

## PM's remarks at the DC conference

*Don't drag them into political issues*

WE are at a loss to comprehend what Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina actually meant when she asked DCs to be alert to any unconstitutional government's assuming power.

For all we know, DCs discharge administrative functions and are not supposed to get involved in matters having to do with politics.

So, the PM's wanting them to play a role in warding off any untoward political development at the inaugural of DCs Conference, 2013 on Tuesday defies logic.

Clearly, it was an inappropriate forum for the PM to choose to utter her pet political phrase. It is worthwhile to note that she usually dismisses the opposition's demand for an election time caretaker government arguing that it is unconstitutional.

Are we then to believe that she was addressing the occasion purposively in a bid to make the administrative functionalities of the districts a party to the ongoing politics of confrontation?

In that case, she is asking for the very trouble she is proposing to avert. In fact, it is a political issue that the PM has broached, something that should be resolved politically. We are forced to conclude that the PM's speech was inappropriate and misplaced. DCs should be left alone to perform administrative responsibilities and should not be dragged into conflicts that are fundamentally political.

## Undue pressure to award work

*Sends bad signal to foreign contractors*

GOING by newspaper reports, influential ruling party interest groups are strong-arming a foreign contractor in an energy project in Ashuganj. From what has been revealed by investigative journalism is that Pipelines Engineering Ltd. has been put under undue pressure to hire technicians and other staff from the locality. The fact that unqualified personnel have been forced down the management's throat of a foreign company to do largely technical jobs is precisely the wrong message to send to foreign companies interested in working in Bangladesh.

Not only has this been a case of forceful employment, but the management has suffered attack on premises and employees when disciplinary action was taken on unruly elements employed. That the local police administration has had to step in to provide security at site of man and material is hardly conducive to a normal work environment. With politically-backed business interests interested only in wresting control of supplying construction material and workers to the project, it is little wonder that work on \$136million to build a gas compressor in Ashulia has suffered serious setback.

Needless to say that the project in question is of vital importance as it has everything to do with the supply of natural gas. The State is mandated to provide sufficient security to protect key installations. We are distressed to see that such priority projects too are not being treated with the importance they deserve and urge the administration to take measures to safeguard personnel and material from vandalism.



## To pass an examination, just agitate!

ABDUL MATIN

I recalled my days at Ahsanullah Engineering College after reading the recent news that all the students who failed in five out of six, I repeat five out of six, subjects in the first year examination of 2011 at the National University would be promoted to the second year on special consideration! It is reported that a significant 46% students failed to pass in five out of six subjects. They resorted to street agitation. Finally, the authorities had to give in on condition that all the promoted students would have to pass in the subjects they failed in. To make them pass, the university is also thinking of revising the grading system, obviously to make it easier!

Now, it appears that students may not have to study anymore to pass an examination. S/he only has to be a good agitator. Through agitation, one can get promotion from one class to another. After independence, a new term got prominence in Bangladesh. This was known as auto-promotion. A whole batch of students once got their bachelor degrees without any examination! Are we ultimately going back to the auto-promotion system?

We often boast of our progress in education. We now have more educational institutions. More students are going to schools. More graduates are coming out of universities. The numbers are impressive but how about the quality? How can we maintain quality if we give in every time there is an agitation on the streets by the students who fail?

Should we need forty two years to fix our examination and grading systems? Once the systems are fixed, should we change them every time there are agitations against them? If agitations can achieve everything, the students only need to learn how to agitate to get promotions, degrees, jobs, higher salaries and what not?

Do our politicians realise what message they are spreading across the country through their agitations? Agitation is a contagious disease, no matter who practices it. It is spreading too far, beyond permissible limits. It is easy to spread a disease but difficult to contain it. No nation can survive with a diseased education system. It is bound to be crippled one day. It is time for us to come out of the culture of agitation, at least in education!

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

# A land of many Muslims but little of Islam

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

I went to the West and saw Islam, but no Muslims; I got back to the East and saw Muslims, but not Islam." That was what Muhammad Abduh, the Egyptian scholar and jurist, had to say about Islam in the early 19th Century. The essence of the statement is that while we claim to be Muslims we hardly reflect the religion in our actions or talks or behaviour. And I would venture to suggest that it could not apply more in the case of Bangladesh.

We are a Muslim majority country and many of us take pride in the fact that we were the second largest Muslim state, a fact that was not lost upon Bangabandhu, and he had made that known very soon after he landed on the free soil of Bangladesh. Many of us do not hesitate to flaunt our Muslim credentials, although in some instances they are very much seasonal, an act that is intensified during the election season in particular. And some politicians unhesitatingly try to show how better Muslims they are than their opponents by telling public the number of times they pray and the religious diktats they follow.

And in spite of secularism being one of the cornerstones of the constitution we take unending pride being described as a moderate Muslim state, even more the secularists among the politicians who, not being able to muster enough courage to do away with the preamble, are quite happy to live with Islam being the state religion. We are proud to say that the Muslims in Bangladesh are deeply religious without being bigoted, or being extreme in their outlook or behaviour. I do not know about bigotry but I wonder whether as 'deeply religious' Muslim Bengalis we reflect the essence of the religion in our behaviour.

Look at the way a Maulana denigrated women in his sermon recently. His comments, which would be most un-Islamic even to his most inveterate apologists, have not only given a sullied picture of Islam to those not fully conversant with what the religion says about women but are also likely to be used as a handy tool for the detractors to flay Islam.

HASAN TARIQUE CHOWDHURY

AS many national and international rights organisations and foreign buyers expressed their serious concern over workers' rights and safety, especially after the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Garments tragedies, the government took steps to amend the Bangladesh Labour Law-2006 to ensure adequate rights for workers. The National Parliament recently passed Bangladesh Labour Law (Amendment) bill 2013.

The government, after passing the bill, said that the new law was a major advancement in establishing workers' rights, and that it would also bring more stability in the industrial sector. Whereas, immediately after passing of the bill, the international human rights organisation, Human Rights Watch, said that the new law will be inadequate for protecting rights of workers. The Bangladesh committee of World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), in a national seminar on July 12, asked the government and drafting committee to correct mistakes and ambiguity in the law. 30 trade union organisations of the country also submitted their suggestion to the ministry concerned, and after passing of the bill they expressed their frustration over the new labour law. They said that the amendment to the law was wrongly drafted; it is not equitable and thus it will go against fundamental rights of the workers.

Due to this controversy, it is important for legal experts, trade unions, employers and the government to review and analyse the new law. If we go through some sections of the amended law we will find many basic flaws. As we all know, the right to 'free trade unionism' is a much discussed issue in the industrial sector.

All trade union organisations of the country, the European Union, USA and many foreign countries that buy RMG products from Bangladesh raised their voice for establishing trade unions in all the factories and industries and also in EPZ. Frustratingly, the new labour law has practically ignored this fundamental aspect. Section 12, S.13, S.23 (3) and S.4 of the new law do not clarify the definition of the term 'closure of institution' and 'misconduct of worker.' Due to only this flaw of the section any employer or owner can abuse the law by accusing any procession or strike as "workers' misconduct." By taking advantage of this section of the law an employer or owner can dismiss his workers.

The new law has kept the previous provision of 30% membership for forming new unions, which practically negates the idea of free trade unionism. Section 180 (b) of the new law limits the eligibility of the membership of trade unions only to the enlisted workers of a particular factory, so the fear of dismissal and harassment from the employer's side discourage workers from forming trade unions in their institutions. Whereas, if we look back even to the Pakistani period, there was a provision to elect 25% leadership from outside trade unions according to Industrial Regulation Ordinance, 1969. Consequently, many educated and efficient trade unionists with their leftist or humanist ideology joined trade union movements and created a glorious history of trade union movement.

The new law has not kept any provision to reduce or control arbitrary power of the Labour Director or Registrar of Trade Unions, so in the long run it will be

Unlike in other Muslim countries which look upon the advent of the month of Ramadan with positive expectation, as a month to expiate for the past, to me personally the month comes with mixed feeling, a feeling of joy mixed with trepidation, because this is the month when prices will be pushed up inexplicably with the poor having to suffer the agony. And once the prices go up in Bangladesh they hardly assume the state of equilibrium. When in other countries, including non-Muslim countries, prices are controlled if not reduced during such occasions of festivity, it is perhaps only in Bangladesh that prices of some commodities that are consumed more than others in the month of Ramadan see a steep rise. Can anyone explain the reason why prices of chili got so hot to leap five times the normal price at which it was selling before the start of Ramadan this year? What had risen was not the demand for the item but our insatiable greed; even the

Holy month could not restrain our excessive profit making proclivity. And we call our self "deeply religious Muslims."

And how more un-Islamic can one get than calling for strikes in the month of Ramadan, and to indulge in destruction of private and public property. Such acts of violence are anathema in Islam, not to

speak of it in the month of Ramadan. And this is being done by a party that is supposed to be the flag bearer of Islam in this country. Some flag bearer!

As for adulteration of food, we would perhaps be the envy of the wicked world of the base. We do not blink an eye while saying that without formalin the fruits and vegetables would not last the duration of their journey form one part of the country to another. We do this knowing fully well that we are slow-poisoning the nation. And instead of putting fresh and unadulterated milk into babies we even tamper with imported milk tins for enhancing profit. Good Muslims we are!

When the two major political parties never come together on any issue we saw the result of their 'teamwork' in the destruction of the Buddhist temples and other sites of its heritage in Cox's Bazaar last year. Good Muslims they were!

And the list goes on.....!

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

## Amendment to labour law inadequate

very difficult for the workers to get registration for new trade unions. Section 2(45) of the new law excludes house rent benefit from workers' wages, which is totally illogical and inhumane. Not only this, despite repeated pledges from the government, this labour law does not provide any provision to allow 6 months maternity benefit for female workers. Section 10 (5) of the law does not clarify provisions for sick leave or temporary leave for the workers.

During the GSP debate western countries and many rights organisations urged our government and BGMEA to make some provisions so that workers could share the profit of the company. Since there has been such a provision in the law from 1968, by not implementing it to provide workers 5% share of profit of the company, the owners have deprived the workers of a lot of money. By amending Section: 232(3) and s. 233 of the previous law the government permanently abolished the right of workers to get a share of the profit. Section 309 of the new law does not provide adequate punishment for gross negligence of owners and their actions that could have dangerous consequences. This shows that we did not take any lesson from catastrophes like Rana Plaza, Tazreen, etc.

Bangladesh has ratified 7 ILO conventions out of 8, of which Convention 87 and 98 are relevant to the right of 'Freedom of Association' and 'Freedom of Choosing Leadership.' Therefore, it is an obligation for our government to make our national law compatible with ILO conventions. People who really want a stable industrial sector in Bangladesh advocate for a labour law of international standard that provides possible maximum benefit for workers and ensures adequate work-place safety.

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Now a question has been raised, why did lawmakers in the Parliament pass a law with so many flaws? There is heavy pressure on it from the owners and employers of industries. Since 26 MPs are directly or indirectly owners of different garment

factories, it is no surprise that they are pressuring the government not to take any positive steps for making a 'worker-friendly labour law.'

Immediately after independence of the country there were about 80% workers in the public sector and 20% in the private sector. The figure for the public sector is now about 5-6% and 93-94% in the private sector. In both the industrial and the agriculture sectors there are about 6 million workers, and many workers from informal sectors should remain under the jurisdiction of this law, but the new law did not make this clear. Moreover, safety and hygiene at workplace, and rights of women workers, had been curtailed due to deficiency in the Labour Law-2006, and the same situation is still prevailing.

Statistics show that the majority of workers are engaged in the private sector. If the new law fails to bring desired stability and development in the industrial sector, then the responsibility will have to be borne by the lawmakers.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Capital punishment for Mojaheed

As a citizen of Bangladesh, I am very happy with the verdict on war criminal Mojaheed. We would like to request BNP to leave Jamaat—the party of war criminals—which does not believe in the independence of Bangladesh. If BNP does not leave this party, we are sure they will lose votes in the upcoming national election.

Sheikh Mohammad Ali  
Mohakhali, Dhaka

### Huawei does DCC's job

This is in response to the write-up printed in The Daily Star titled "Huawei cleans Dhaka city streets" on July 14, 2013. I would like to commend Huawei for the initiative they took. It was a responsibility to be carried out by DCC but they have so far failed miserably to perform their duty. Thank you, Huawei. You have set a wonderful example and I sincerely hope that others will learn from you.

Aminur Rahim  
New DOHS, Mohakhali  
Dhaka

### People suffering: It's not just news!

A news was published in TDS on July 16 about the erosion of river Jamuna. The erosion of Jamuna has devoured 200 homesteads in just three days in the four unions of Daulatpur upazila in Manikganj. I know this type of news appears on newspapers quite often. But do we think for a moment that it is not just a news? There are many things hiding behind the news... the tears of the victims of those 200 households... their pains and agony of losing home and everything.

We just read the news and look for the next news while sipping tea from our mugs. We are too busy thinking about the development of this country. But we have no time to think about these hapless people.

Md. Shohanur Rahaman Shetu  
BAU, Mymensingh

### Youths deprived by quota system

AL is now in power mostly by the votes of youths as they were inspired by AL's promise of 'change' in the election of 2008. But the situation has not changed. In government jobs, 55% posts are filled by the candidates as per quota provision and only 45% are left for the rests. This is injustice to the meritorious students. It's time the government rectified this system and gave the general candidates the opportunity to prove their merit.

Sudip Bhattacharya  
Bangladesh Agricultural University  
Mymensingh

### Comments on news report, "AL embarrassed," published on July 22, 2013

Faisal

Embarrassed? So, what action will Sheikh Hasina take against him? Probably nothing.

Ahmed Zakaria

What shameful behaviour from our MPs!

Nds

It sounds incredible to me that AL leadership have any sense of embarrassment. It's a revelation to me.

Shahin Huq

Awami League is no stranger to repressing and beating up journalists. So I don't see any reason why the party will feel embarrassed by Roni's behaviour. The truth is that Awami League cannot tolerate media and has always been hostile to criticisms. It has closed down opposition newspapers and television channels.

Akhtar Shah

It's no different to the Mirpur AL MP who handled a female reporter. Nothing happened to him or his school overcharging parents. Don't hold your breath. Roni will rendezvous with right people and rest assured, he will relish beating up a journo with complete impunity. It's a jungle out there!

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"War trial 'a joke'" (July 22, 2013)

Toru Hashimoto

Regardless of such comments or publicity by Al Jazeera, wrongdoings cannot be made right and law will take its own course.

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Didn't the top ranking Nazi officials such as Goering and Hess give the same kind of excuse after they were accused? Talk about déjà vu!

SM

US and UK government need to look into their immigration filings. Pretty sure both of them lied.

Rashed Sarwar

UK will never do that, because he is the head of a Muslim organisation and the Muslim community (minus Bangladesh off course) will burst into street protest.

Bangla Bright

Agreed. That is why no right minded democratic government will send back these alleged war criminals!