

An emotional reunion

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chittagong

The story began almost three years ago, on November 12, 2010.

Anwar Hossain, a staff of Bangladesh Marine Fisheries Academy, was restlessly waiting in front of the emergency department of the navy hospital in Chittagong. Doctors had told him that his pregnant wife Jannatul Ferdous, who was in her third trimester, was in a very critical condition. Jannatul was suffering from various medical problems like hypertension and heart disease.

Yet, the story is not entirely about the couple.

From the navy hospital, Anwar came to know about "Peace Ark", a hospital ship of Chinese People's Liberation Army, which at the time was anchored in Chittagong. He immediately rushed to the ship.

Oihi Alifa Chin was born that day in navy hospital after a c-section surgery performed by a four-member Chinese medical team from the ship. Both, the mother and child, later returned home safe and sound.

Yesterday was the emotional reunion between the Peace Ark and the grateful family. The ship doing its miracle all over the globe came again to Bangladesh on August 19.

Rear Admiral Guan Bo Lin, head of the ship's medical staff, became very emotional seeing Chin. He immediately took her on his lap.

"I held her hand three years ago," said the rear admiral, adding, "How can I forget Chin's birthday as my daughter too was born on this day."

He described Chin as a symbol of friendship between China and Bangladesh.

Lin gave Chin a stuffed Chinese panda and a birthday card on their second meet. She was also given a free medical check-up.

Her mother Jannatul said they picked the name "Chin" for their first born out of gratitude to the Chinese doctors. The word Chin means China in Bangla.

Giving free treatment to the poor, Peace Ark will leave Bangladesh on August 25.



Three-year-old Oihi Alifa Chin meets the Chinese doctor who delivered her. Rear Admiral Guan Bo Lin met her on the hospital ship Peace Ark in Chittagong with a stuffed Panda. Lin performed the complicated C-section on her mother when the ship last came to Bangladesh.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Special JS body's proceedings back Star editorial

FROM PAGE 1

distort her news in our reports, the "response" talked about how we "distorted" it in our editorials.

We also note that the PMO's response was carried by the state-owned news agency BSS. The state-owned BTV made it a lead item in its midnight bulletin. BSS subscribers and BTV viewers got the government's accusations against The Daily Star without any comments from us.

As a mark of fairness, we hope both BSS and BTV will carry our following response.

Below we examine if we had distorted anything in our editorial. (All facts mentioned in our reply are taken from the official proceedings of the Special Committee.)

The PMO took exception to our claim in the editorial that the fifteenth amendment to the constitution was done "according to PM's own wishes and in undue haste, without any serious effort to engage anybody, including her own allies." The "response" claimed that "as a matter of fact the government followed a lengthy process for the fifteenth amendment to the constitution."

tion.

Parliament formed a 15-member Special Committee on July 21, 2010 to suggest possible amendments to the constitution necessitated by the Supreme Court judgement on the 5th amendment to the constitution.

The Special Committee met for a total of 26 sessions from 29th July 2010 to 28th May 2011. During these sessions, its members discussed all the articles of the constitution and came up with nearly 50 suggestions for amendments.

The caretaker government issue was discussed for the first time on March 29, 2011, in which they decided to suggest certain reforms to plug some loopholes and make the act much more clear. However, they made no suggestion about scrapping the CTG provision. Even suggestions by some to limit the CTG to only two terms in the future were not accepted.

In the subsequent sessions, the Special Committee discussed other articles of the constitution.

On 10th May, the Supreme Court delivered its "short verdict" on the 13th

amendment (that incorporated the CTG system in the constitution) declaring the CTG system "prospectively void and ultra vires" of the constitution. The verdict also suggested that the voided CTG system might be practised for another two parliamentary terms for the sake of "safety of the state and its people".

"The parliament, however, in the meantime, is at liberty to bring necessary amendments excluding, the provisions of making the former Chief Justices of Bangladesh or the Judges of the Appellate Division as the head of the Non-Party Care-taker Government," added the short verdict.

The Special Committee took note of this verdict at its session on 16th May, 2011. At the session, an elaborate discussion took place in which the judgement was examined in minute detail along with its possible meanings and implications. As the judgement was of a historic nature and as it dealt with one of the fundamental pillars of democracy, namely elections, the Special Committee decided to discuss it further and also, if possible, wait for the full

verdict.

The Supreme Court judgement drew tremendous national and media focus on the issue. The Special Committee discussed the CTG at two more sessions, held on 26th and 28th May.

On 29th May, the Special Committee finalised its draft final report for submission to the Leader of the House, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, at a meeting to be held the following day, 30th May.

In this draft final report, the Special Committee recommended the retention of the CTG system with only two amendments, namely specifying that the CTG cannot overshoot its limit of 90 days under any circumstances and restraining CTG power to conclude foreign treaties.

The prime minister, at her meeting with the Special Committee, rejected its recommendations and suggested that after the Supreme Court verdict the CTG system should be abolished.

The Special Committee followed her instructions, and without holding any further session, incorporated the suggestion to scrap the

CTG system and submitted its report with a 51-point recommendation to parliament on 8th June 2011.

The law minister placed a bill in the House on June 25th which was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the Law Ministry on the same day. The Standing Committee reported back to the House on 29th June, and the bill was passed on 30th June 2011.

From the above detailed narration of the working of the Special Committee, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The Special Committee after holding 26 sessions, between July 29, 2010 and May 28, 2011, and after discussing with three former chief justices, jurists, scholars, political party leaders, senior journalists (including the editor of The Daily Star, as mentioned in the "PMO response"), civil society members decided to recommend the retention of the caretaker government system.

2. The Special Committee at no stage contemplated the suggestion of abolishing the CTG system, even after the ver-

dict on the 13th amendment.

3. It was only after the PM's instruction on 30th May that CTG scrapping was incorporated in the report of the Special Committee.

4. Once the PM's instruction came, the House speedily adopted the change without discussing it with the opposition, which was boycotting parliament.

5. It may be mentioned that the Supreme Court verdict of May 10, 2011 brought before the Special Committee the issue of CTG being "ultra vires" of the constitution and at the same time suggesting that it may be kept for two more terms. This complicated legal and constitutional issue was never discussed with former chief justices, jurists and others who spoke before the Special Committee as they appeared before the verdict was pronounced.

So to imply, as the "PMO's response" does, that the scrapping of the CTG issue was discussed with a wide range of people and that public opinion was sought about it is a travesty of truth.

6. The PMO's claim that the CTG scrapping took place

following the verdict of the Supreme Court is not based on facts. The short verdict allowed for two more terms for the CTG, which was ignored by the government. The full verdict was released in September 2012, long after the CTG had already been abolished.

7. While the Special Committee met for more than 10 months, the CTG scrapping only took place within a month, 30th May to 30th June, 2011.

Considering the detailed historical account, which is taken from the official proceedings of the Special Committee of parliament, and point by point discussion of the PMO's response, we consider our editorial to have been based on facts and that no distortion can be traced in our editorial.

We stand by our position that the abolition of the CTG took place on the PM's wishes, "in undue haste and without any effort to engage anybody..."

For the benefit of our readers and to contribute to a more informed debate on this issue we intend to write further on the proceedings of the Special Committee.

- Editor

Speaker

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opposition] want to hold discussion in the House on how to hold the next parliamentary polls," she said while talking to reporters after a workshop at the MP hostel of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Management and Resources Development Initiative organised the workshop titled "JS bodies under media scanner".

"It is the government and the opposition who should come forward to find ways to hold the next parliamentary polls," she said.

The 19th session of parliament is set to begin on September 12. The BNP-led opposition leaders said they would join the session even though they had boycotted several entire sessions of this parliament.

The political stalemate arose mainly after the Awami League-led 18-party government abolished the non-partisan caretaker government system by amending the constitution in June, 2011.

The main opposition BNP has been agitating restoration of the caretaker government system.

The next parliamentary elections are due between October and January, 2014.



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Crisis deepens

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Academic activities of the university came to a halt as no class or exam has taken place since Wednesday, thanks to the teachers' strike.

The teachers said they would continue the strike until August 26 and if nothing happened by then they would announce their next course of action. They also said the university's transport system and scheduled examinations would remain out of the purview of the strike.

Amid such situation, the VC yesterday faxed a letter to JU Chancellor and President Abdul Hamid requesting him to look into the matter and take legal actions to save the university.

Meanwhile, two other factions of teachers under Shikhhak Mancha and Sadharon Shikhhak Parishad yesterday took their stand against the strike.

In separate press conferences on the campus, they alleged that the agitating teachers had been demon-

strating without caring for the interest of the university.

They too sought interference of the chancellor and demanded investigation into the allegations brought against the VC. They, however, admitted that the VC's resignation was one of the solutions to the ongoing crisis.

On Wednesday, the agitating teachers sat with two pro-VCs of the university but the talks yielded no positive result.

Over the last two days, Prof Anwar Hossain has been allowed medical facilities and homemade food. His family members met him last night.

Talking to The Daily Star, the VC refused to resign. Terming the agitating teachers' demand baseless and illogical, he said they were continuing the agitation ignoring and violating a High Court order.

"I will decide my next step in accordance with the chancellor's findings," he said.

Contacted, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid told The Daily Star that his ministry was keeping contact with the agitating teachers and had urged them to find out a solution through talks.

"Eventually, the students will bear the burnt if the classes and exams remain suspended," he said.

Education Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "I have asked the teachers to inform us of their problems and grievances. They assured me of doing that soon."

Meanwhile, the JU Teachers' Association had been demanding resignation of the VC since April 27. On July 30, it withdrew its agitation following a HC order, but then the Sadharon Shikhhak Forum was formed and the agitation revived.

Earlier, teachers of the university observed work abstention for about two months.

Schoolgirl forced

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Instead, Mosharraf, 24, along with his friends raped her, confining her to a house for a week.

She was then handed over to Rubina Begum and Taslima Begum of Maya Kuthir at Savar, where they forced her to become a sex worker for about two months, the victim said.

Rubina Begum, 35, of Kakfu village under Bagatipara in Natore, and Taslima Begum, 21, of

Kumuria village under Daulatpur upazila in Manikganj, have been running the prostitution ring at the Savar's Maya Kuthir for long.

After his daughter reached home and narrated the horrific story to him, the victim's father filed a case with the police station accusing Mosharraf, Rubina, and Taslima under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act Wednesday

afternoon.

Police arrested Rubina and Taslima from Maya Kuthir, and Mosharraf from his residence at Daulatpur in the district in separate drives on the day, said Ashrafur Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Ghior Police Station.

Police produced the arrestees before a court yesterday and prayed for a five-day remand. But the court granted a three-day remand for each, the OC added.

Bill seeks media

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The proposed legislation says if a media house reports on parliamentary proceedings without any distortion, nobody can take it to the court.

The media house, however, might face prosecution if it runs any report without objectivity and against people's interest. In that case, the accused may be faced with a fine of Tk 50,000 and sentenced to two years in jail.

As per a constitutional provision, lawmakers enjoy such immunity from prosecution. Article 78 (3) of the constitution says a member of parliament shall not be liable to proceedings in any court in respect of anything said, or any vote given by him in the House or in any committee thereof.

Parliament Secretariat officials, involved in publication of any report, paper, vote or proceedings by or under the authority of parliament, also enjoy the same constitutional immunity.

In the absence of such protection, newspapers and television channels face difficulties in running reports on parliamentary proceedings fearing prosecution.

Sometimes, they partly censor reports in fear of defamation or contempt of court. This deprives people of being informed about the exact discussions in the House or in parliamentary committees.

Defending the proposed legislation, Saber Hossain

Chowdhury said the Jatiya Sangsad is the centre of all activities of the country. In a democratic governance system, all national issues are discussed in parliament. Debates are also held in parliament before making any policy decision, he added.

So, the media need to publish and broadcast parliamentary proceedings as they are to aware people about the discussions held in the House. Considering all these aspects, the law has been drafted, said the legislator in a brief statement tagged with the copy of the bill.

Talking to The Daily Star, senior BNP leader Moudud Ahmed lauded the proposed legislation. He said he would support the bill in the House.

"We should have enacted such a law much earlier for the protection of media to cover parliamentary proceedings," mentioned the former law minister.

Prof Nizam Uddin Ahmed, a teacher at Chittagong University and a parliamentary affairs expert, also welcomed the move.

"It would empower the media to ensure extensive coverage of parliamentary proceedings, which would contribute to strengthening parliament," he told this newspaper yesterday.

The Indian parliament long ago had made such legislation. A few years ago, it amended the constitution to ensure protection for media.