

Law against reckless driving slackens

The idea should be reviewed

YIELDING to road transport workers' pressure, the home ministry has decided not to bring murder charges under Section 302 of CrPC against transport drivers responsible for deaths in road accidents. Cases already in motion under this section will be withdrawn. Under the prevailing arrangement they could be prosecuted according to the nature of their offence.

This is unfortunate as it will only encourage reckless driving. It will not only close options open to the law-enforcement agencies in dealing with such cases, it will also provide them with impunity of sorts, and untrained drivers with unfit vehicles will now become more callous in the absence of a deterrent law. As it is, we are not aware of any instance where a driver has ever been meted out with the highest punishment under the existing dispensation.

It is worthwhile to note that appalled at reckless driving resulting in increasing number deaths related to roads accidents, civil society members and road safety campaigners had long been demanding that tougher punishment under CrPc be arranged for irresponsible driving.

The idea stands in stark contrast to the fact that our highways are known as death traps, where the number of annual deaths in road accidents is around 3300, and the rate of death of 80 per thousand vehicles on road, far outnumbers that of India and Pakistan.

The government's giving in to pressure from a coterie, perhaps with an eye to the upcoming parliamentary election, does not bode well for establishing discipline on the highways. It should think of reviewing the idea.

Unbecoming behaviour of BRUR faculty

VC's confinement deplorable

W E note with dismay that the Vice Chancellor (VC) of Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur (BRUR) has been confined to his office for three consecutive days. While the demand of the teachers for arrear salary may be valid, it does not justify the action of the teachers of BRUR. What is interesting to note is that many of the demands regarding irregularities made by the teachers and staff had occurred during the tenure of the former VC.

We wonder if the teachers are justified in demanding the regularisation of those teachers and staff appointed by the previous VC which is far beyond the approved posts of the university. If anything, the previous VC should be called to account for the irregular appointments. We are surprised that such gross violations, that went on during the four year period of the previous VC had escaped the notice of the UGC.

It is hardly any wonder that there is huge shortfall in the fund, and the staff has gone without pay for last four months. The university has nearly double the number than its authorised quota. Regardless of the circumstances, we would like to state emphatically that whatever demands the faculty have must be taken up in a manner that is dignified and proper.

Solitary confinement of the VC cannot be condoned under any circumstances. It is both inhumane and illegal. Such behaviour is unbecoming of teachers. With teachers setting the standards for unruly behaviour these days, is it any wonder that our campuses are turning into battlegrounds between student factions?

What people think

Friday: September 13, 2013

Do you agree with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that the defeat of the Awami League-backed candidates in all city corporation elections was for "false propaganda" of the opposition parties?

Yes

16%

No

84%

Saturday: September 14, 2013

Do you agree with Rashed Khan Menon, chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education Ministry that the demand for raising the maximum age limit for govt job applicants to 35 is logical?

Yes

51%

No

49%

Sunday: September 15, 2013

Do you agree with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury that the treasury and the opposition benches will resolve disagreement between them through discussions in the last session of this parliament?

Yes

20%

No

80%

Monday: September 16, 2013

Do you agree with BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir that the ruling Awami League has been hatching a plot to hold a one-sided election and trying to keep the BNP out of it?

Yes

79%

No

21%

Tuesday: September 17, 2013

Do you agree with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that there may be conspiracies against the ruling Awami League both in the national and international arenas?

Yes

21%

No

79%

Wednesday: September 18, 2013

Do you agree with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's allegation that the government is trying to hold a stage-managed, one-sided election?

Yes

74%

No

26%

Thursday: September 19, 2013

Do you agree with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia that more than 90 percent people of the country want the caretaker government system?

Yes

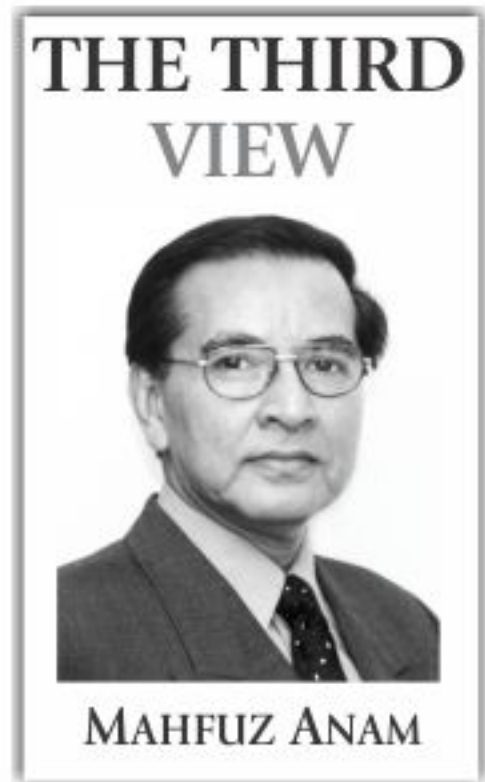
70%

No

30%

Why is BNP so ambivalent about the War Crimes trial?

Its unclear position is lending credence to AL's accusation that it is trying to "protect" the war criminals



THE THIRD VIEW

MAHFUZ ANAM

THERE are two distinct aspects of the war crimes trial. One is of the role of individuals in committing crimes against humanity and how guilty one is, and the commensurate punishment that should be meted out. These are matters of law, of evidence, of witness, testimony, interpretation. These we leave to the ICT and our highest judiciary to determine.

The other is the bigger question of genocide and the historical legacy of betrayal, subversion, denunciation of our most sacred cause and conspiring with and abetting those who wanted to obliterate us as a people, as a culture and as a nation. It deals with our very birth, the reason for our independence movement, the meaning of the events that culminated into our armed struggle and, most importantly, the reason behind millions of our people laying down their lives.

There is nothing greater and more glorious than our Liberation War, and there can be no greater crime than committing genocide and all that it entails in an attempt to prevent our freedom.

This is where many of us, as freedom fighters, as patriots, and as ordinary citizens of the country, cannot comprehend the role of one of our biggest political parties, namely the BNP. Its ambivalence, indifference and, according to many, near hostility towards the events of 1971, and especially the genocide, leave those of us who lived through those events absolutely flabbergasted. How can a political party that enjoys significant public support and has twice been elected to government, and may be elected again, be so absolutely silent about the biggest and the most gruesome crime ever committed against us as a people?

Whenever questioned about the war crimes trial the BNP's reply has been that they are definitely in favour of trial of the "real" war criminals, implying that those being tried are not.

Who are those "real" war criminals that BNP is alluding to? It has never named them or even hinted as to who they might be. There have been occasions when some BNP leaders said that AL must try Razakars within its own party. So is it BNP's position that those Razakars who are now within the ruling party are the "real" war criminals? Wasn't Ghulam Azam the chief of Jamaat during the War of Liberation? Wasn't Matiur Rahman Nizami the head of Al-Badr at that time, how did Abdur Quader Mollah come to be known a 'butcher of Mirpur,' wasn't Mojaheed the head of Islami Chattra Sangha, the student wing of Jamaat then, and wasn't Kamruzzaman a local leader of the same organisation? Wasn't Jamaat collaborating with the Pakistan army, whose target was our freedom fighters and the goal was to destroy our freedom struggle? Weren't millions of Bangladeshis killed during those crucial nine months? And if so, aren't some people responsible? If so, then is it not our duty to find who those people

were?

BNP can say that the list of war criminals prepared by AL is incomplete and that there are many others who should be tried. This can be quite an acceptable position. But to literally say that "real" criminals are not among those who are being tried is really trying to falsify history and, here we agree with Sheikh Hasina, BNP is trying to save those being tried for war crimes.

BNP's 'damn care' attitude towards our Liberation War and what it means to us the freedom fighters, to the nation and to the people in general was most disgustingly revealed when it used the word "genocide" to describe the deaths that occurred during Hefajat's gathering in Dhaka.

Just for the sake of argument let us accept Hefajat's version of the event (though they failed to substantiate the claim till today, and which we contested in our reports). The question is why should BNP use the word "genocide" to describe those deaths knowing full well its significance in our Liberation War history? How can the BNP equate the Hefajat incident to the events of 1971 and the killing of millions of our people, the rape of many thousands women, the destruction of thousands of villages, and making twenty million of our people into refugees—something that in our collective memory is connoted by one word, "genocide"?

The question becomes all the more pertinent when we consider that the trial of those accused of committing "genocide" is going on in the country after 42 years of waiting. Will it be unfair if we accuse BNP of deliberately corroding the historical significance—and thereby diminishing the memory of the crime that it signifies—of the word 'genocide' by using it in such an inappropriate instance.

I asked a BNP leader whom I know from my St. Gregory school days about it. He flew into a rage and said: "See the dictionary. It is a common English word and why can't we use it?" If that is the level of sensitivity BNP leaders have for the biggest tragedy that had befallen our nation then we really have a fundamental "clash of values" with this party. Why does the word "Holocaust" have a special meaning for the Jewish people? While I condemn them for the way they are treating the Palestinians, I cannot support former Iranian president's attempt to trivialise it. BNP is also trivialising our sacred history when they use words like 'genocide' in such a cavalier manner.

BNP has so far shied away from making its position clear about the war crimes trial. People can have questions, as we ourselves do, about the procedural aspects of the trail. But the fact is that the crimes against humanity did occur in 1971 is well established. Questioning that, or trivialising the historic events of our independence struggle and especially making light of the genocidal attack on our innocent and freedom loving people cannot be and will never be accepted.

Given our political culture, it is expected that BNP will oppose everything the AL does, regardless of its merit. However, it is not expected that BNP will oppose history just because AL is trying to uphold it.

The writer is Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star.

Two parties are two peas in a pod



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

WHEN the great Greek poet Epimenides said all Cretans were liars, the paradox was that he was himself a Cretan. Come to think of it, that "liar paradox" also defines our political irony. Almost everything the ruling party blames on the opposition in this country is what it did while it was in that position. Almost everything the opposition holds against the ruling party is what it did when it was in power. If either side is right, it's also true that neither side is wrong.

Thus the crux of political confrontation in Bangladesh lies in its paradox. The ruling party that once struggled for the caretaker government has sidelined it. The opposition that resisted the caretaker government is rooting for it. The ruling party complains that the opposition does not come to the parliament, when it itself boycotted the parliament while in the opposition. The ruling party criticises the opposition for enforcing *hartal* because it hurts the economy. Not long ago and every time in the opposition, it spared no chance to do the same thing.

There are many nuances to the paradox that are the staple of our national politics. When BNP was preparing for the elections in 2001, the elder son of the party chairman is said to have had orchestrated the campaign for it. The electoral victory of that year invested him with so much influence in the party that even ministers visited the Hawa Bhaban to seek his guidance.

The son of the ruling party president also got inducted to politics on the eve of an election campaign. If the party wins the election, the credit of a job well done will consolidate his position. When that happens, we have to wait and see which way he will go with his newfound command.

In a nutshell, though, the ruling party and the opposition are the mirror images, if not the spitting image, of each other. If the ruling party ministers and leaders are committing excesses, they only remind us of opposition politicians when they were in power. And, if we take the history of the post-Ershad politics in this country, it has been a vicious circle between two main political parties. One lost elections exactly for the same and opposite reasons why another won. In five years' time every time, the table kept turning in exactly the same manner.

Thus the party in power is the bygone opposition. The opposition is the bygone party in power. That's also true for other countries: Tory and Labor in the UK, Democrats and Republicans in the USA and Congress and BJP in India. The difference is that in repetitive cycles of victory and defeat both parties in each country have been able to create smooth transition to its future.

In contrast, every five years our politics stumbles into deadlock because the two political camps are more similar than dissimilar. As a matter of fact, they agree more than they disagree. And their conflicts arise more from convergence than divergence, because their differentials are ingrained in their commonalities. Their strategies are the same. Their dynamics are the same. So are their goals and ambitions.

It, therefore, was no surprise when the ruling party billboards, bitterly criticised in the nation's capital, popped up in Sylhet. And the opposition erected similar billboards in Bogra, when it had so scathingly criticised the billboards in Dhaka. The biggest weakness of our politics is mistaken by politicians as its greatest strength. Success is seen more as an ability to teach the opponents a lesson instead of learning from them.

May be, an allegory of magnets will explain it better. If the two parties are compared with two magnets, they repel because their like poles are facing each other. A pole of a magnet is where its field is most intense. Our two parties are so confrontational because their approach to politics has the intensity of two advancing

armies. Victory of one isn't certain in accommodation but only in elimination of the other.

Competition makes rivals, and hostility makes enemies. Which one is true between our two political parties? Rivals prove one is immensely better than the other. Enemies prove they can get worse. While the country anxiously awaits a peaceful election, the voters are feeling nervous. Whoever comes to power next, will it be for better or worse?

Ideally, people willing to make sacrifices for the country join politics. Our politicians look ready to sacrifice the country. They buy homes in another country, send their children abroad and stash away money in foreign banks. Politics for them is a way to convert country into cash.

That's one thing common amongst our politicians camouflaged by their differences. The fight isn't about what they can give to the country but what the country can give them.

The writer is Editor, First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star.
Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Rein in pro-war criminal hooligans

Nowhere in the world have the war criminals dared to protest the verdict of the court and the law. But in Bangladesh whenever the court gives a verdict on a war crimes case, supporters of the criminals start vandalising public vehicles and police vans, call hartals, kill innocent people and create panic throughout the country. Police in most cases fail to protect public property and tackle the situation. Is this not a serious disrespect to the court and the law by the supporters of the war criminals? The government should take full responsibility for all the damage done by the supporters of the war criminals. For while the court is conducting the trials of the war criminals, the government is allowing the war criminals' supporters to commit destructive activities.

Md. Shahjahan Mia
Development Professional
Satmosjid Road, Dhaka

Assad rides over burning Syria

It is simply disgusting what Bashar al-Assad is doing to stay in power. He fought his war against rebels and that was enough. But why did he use chemical weapons against civilians? The country is already torn apart. It's unbelievable what he's doing just to hold on to power.

Ahmed As Sami
Anandeniketan School, Sylhet

Increase potato storage facilities

In 2012-13 fiscal year, Bangladesh has produced a record of 8.6 million tons of potatoes which has surpassed all the previous records. Potato is the most consumed carbohydrate-rich vegetable in Bangladesh. Potatoes provide several key nutrients such as vitamin C, potassium, and dietary fiber.

It is unfortunate that although we are producing a huge quantity of potatoes in our country, the storage facilities are very limited. According to Bangladesh Cold Storage Association, the country has a storage capacity of 4.2 million tons of potatoes at its 382 cold storages, which is less than half of the total production. Every year a huge quantity of potatoes get rotten due to insufficient cold storage facilities. Moreover, only a few industries are producing potato chips, fries, etc. in the country.

The government should take some initiative to increase the cold storage facilities and ensure constant power supply for smooth operation of these cold storages. At the same time, private sector should be given some incentives to set up potato processing plants in rural areas.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture
SAU, Dhaka

Reckless motorcyclists

The number of motorcycles is increasing rapidly on our streets. But most of the motorcyclists do not obey the traffic rules; even in the presence of the traffic police they remain indifferent to the traffic rules. They drive straight onto the oncoming traffic which is very dangerous for the pedestrians and the bikers as well. My car has been hit several times by motorcycles as the bikers tried to drive through a narrow gap on the road when I stopped my car in a traffic signal. I request the traffic police department to enforce traffic laws strictly for the motorcyclists.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "BNP grabs billboards," published on September 16, 2013

Abbasuddin

All the political leaders are poorly educated in Bangladesh and they just look alike. Only difference is that they work for different parties. However, it's a shame for the leaders of BNP that they are copying the nasty acts of AL.

deep purple blue

The two big parties are two sides of the same coin!

touchstone

So now, how is BNP different from AL? If they show such muscle power, we need not guess what they will do once they win. More of what they did in their last term.

Abul Kashem

We appeal to BNP's leadership to refrain from this copying culture.

Shahin Huq

If this has been done without permission, then it will only harm BNP's popularity.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

We are not astounded to read this news. Bogra is BNP's stronghold and they grabbed the billboards like bandits. Awami League did the same in Dhaka. Now it's people's turn to use their own judgment about BNP and AL. Both the political parties are unashamedly blackmailing the public.

"Govt denies EC more clout" (September 17, 2013)

Ash C.

Let's not be that naive to undermine the ruling party to allow EC any power which could in turn boomerang to 'help' AL put another nail in their coffin!

Abul Kashem

The government wants to stick to power anyhow. So, proposals or suggestions from anywhere will be dumped by them all along.