

Leakage of ICT verdict

A serious professional lapse

THE admission by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT)s spokesperson on Wednesday that parts of draft of the verdict on SQ Chowdhury might have been leaked a few days before it was delivered by the tribunal is highly disconcerting. This is so even if the leaked version of the draft copy may not be the same as the final form in which the verdict was delivered.

What has happened reflects serious lack of professionalism in matters of handling confidentiality of an important material.

Given the sensitivity of the war crimes cases, it should not have happened at all. Since, however, this involves the sanctity and integrity of a legal process, no quarters, political or otherwise, should take unfair advantage of it.

But the way the BNP is casting aspersions on or questioning the process and the judgement is objectionable and unacceptable.

We are particularly distraught by BNP's tendency to take the slightest opportunity to question the ICT's trial process.

It's no doubt a serious lapse occurring through the cracks of an ill-guarded system. This must be thoroughly gone into and those responsible for the leakage should be exposed, held to account and punished.

We would like to emphasise that especially after the Skype scandal, the ICT administration should have been, by all means, on guard against any deliberate attempt at bringing the judicial process into disrepute. This could have averted such an entirely avoidable slippage.

Dearth of storage facilities nationwide

Large portion of produce goes waste

WHEN the finance minister says that there is a major shortage of cold storages in the country, he is stating the obvious. As pointed out by Mr. Muhith, with only two vintage cold storages operating in the country that were established in the early '70s, it is hardly surprising that so much of the agricultural bounty goes to waste.

Obviously, feeding a population that has practically doubled over the last forty years requires more food. Yet successive governments have shied away from setting up multipurpose cold storages in the country that can preserve a variety of products for leaner times. While the country has experienced good breakthroughs in terms of production, the same cannot be said for physical storage facilities. The major impediment for private sector to make investments in the area of cold storage has to do with high bank interest rate that is around 18 – 20 per cent. Given that banks have largely failed to provide loans for agro-based industries, it is not particularly surprising that no major cold storage facilities have been built in the country for decades.

Modern cold storage facilities go far beyond storing just vegetables. Indeed, processed poultry and livestock too can be stored for future consumption. Needless to say the issue has to be addressed immediately. We would urge the government to seek ways to help provide financial incentives to promote the building of such facilities.

What people think



Friday: September 27, 2013

Do you agree with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that the Election Commission is now totally independent and discharging its duties without any government interference?

● Yes (17%)
● No (83%)

Saturday: September 28, 2013

Do you think it was justified for a ruling Awami League policymaker to threaten public servants of facing "bad consequences" if they do not perform per the government's directives until January 24?

● Yes (17%)
● No (83%)

Sunday: September 29, 2013

Do you think that treating road accident deaths as accidental will deny justice?

● Yes (82%)
● No (18%)

Monday: September 30, 2013

Do you agree with green activists that the government is deceiving people with assurances that the Rampal power plant project will do no harm to the Sundarbans?

● Yes (82%)
● No (18%)

Tuesday: October 01, 2013

Do you think a favourable minimum wage will help end labour unrest in the garment sector?

● Yes (65%)
● No (35%)

Wednesday: October 02, 2013

Do you agree with TIB that deputy commissioners should not be appointed as returning officers in the national election, taking into consideration the issue of "politicisation in administration"?

● Yes (88%)
● No (12%)

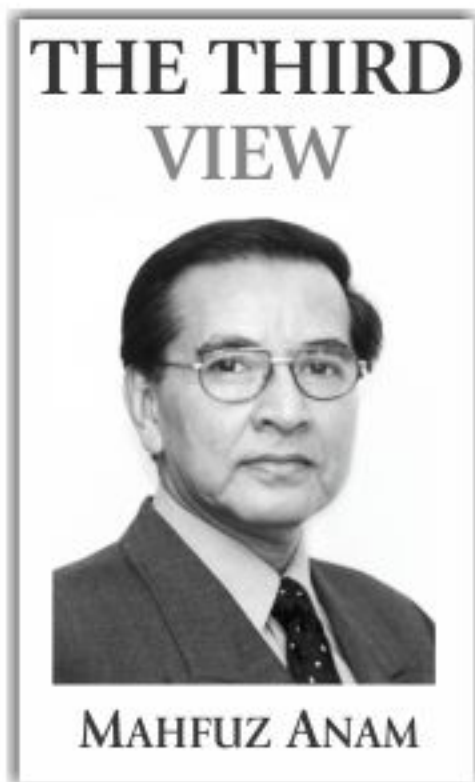
Thursday: October 03, 2013

Do you think it was justified for traders demanding return of the medicines seized in a drive against the sale of unauthorised medicines in the capital?

● Yes (10%)
● No (90%)

War crimes trial and failure of our politics

Genocide was committed against our people, and yet we cannot agree to condemn it collectively



MAHFUZ ANAM

WE are a severe critic of this government on many issues. But on the issue of holding war crimes trial we have no hesitation in saying that without the AL in power, and without Sheikh Hasina's determined leadership, it would have never happened. For this we express our heartfelt gratitude, as we have done in the past, to the AL chief's single minded focus and unwavering resolve to hold the trial and then see it through to the very end.

For those of us who remember the immediate post-Bangabandhu assassination period, we distinctly recall how the memories of our Liberation War and that of the leaders of those momentous days, especially the role of Bangabandhu and that of Awami League, were either gradually obliterated or made questionable by selective, incomplete, and sometimes fabricated history of the period.

Bangabandhu was the founder of Baksal and Awami League the party that killed democracy were the two oft-repeated narrative of that period. The former's role in leading to the independence struggle -- how he united a divided people, how he forged an ironclad unity behind Bengali nationalism, how he emboldened us all to first demand and then fight for our rights--were swept under the carpet, and only the fact that he formed Baksal (no doubt his biggest blunder) was grilled into the public mind.

All the narratives of the Liberation War were usurped by one sentence, that Maj. Zia declared independence, and hearing his announcement over the radio, people just spontaneously started the armed struggle.

There was no political struggle from 1947 to 1970, there were no movements for provincial autonomy -- six points and eleven points -- there was no anti-martial law movement, there were no anti-Ayub and anti-Yahya movements, there was no Agartala Conspiracy case, there were no student or mass movements. There was just Zia's announcement, and like magic our Liberation War started.

Without going into the nitty-gritty of the trial and its real and imagined shortcomings, the question we need to ask is that why did it need the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina in power to bring it about? There is not a single Bangalee--save perhaps the perpetrators themselves--who will deny that genocide did take place on our soil during 1971. In that genocide millions were killed and hundreds and thousands of our women raped and thousands of our villages burnt. Even today one would not find a single family that did not have one or several of its family members killed, either by the Pakistani army or their local collaborators, including the dreaded Al-Badr, Al-Shams, etc.

When such is the collective memory, then why is that it is only the AL and Sheikh Hasina who pursue the war crimes trials, and the rest of us, at best, watch like specta-

tors and, at worst, pass sneering remarks about its so-called flawed process and legal lacunae.

Herein lies one of the biggest failures of our politics. It is so blinded by mutual hatred, jealousy, suspicion, and driven by vulgar opportunism, that we are willing to sacrifice everything, including facts relating to the Liberation War atrocities, just to suit our political convenience. We are among a few countries in the post Second World War history, which had the rare good fortune of fighting and creating a free and independent state of our own. In gaining that freedom we had to undergo tremendous sacrifices, immense sufferings, almost endless prison terms of many of our leaders, including, and especially, Sheikh Mujib.

In the final chapter of that struggle we had to face genocide. The state machinery of Pakistan and its formidable and highly trained and equipped armed forces -- armed, by the way, by our tax and jute money -- used their full might to quell our struggle for freedom. The idea was that they would kill everyone who demanded freedom and when sufficient numbers would be dead the rest would become silent.

What made our genocide different was that it was being perpetrated by "our own" army. In almost all other cases of genocide, the actor was an invading army. But in our case the army that we clothed, fed, trained, brought equipment for and housed in ideally located areas of the country, wanted a "pure Pakistani" people and wanted to eliminate the "impure Bengalis" from amongst them.

The above narrative was just to nudge the memory of those of us Muktiyoddhas who seem to have forgotten how our Liberation War narrative was hijacked till Awami League and Sheikh Hasina retrieved it. (With a new fault of their own, that of excluding everybody from the narrative save Bangabandhu.) We hope to address that issue on a separate occasion)

We need to remember the atrocities of 1971 and the brutality perpetrated on our people, in order to fully understand the relevance of the war crimes trials. Yes, we wish we were a bit more efficient in going about it, more tech-savvy, more up to the international standard, etc. But all the shortcomings notwithstanding -- all of which were eminently avoidable -- the fundamental legal, moral and historical foundation of the process remains unshaken.

There is an urgent need for the nation to be united behind the war crimes trial. The present political process that shows a divided polity on the issue is an insult to the millions who laid down their lives so that we can live in freedom. This is not revenge, nor retribution, but only justice. There is no way we, as a self-respecting people, can and should forget what happened in 1971. Those who say why hang on to the past, the answer is simple. There are "pasts" whose value is so immense, whose significance in our national ethos so fundamental, and whose energising capacity to drive towards the future is so powerful, that giving it up is like giving up our very dream of building a nation of prosperity, freedom, and above all, DIGNITY.

The writer is Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star

Railroading Rampal power plant



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

AMERICAN writer Mark Twain said that a railroad is like a lie that one has to keep building to make it stand. Our government plans to build a power plant, not a railroad in Rampal. And we hope it's not lying to us when it insists that the plant isn't going to cause any harm to the Sundarbans. But the rush of things and the last minute launch plan are sending a wrong message. Many people wonder if the government is trying to railroad the whole thing.

The recent government press note only reinforced that message. It rightly emphasised that this power plant is an important project for the country. The press note also stated that the plant, once built, will improve the socioeconomic conditions of the people in the surrounding areas. All of that should be music to our ears if not for that pesky doubt that raises its ugly head from time to time: Why are some people opposed to the plant if it's supposed to be good?

The Rampal plant should wait until this nation reaches a consensus. We surely need more electricity to tide over power shortage. But one less project cannot be a disaster for this country. Not when immediate illumination threatens to leave long-term future in the dark.

A press note is as flimsy as the paper on which it's written. Even flimsier is the idea that the government could address a national concern with a piece of paper. It's not enough to say that a segment of people and a few organisations are spreading propaganda to mislead the people. What has the government done in last nineteen months since it signed the agreement with the Indian company? What has it done to set the records straight and dispel misgivings that snow-balled last week into a long march?

Prime minister's energy adviser announced at a press briefing on September 25 that the construction of the plant will be inaugurated on October 22. He also said that the controversy over the plant and its impact on the Sundarbans was not based on facts. But that only gives one man's soliloquy when we needed a national dialogue. The energy adviser sounded as if he was hurling commandments as Zeus did lightning bolts from Olympus.

Instead, why couldn't he invite the long marchers to a meeting? Why couldn't he disclose the actual facts if he knew the other side was out of depth? That the plant will be located 14 kilometers away from the Sundarbans, that there will be a 275-meter high chimney and that the government will import high quality coal don't put our minds to rest. Rather, these only tell us that this power plant has to be run with extreme care, all the more reason why the project deserves a careful second thought.

For argument's sake, let's assume that the distance of the

plant and the height of the chimney are going to be safe. Let us also assume that neither of these two is ever going to change. What about the quality of coal? Who is going to see that it does not get compromised if corruption finally infiltrates the plant? What's the guarantee the next government will be equally wise and the next energy adviser will be equally committed?

Those are just the onsite risks of Rampal power plant. What about the offsite risks? The coal will have to be transported through the Sundarbans from Mongla to Heron Point when coal dust is likely to pollute water and air along the way. The increased ship movement will intensify river erosion. Light and sound of ships will devastate marine life.

These are the arguments proffered by the protestors. How does the government want to counter them? It talks about the Environment Impact Assessment done by the Power Development Board. It also talks about the certification given by the Department of Environment. Now both of these being government bodies, their findings are taken by people with a grain of salt for obvious reasons.



STAR photo of September 15, 2013, shows land development is going on at the site of Rampal power plant in Bagerhat.

Why does the government have to build the plant in the face of so much resistance? And why is it so important to start the work in the last days of its tenure? This country needed many more projects implemented but the government couldn't get them started.

The Padma Bridge, the monorail project, the tunnel under the Karnaphuli River, modernisation of Chittagong and Mongla ports, construction of a deep seaport, completion of the 4-lane Chittagong Highway and extension of rail network were promised in the ruling party's election manifesto. Most of these ambitious projects either never got started or are left in limbo. On bilateral side, the Farakka Barrage, Teesta water sharing and corridor issues are still unresolved with India. If so much can wait, why is the big hurry in Bagerhat?

The Rampal plant should wait until this nation reaches a consensus. We surely need more electricity to tide over power shortage. But one less project cannot be a disaster for this country. Not when immediate illumination threatens to leave long-term future in the dark.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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PM should resolve crisis over poll-time govt.

The people of Bangladesh must be very scared of the movement that the opposition has announced it will launch to unseat the present government. The movement is not likely to be peaceful as one can assume from the opposition leader's speech in Khulna the other day.

Thanks to the prime minister for her prudence that she did not give a similar speech on her arrival at the airport from the USA. PM should take adequate time to personally review the opposition leader's speech and respond with relevant facts and figures maintaining decency. The prime minister must keep the door open for dialogue with opposition and try her best to agree to a permanent system of poll-time interim government instead of a patchwork for next one or two terms.

A well-wisher of Bangladesh
One e-mail

An excuse for corruption of chosen ones

Your very eye-opening headliner about the National Board of Revenue (NBR) 'waiving' the law for vehicle imports for parliament members (DS Sept 30) is quite instructive. The fact that a supposedly independent body like the NBR can succumb to political pressure is bad enough. The additional fact that the tax law of the land, as passed by parliament, can be openly and formally 'waived' tells us quite a bit about the substance of Bangladesh's parliamentary democracy which the PM was taking credit for in New York with the claim that she established the 'rule of law.' What is also interesting in your article is the author's blaming a former military ruler for the tax dodging, even though that ruler has been history for quarter of a century; at some point, laying the blame for all the ills of the land at the door of the British, the Pakistanis, and the military simply becomes an excuse for the corruption of those who we desperately want to idolise. I credit the author of the story for admitting rather grudgingly that the former caretaker government had actually refused to indulge politicians in this wholesale theft of the national exchequer.

Esam Sohail
Kansas, USA

Humanism Manifesto

Greatest theoretical physicist of our time, Stephen Hawking, speaking at the premiere of a documentary film about his life, said he thinks idea of conventional afterlife is a fairy tale for people afraid of the dark. I would like to mention in this connection that twenty two Nobel Laureates in various disciplines of science are among the signatories to Humanism Manifesto iii. According to this manifesto, humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without super-naturalism, affirmed our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity. Growing number of people in developed countries are being converted to this idea. Technology of artificial birth is already in the hands of men. Conquest of death is not a far cry as a lot of progress has already been achieved. Are we preparing ourselves to face the situation when old faiths and beliefs are shattered by the onslaught of science?

Ahmed Shah
Dhanmondi 13, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Send team to watch polls," published on September 30, 2013

Zman7

The honest opinion of PM has come out again from her prime statement when she officially requested the UN to send its observer team to see the fairness of the next election.

Abul Kashem

A person with minimum sense knows that by 15th amendment the present constitution was 'rearranged' to serve the AL government's purpose only, not the people's.

Jakaria Bulbul

It proves the PM's honesty and courage as she requested the UN to observe whether the upcoming polls will be fair or not.

"TIB against DCs as returning officers" (September 30, 2013)

Nantu

Why can't anybody speak in plain language? TIB should clearly state what measures the AL government has taken to fix the election results.

Deepjelejai

When the EC has been politicised, it does not matter who will be appointed as RO.

Shahin Huq

Will Sheikh Hasina listen to any such sensible advice? She fears that defeat in the general elections may expedite her imprisonment; and she knows how much public money she and her ministers have misappropriated, how many people her government has killed and how many opposition people have been subjected to forced disappearance during her rule.

Nds

Will TIB please tell us who in this country is not politicised? Are they themselves above politics?