

Making hartal a playing

Public can't stand the violence anymore

SUFFERINGS of the general people and damage to the economy have become matters of least concern to politicians when they enforce their political programmes like hartal.

A glaring instance of total indifference to public woes even riding roughshod over the feelings of the devotees in the holy month of Ramadan is the three consecutive days' shutdowns beginning Monday. All of these centred on the ICT verdict on former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam.

If they have any point to convey to the people, they should rather take recourse to holding mass campaigns and doing the hard work of mobilising the masses in support of their programme. Just issuing a hartal call is an expedient reaction to any event. Then letting loose hooligans to terrorise the people is abominable and devoid of a modicum of respect for the people.

Already millions of work hours have been lost, scores of vehicles and other public properties damaged and people killed and injured.

We are also baffled at the decision of Gonojagoron Mancha youths and some pro-left student bodies to call a hartal protesting the less-than-capital punishment awarded to Ghulam Azam. They had alternative ways to articulate their feelings.

We sympathise with the feelings of aggrieved Liberation War victim families, who did not get the court verdict they expected against Ghulam Azam. But we must also have to respect the process of law.

Amended labour law enacted

Ensure effective implementation

AFTER much debate an amended labour law has been passed in the latest session of parliament. It goes to redeem the long pending workers' right to form collective bargaining agents at the workplace of garments industry (RMG). Of the many changes that have been made, the most significant is the right to form up to five unions without prior approval of factory management. Substantial gains have been allowed in terms of compensation and safety. Owners will now introduce group insurance schemes for workers who sustain injury while at work.

Provision for a workers' provident and welfare fund that will come out of 5 per cent profit of company earnings and building safety will be ensured as ad hoc changes to factory premise design cannot be made without prior approval of factory inspectors. Workers will receive an array of financial benefits while employed and specific guidelines have been put in place with regards to termination and compensation.

While the changes have been welcomed, the question is why we had to wait for a mounting international pressure to wake up to the anomalies of unsafe working conditions in the RMG sector. Would it not have been better to initiate reforms so as not to be labelled a country of sweat shops and averted disasters like Rana Plaza and Tazreen fashion that cost more than a thousand lives and injured many more?

Now that the law has been passed it is for all the stakeholders to make it work to benefit the industry and overall economy.

Education: Boon or bane?

TASFI SAL-SABIL

EVERY year thousands of students complete their tertiary level of education from different institutions in Bangladesh and enter the job market. Eighty two universities, including 31 public and 51 private, produce 554,671 students (BANBEIS, 2011) in a year. The percentage of graduated students is increasing every year and the number of young people entering the job market is also increasing.

In recent years, contribution of service sector to GDP is about 49%. Like in most countries, our service sector is also divided into two parts -- public sector and private sector. If we look at the recruitment process of the public sector jobs, we will find that quota, corruption, and political recruitment are seriously hindering merit based appointment.

Again, the process of recruitment takes more than one year. This discourages the young generation, especially the meritorious students, from sitting in the exam for public service.

Now let us take a look at the private sector. To get a job in the private sector without lobbying is difficult. Most of the jobs are circulated internally and recruited by the seniors or power holders of the office. Moreover, one significant requirement for those jobs is experience. The minimum requirement for entry level job is 'masters with 2 to 3 years experience.' How can one get 2 or 3 years experience as a fresher?

Because of their higher educational background, it is impossible for them to engage themselves in any kind of work other than formal service. Thus they face socio-psychological stress and become isolated. How will the fresher's be accommodated or absorbed in the job market after finishing their graduation as they have no experience, which is the most significant and crucial requirement for a job? It is time the government took initiatives for solving the issue. If the appropriate authority selects some organisations to take the fresher's as interns or offer jobs without seeking any experience and only based on their performance in interview and the written exam, it will be a good way to solve the problem. Moreover, the government can engage those people to work as volunteers in government and private organisations to get the experience needed for a good job.

The writer is Research Fellow, Centre for Control of Chronic Disease (CCCD), ICDDR,B.

Ghulam Azam and the wheels of justice

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

ten, some sins are never expiated. He joins the ranks of men who have killed or helped to kill and were therefore condemned by law and censured by history.

There are meanings to be drawn from the trials of old men for old crimes. And there are all the instances of justice meted out to remind the world that a point comes when the victims of crime and their families and the societies they are part of need to be satisfied that the law has prevailed, that morality has triumphed. Forty two years after 1971, the law and morality have taken centre stage through the verdict delivered on Ghulam Azam. No, he will not be around for ninety years more to go through the entirety of his punishment. Mortality will not allow him to live that long. He is ninety one. He may not have many more years to live.

The question of Ghulam Azam's longevity of life is irrelevant here. What eventually matters is that his past has finally caught up with him, even if it took more than four decades to do so. The past, as they say, is always with us, in various forms. And Ghulam Azam's past, like that of any other individual notorious in history, never quite left him or his party. In an incredible sort of way, Azam and the Jamaat-e-Islami have always played truant with history, have always remained outside the bounds of respectability owing to the darkness of their record and the venality of their deeds.

The Jamaat-e-Islami caused murder and mayhem when it went after the Ahmadiyya community in Lahore in 1953. Hundreds of Ahmadiyyas died in the violence; their homes were destroyed because the Jamaat said they were heretics, were no part of the Islamic faith. Syed Abul A'la Maududi's version of Islam was one that stood at variance with that of the founders of the faith. Not until martial law was imposed on Lahore did the violence subside.

Ghulam Azam and his fellow Jamaatis in Bangladesh are not the first to be hauled up for murder and related crimes. Their mentor Maududi was placed on trial, in the aftermath of the Lahore riots, and sentenced to death. The sentence was subsequently commuted and in the end Maududi was pardoned. Twenty one years after 1953, the Jamaat went after the Ahmadiyyas again, forcing the hand of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Pakistan's prime minister formally declared that the Ahmadiyyas were not Muslims, that therefore they could not practice Islam. The Ahmadiyyas are a cowed lot in Pakistan these days.

Intolerance has been part of the Jamaat psyche. And it was hatred of others -- Hindus, secular Muslim Bengalis, Awami Leaguers, liberals, intellectuals -- Ghulam Azam and his cohorts preached in occupied Bangladesh in 1971. These men did what Yahya Khan and Tikka Khan wanted

THE wheels of justice do not always turn. But when they turn, they do so with the clear message that the perpetrators of ancient crimes always get their comeuppance at a point in historical time. The judgement delivered in the matter of the crimes committed by Ghulam Azam during Bangladesh's War of Liberation reinforces the old argument that sooner or later those who commit misdeeds must pay for their acts. Now a frail ninety-one year-old man, Azam is proof that criminality is never forgotten. He joins the ranks of

them to do. Beyond that, they did what they on their own wanted to do. The result was the murder of three million Bengalis and the rape of two hundred thousand Bengali women by the Pakistan army. Ghulam Azam's fault was not that he believed in Pakistan. It was that he continued to be on Pakistan's side even when the state resorted to genocide. Worse, Azam and other flunkies of the Pakistani regime demonstrated a remarkable ability to misread their own people's minds, to look upon every instance of opposition to the soldiers' moral depravity as a threat to the state of Pakistan. Every freedom fighter for Azam was a miscreant or an Indian agent. Every instance of trouble in 'East Pakistan' was the doing of Hindus. The lust-driven soldiers of Pakistan were only saving Islam and Pakistan.

The trial of Ghulam Azam and the judgement delivered on him are therefore a reminder for us that bad men and their terrible crimes must never be forgotten. The verdict delivered on Monday deserves to be studied in other contexts as well. One simple context will suffice: the verdict on Azam's criminality is a hard slap on the face for those who looked the other way when the visa on his Pakistani passport ran out in the late 1970s and yet he was allowed to stay in Bangladesh; for those who have had no shame in forging political alliances with Ghulam Azam or his party and helping them to enter government.

Bad men need shaming everywhere. Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea and their accomplices sent tens of thousands of Cambodians to death between the mid and late 1970s. In the end the law and global conscience caught them by the scruff of the neck, in the interest of justice. Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic waged an enormous battle to save themselves from life in prison. Charles Taylor once ruled Liberia and then was hauled off to an international war crimes tribunal. The genocidaires of Rwanda 1994 are unable to escape the law. The message cannot be missed: criminals camouflaged as politicians can strut around on the stage for a while and then are forced to pay the wages of sin.

In 1971, Ghulam Azam ceased to be a politician and reinvented himself as an instrument of fanatical oppression, shaped and forged by a murderous military regime in Pakistan. On his watch, the goon squads called al-Badr and al-Shams picked up and picked off Bengal's leading figures in the various professions and felt no contrition. Once Bangladesh emerged into a blood-drenched dawn, Azam continued to do Pakistan's bidding -- badmouth the new country abroad through bare-faced lies and go on an expedition in the Middle East for a restoration of 'East Pakistan' on geography that did not exist any more.

In 2013, let the message go out of this land, loud and clear: evil may live and thrive for decades on end, but it will have no place to hide forever and someday will be made accountable before the forces of civility and decency. Ghulam Azam may not hang. He will not live for the next ninety years. But he has been tried, found guilty of participation in genocide and sentenced. We the people are satisfied.

Justice has been done. Never again will any citizen of this land consort with a foreign power and conspire to murder his own people, along with their values and dreams and nationalistic convictions.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.
E-mail: ahsan.syedbadrul@gmail.com

"Allama" Shafi's misogyny

TAJ HASHMI

THE way Ahmad Shafi misquoted the Quran to abuse and denigrate women is repulsive. The Quran does not exhort women to stay home and "not even go for shopping." Contrary to Shafi's fabrication, the Quran nowhere urges men to take four wives or even justifies -- let alone encourage -- polygamy.

Shafi's promotion of patriarchy in the name of religion is as old as civilisation. Pre-modern societies throughout history -- Pagan, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Muslim and others -- almost invariably promoted patriarchy by demonising women. As Aristotle did not believe women had souls, so did many medieval Christian priests. Biblical texts, Jewish and Christian clerics, Hindu sages and monks, Muslim priests and philosophers also portrayed women as subhuman.

While Saint Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) thought "every woman should be filled with shame by the thought that she is a woman," we find women being denigrated as "the devil's gateway" and "the root of all evil" in Christian texts; and as an object of sex or *raman* (hence the pejorative "*ramani*") in Sanskrit and Sanskrit-based languages. Writings by some Muslim scholars are full of misogynic prescriptions.

However, unlike the post-Renaissance and post-Enlightenment societies in the West, Muslim societies are not yet enlightened enough to accept women as equal human beings deserving equal rights and opportunities. Extra and un-Islamic practices and beliefs have crept into Muslim societies. Although Bangladeshi women have better rights and opportunities than what their counterparts enjoy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, some clerics are again raising their voice against women's liberation and equal rights and opportunities guaranteed by the Constitution.

Now, in the backdrop of the latest vulgar speech against women's rights and dignity by the leader of the so-called Hefajat-e-Islam (HeI), it appears that some radical elements are trying to fish in troubled water. The HeI is trying to make headway in the arena of Bangladesh politics by capitalising on mass sympathy in the wake of the government's alleged crackdown on its leaders and followers at Motijheel in Dhaka, in the early hours of May 6.

We may impute the rise of the HeI to some alleged hateful writings against Islam and the Holy Prophet by some bloggers, who were also active supporters of the months long Shahbagh Rally that demanded death penalty for convicted "war criminals. Nevertheless, the HeI's 13-point demand is political. It goes beyond the demand of trying anti-Islamic bloggers for blasphemy against Islam.

The prevalent chaos, corruption and political uncertainty in the fractured and over-polarised country have facilitated the rise of Islamist forces not long after the government's "decisive victory" against anarchist JMB and Huji (B) in 2006. In sum, leaders and their followers are

collectively responsible for the disorder at the macro and micro levels.

Firstly, the government and people promote three types of education system -- English, Bengali and Islamic -- and produce employable, under-employable and unemployable graduates out of rich, not-so-rich and poor families. This discriminatory education system has also polarised Bangladesh society between the disempowered and the dominant elites.

The system has created social envy in the "vernacular elites" towards the "Western elites" (as Oliver Roy has coined the expressions), precipitating the clash of cultures and interests between people having different world visions, philosophies and interests. It is time that Bangladesh addresses its lopsided education policy for the sake of equal opportunity to all citizens. Most importantly, only modern, secular and job-oriented education can contain Islamist obscurantism and tyranny.

Secondly, along with bad governance and unaccountability, both the military and the "democratic" governments since the 1970s have tolerated and even promoted political Islam. As Zia legitimised Islamist parties so did the military dictator Ershad, to legitimise their rule by exploiting the religious sentiment of the overwhelming majority of the population. BNP under Khaleda Zia and AL under Sheikh

Hasina have not lagged behind in this regard. The successive BNP and AL governments not only failed to removed the un-constitutional amendment of the Constitution that had declared Islam as the "state religion," but also nurtured political Islam and forged politically expedient electoral alliances with reactionary Khilafat Majlis, Jamaat-i-Islami and other Islamist groups.

Surprisingly, some former "secular" and "socialist" politicians have also been serving political Islam since August 1975. Liberal democratic politicians in Bangladesh should have learnt from the bad example of Pakistan, where General Zia started Islamising the polity.

Finally, it is time to call a spade a spade. Political Islam in Bangladesh is not dead; it is only dormant. It must be addressed not exploited politically. Bangladeshi leaders and people must realise that the Hefajat and Jamaat are the two sides of the same coin. Despite their mutual differences, these undemocratic, fascistic, pre-modern forces can unite to the detriment of freedom, democracy, and rights of women, minorities and liberal Muslims.

It is distressing that so far only a handful of human rights and women's rights groups, along with the Awami League, have condemned the "Allama" for his misogynist expositions. The BNP and all democratic forces should come forward to contain political Islam, so that Bangladesh does not experience a clash of democratic and obscurantist forces in the long run.

The Pakistani writer is at Austin Peay State University Tennessee, USA. He is the author of a best seller *Women and Islam in Bangladesh* (Palgrave-Macmillan 2000) and *Global Jihad and America* (Sage, January 2014).

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR
letters@thedailystar.net

Govt. should face facts

The people of Bangladesh have given their verdict in the five city corporation elections. It was predictable because the government failed miserably in many sectors.

The PM's insulting words to Nobel laureate Prof Yunus and the government's acts to take control of the Grameen Bank have shocked the people. The incident of Shapla Chattar also shocked the people all over the country.

Communications Minister Obaidul Quader said that the government will correct itself taking lessons from the defeat of the Gazipur polls. But we want to remind the honourable minister that time has run out; only a few months are left of the government. Will it be possible to mend all the damages the government has done and get back people's confidence?

The only saving grace is to agree to hold the next general election under a neutral government and spare the people from further sufferings.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Unjust quota system

Any rational person will agree with the fact that quota system in the BCS exams is creating a huge discrimination among the jobseekers. 56% quota is simply illogical. So the protest against this quota system is absolutely right and just.

Some people are calling the protesters supporters of Jamaat-Shibir which is wrong. The general students want this unjust quota system to end. 15%-20% quota is acceptable, but 56% quota is absolutely irrational. The government should take this matter very seriously; otherwise, they will lose the votes of youths like us too.

Mir Abidur Rahman
Department of English
North South University

Class boycott by JU teachers

Jahangirnagar University is one of the leading universities of Bangladesh. But now it is suffering from political and internal problems. Frequent change of VC has become the culture of JU. It's not clear to us why the teachers are not taking classes. Teachers are the builders of a nation. Their main duty is to enlighten the students. But it is so disappointing to note that nowadays most of the JU teachers are busy doing politics. It's time they changed the situation for the better.

Md. Rasel Rana
Department of Government & Politics
Jahangirnagar University

Gazipur city poll's import

Restoring caretaker government system is a public demand and it's been again reflected through the ballots in the recent Gazipur poll. Although it was a local election, people cast their votes against the 14-party backed candidate after considering the handling of national issues by the AL government. Gazipur was considered one of the strongholds of AL and its party leaders seemed to have been certain about winning the poll. But they became stupefied when Mannan won the election. Same thing happened in the other four city corporations. I think it made the demand for a nonpartisan caretaker government strident.

Samiul Rajjul
Bangladesh University of Textiles
Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Hasina slates Hefajat chief's comments," published on July 14, 2013

Ahmed Zakaria

Not everyone has the courage to stand up against the religious bigots.

Vikram Khan

Why didn't the present government and its predecessors act earlier to remove this scum from the political stage? A modern democracy cannot afford bigots; they are harmful for development, prosperity and human rights.

"Hefajat defends Shafi" (July 14, 2013)

Abbasuddin

Khaleda Zia should feel 'proud' of Shafi.

Dev Saha

The words came out from horse's mouth with no ambiguity. What to defend there? Good man with plenty of prejudices? If it was a mistake, he should apologise and move on.

"Jamaat goes berserk" (July 15, 2013)

Arun

Where civilisation and democracy end, the era of might is right begins.

Shafiqur Rahman

We saw these scenes a few months ago. Jamaat repeatedly resorted to violence and mayhem. So why on earth is the government not banning it?