzai gave an inspiring speech at the UN on July 12, coinciding with her 16th birthday. The day has been declared by the UN as "Malala Day." It may be recalled that she was shot by a Taliban gunman while she was returning home in a school bus last October. In her first public speech since her miraculous recovery, she said that she would not be silenced by terrorists.

"The terrorists thought that they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing changed in my life, except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage were born," Malala said. This is a unique example to show how an attempt on one's life can strengthen one's determination.

Surprisingly, she had no harsh words or hatred for the Taliban gunman. She said: "I want education for the sons and daughters of the Taliban and all the terrorists and extremists. I do not even hate the Taliban who shot me. Even if there is a gun in my hand and he stands in front of me I would not shoot him." This is a rare example of forgiveness.

Herself a devoted student, Malala wants education for all children. She said: "The extremists were, and they are afraid of books and pens, the power of education. The power of education silenced them ... Let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world. Education is the only solution."

In another speech on the following day, Malala reiterated that the Taliban were among "people who think that when a woman goes to school she will be empowered, and they are afraid of it." Yes, Taliban terrorists are afraid of books and pens in the hands of women. They are not alone. While Malala was delivering her historic speech for educating women at the United Nations, we were getting sermons not to educate our women but to keep them confined within the four walls. Whether one uses the power of the barrel or that of the speech, the intention remains the same: Keep women subjugated.

Let Malala's speech at the UN inspire more children to enroll into schools, no matter what the clerics may preach at home. Bangladesh has made a remarkable progress in women's education and empowerment. It is time to move ahead.

The writer is a former Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.