

Tackling violence against women

Not women-only matter

WE fully share the sentiments of our sisters who are demanding justice for those women victims of violence for whom justice has remained a distant dream. It is astonishing that only a handful of 2 lakh cases of violence against women filed between 2002 and 2013 have been cleared till now. And what better way than to ventilate their grievances at the slow progress of these cases than holding a demonstration on February 14 with the theme, "Demanding Justice" under the banner of "Uddome Uttorone Shotokoti."

While we would like to assure the organisers that they are not alone in their effort to establish rights of women we would suggest that they focus on the entire gamut of the issue of violence against women while invoking the help of the highest judiciary. We would like to flag an important aspect of the issue, as we have done in the past, that to combat the menace of violence against women and girls we need a collective approach straddling the supposed gender barrier. Unfortunately, the system in Bangladesh is heavily weighted against women. And it needs both systemic and attitudinal change, in the collective psyche of the male-dominated society that takes the matter of men dominating women as not only given but also a fait accompli, to tackle the problem. That, along with strident measures to deal with the perpetrators of violence against women can ensure that the phenomenon is done away with for good.

Candidates' affidavits published

EC was expected to be more prompt

WE welcome the Election Commission's (EC) decision to make public Upazilla candidates' wealth statement affidavits online as required by the RPO. What surprises us though is the Commission's apparent dithering on the question of publishing these statements. Are we to assume that given the outpouring of criticism that had followed regarding the affidavits of candidates of the 10th national parliamentary elections, the Commission may have initially felt hesitant to put the affidavits up in the local level elections?

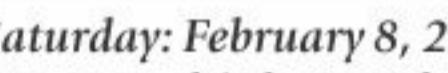
One cannot overlook the fact that it is of paramount importance for the electorate to have access to information about contesting candidates to make an informed decision. These affidavits contain vital information like candidates' educational qualifications, police records if any, sources of own and dependents' incomes, preoccupation and wealth statement, whether candidates are bank defaulters, etc. Indeed, EC rules make it mandatory that candidates furnish such information in the form of affidavits.

The reason given by the Commission for the delay being that too many candidates were contesting is not altogether convincing. However, it is fortunate that good sense has prevailed and the information has been put up in the public domain.

What people think

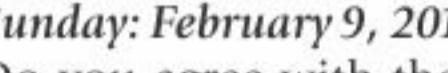
Friday: February 7, 2014

Do you agree with the claim of Khaleda Zia that around 300 opposition men fell victim to killing and forced disappearance in one month?

● Yes  (71%)
● No  (29%)

Saturday: February 8, 2014

Do you think Bangladesh have made remarkable progress to regain the GSP facilities by June?

● Yes  (27%)
● No  (73%)

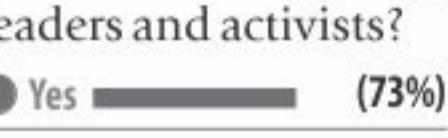
Sunday: February 9, 2014

Do you agree with the ruling Awami League's claim that none had been killed or made to disappear in joint force's operation before and after the January 5 polls?

● Yes  (13%)
● No  (87%)

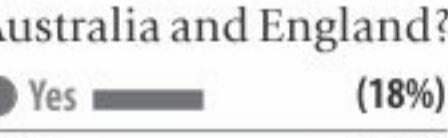
Monday: February 10, 2014

Do you agree with BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir that a speech of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina incited ruling party men to attack opposition leaders and activists?

● Yes  (73%)
● No  (27%)

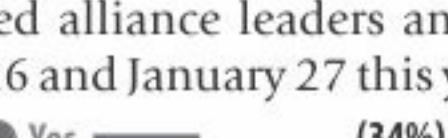
Tuesday: February 11, 2014

Do you think the international cricket will be benefited from the ICC revamp proposal by India, Australia and England?

● Yes  (18%)
● No  (82%)

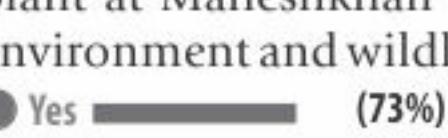
Wednesday: February 12, 2014

Do you think it was justified for the BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to give false figures on the killing of BNP-led alliance leaders and activists between December 26 and January 27 this year?

● Yes  (34%)
● No  (66%)

Thursday: February 13, 2014

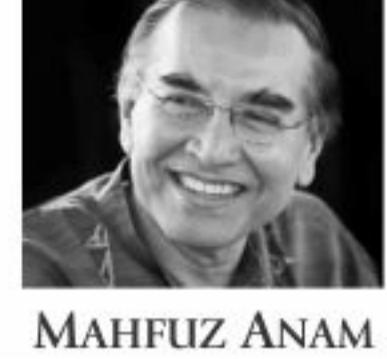
Do you think the government should stop setting up the proposed Matarbari coal-based thermal power plant at Maheshkhali in Cox's Bazar for the sake of environment and wildlife?

● Yes  (73%)
● No  (27%)

Politics destroying all our institutions

Every government servant is now expected to be partisan

THE THIRD VIEW



MAHFUZ ANAM

to be a government servant or hold any publicly funded job without establishing one's pedigree as a ruling party supporter.

Two recent incidents may suffice to prove our contention. Last Wednesday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, while addressing the 34th national rally of Ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP) asked them to "resist BNP and Jamaat-Shibir and their cohorts as they were responsible for militancy, terrorism and communalism," and urged them to "alert so that anti-democratic communal forces and the BNP-Jamaat-Shibir could no longer destabilise the country."

Can there be any question that she is asking Ansars and VDP members, who are public servants in the general sense of the term, to work against two specific political parties -- in this case BNP and Jamaat -- that are legal entities and have not been banned? One can accept it if she asks them to work against Huji, JMB or others who are now banned. But how can she call upon "public servants" to work against BNP? If there are individuals within these two parties who have broken the law then let them be prosecuted. But under no circumstances can she ask Ansars, who are part of the "disciplined forces" like army, navy, air force, etc, to work against an established political party. (See Article 152 of the Constitution and Ansar Act of 1995.)

As the head of government it is her duty to bring to justice any individual, group, or even a political party indulging in terrorism, militancy, communalism and destabilising the country in other ways. Purpose-built law enforcement and intelligence bodies exist just for such ends. Here also the law obliges that specific charges be brought and alleged persons or organisations be charged and prosecuted as per law.

Anything other than this process is "politicking" and Ansars and VDP members, who are part of an auxiliary force and paid for from the public exchequer, cannot and must not be subjected to such partisan politics. There are too many examples from too many parts of the world where "politicisation" of "disciplined forces" has led to the emergence of "rogue" groups who, taking the law in their own hands, have caused mayhem against political opponents to please the rulers of the day.

The second example is from last Tuesday. On that day Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the pro-ruling AL students body, activists drove out 97 students (see our editorial of Thursday) from Salimullah Muslim Hall (a student dormitory), once again blurring the distinction between what is public and what is party's. The ruling party students' body thought it quite proper to throw out these genuine students of Dhaka University from their dorms because they did not have AL or BCL connections; in other words they did not belong to their party, hence these students could not stay in the Hall. The story goes that BCL leaders asked students to provide "proof" that they belong to BCL if they wanted to stay in the hall.

BCL can very easily run its own private students' dormitory elsewhere in the city and make it obligatory for its residents to belong to its party. But Salimullah Muslim Hall is public property, belonging to Dhaka University that runs by taxpayers' money and under some laws and bylaws, and must be governed according to the laws of the land, and not that of the BCL.

"Hall dakhla" (forcefully occupying of halls) by the ruling party students' body has been there for sometime. As all aberrations, it started as an exception and has now become the norm. As the AL-BNP rivalry became deeper and sharper, DU Halls 'capture' became a serious affair as providing space to stay became a sure way of ensuring the growth of party cadres.

If BCL action is condemnable, the reaction of the University and hall authorities is simply unbelievable. In

response to our question they told this newspaper (see report published on Wednesday, back page) that University regulation does not permit first year students to get seats in the Halls. This, they said, is organised by the BCL and therefore the Hall authority has nothing to do. If first year students are not entitled to stay in the dorms then it is the DU authorities who should throw them out and not the BCL. Why should the student wing of the ruling party at all come into the picture, and why, for God's sake, should the Hall and DU authorities play second fiddle to them is something we fail to understand, unless of course the DU authorities have handed over to the 'party' what should have belonged to the general students, meaning the 'public.'

The above two examples serve to demonstrate how, with each successive tenure of BNP and AL, partisanship entered the public domain and the distinction between the "public" and the "ruling party" disappeared. I recall the prime minister telling this writer during her first term in office (1996-2001) that police and bureaucracy have been filled up by partisan cadres of BNP. "I have to clean the stable." Well, how much she "cleaned" and how much worse she made the "stable" is a matter of research, but what is clear is that the process never stopped. BNP, in its second tenure, this time with Jamaat in tow, further injected partisan people into the public service. The most striking proof of this process is the high number of Officers on Special Duty (OSD) we saw in each of AL and BNP tenures. In 2009, when the AL government took over from the caretaker government of Fakhruddin Ahmed, the OSD figure was 250. In December 2013 the total was 650.

Our political leadership on both sides of the aisle must seriously ponder the consequences of rising partisanship in dealing with public servants. The situation has reached such a pass that it is now almost a negative qualification if a public servant is thought to be neutral. "How can you be neutral between good and bad?" is often the unasked question by the ruling party.

A sure victim of "partisan" bureaucracy is efficiency. Given human nature, the more knowledgeable and efficient ones work silently and on their own. It is the inefficient ones that team up in groups of 'mutual' promoters and make most of the noise. They compete to show 'loyalty' and hide their worthlessness by badmouthing others, especially pointing out how 'loyally' the 'others' had served the previous regime. If the 'political masters' show preference for the so-called 'loyalty' instead of efficiency and start depending more and more on them then the whole governance process dwindles into mere 'paper pushing' and becomes riddled with bribery and corruption.

Of course the pat answer for the above criticism will be that the previous government did the same, if not worse. Every time we complain about corruption, nepotism or irregularities the answer is the same, "the previous government was worse." This we have been hearing for the last 23 years, and each time the problem got worse and our bureaucracy less efficient and our public service more and more corrupt.

There was a time when the demarcations between what is the party's and what is the government's was clear and made sacrosanct. Regrettably, it has been long lost to our great cost.

When the distinction between public servants and party workers is lost some very serious consequences occur. First, the differences between public wealth and party fund are lost. Thus fund from public exchequer begins to find its way to party activities, which starts by misusing public facilities for party work and ends by directly diverting public resources or development funds for party activities. It is in a blurring of this distinction that the root of corruption lies. When that occurs we have the beginnings of the erosion of the governance process.

It is nothing more than a mere illusion to think that Sheikh Hasina's government can provide good governance or even a semblance of it with a partisan public service. She will have to remember that those who shout the most about how devoted she or he is to her, the more likely it is that the person concerned is using his or her position for personal gains and thereby jeopardising the possibility of the PM's success.

Isn't it time that we stop using the excuse that "it was worse before" and start setting new standards for ourselves.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

How are Sagar-Runi killers evading justice?

On February 11, 2012 Sagar Sarwar and Meherun Runi, two very promising journalists, were brutally murdered in their apartment, leaving their son Megh behind. The incident was so macabre that the whole country was numb with shock and disbelief. Since



then two years have passed, but the murderers are still at large as the law-enforcing agents could not make any headway about the killing. This is unacceptable because they are capable and we have seen many times how swiftly they have arrested criminals guilty of different crimes.

But why are they failing in the Sagar-Runi case? Is the case destined to never give up its mystery? What could be the reason behind it? The journalist community must not give up its quest for the truth to be revealed, and the common people are with them in their struggle to bring the killers to justice. They must not rest until the goal is achieved.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Biman's DC-10s: Use those as all-cargo aircraft

According to Star Business Report dated Thursday February 6, Biman will bid farewell to its last DC 10 on Feb 20 with Dhaka / Birmingham flight. I believe Biman plans to sell its two old DC 10 aircraft. I strongly recommend that these 2 aircraft be converted to all-cargo aircraft. An airline's yield is more on cargo revenue than passenger revenue these days. British Airways has withdrawn its flights from Dhaka for some valid reasons but they are carrying substantial cargo from Dhaka as off-line carrier. It is not true that spare-parts are not available for DC10. Biman can operate daily cargo flights Dhaka to Dubai and thrice weekly Dhaka/London/Rome/Dhaka or Dhaka/London/Frankfurt/Dhaka.

Biman's third B777ER aircraft has reached Dhaka and the fourth one will be delivered by third week of March. Your correspondent repeatedly reports that the B777s were purchased under a 10-aircraft deal with Boeing during the last caretaker government's tenure but forgets to mention that this was only possible because of the initiative and foresight of a professional like Singer's Chairman Mahbub Jamil who was in charge of Civil Aviation & Tourism during that CTG.

S. A. Reza Hussain
Former Manager
British Airways

Crisis isn't over yet!

We have just passed through a serious political crisis with irrecoverable loss and it seems we are going to face the same situation all over again. AL government is not willing to hold any election until the completion of its full tenure. AL will remain in power at any cost. On the other hand, BNP is rigid in their position that a free and fair election must be held. Moreover, they are angry about the extrajudicial killing of their leaders all over the country. So they will not sit idly, rather they will start violent protests soon. I think it's not over yet.

Mrittunjoy Dhali
Khulna

Comments on news report, "Armed forces must keep vigil," published on February 10, 2014

Truth Prevails

Is the prime minister looking for a Bangladeshi Ayub Khan? Or, she has already found one? How on earth can she request them to "uphold democracy and constitution?"

Ash C.

Hasn't the PM politicised and thus destroyed enough of every governmental institution including the armed forces during her last five years rule, for her own selfish gain? Before giving any further lectures to the armed forces about upholding democracy, shouldn't she look herself in the mirror and ask what has she done so far to destroy democracy in Bangladesh to establish her one party autocratic rule?

"ACC sues Mosarraf" (February 07, 2014)

Mofi

He did his PhD from UK, didn't he? May be a part of this money he saved during that UK life, maybe he worked part time. But it is also likely that part of this money was accumulated when he was a minister. Now, ACC needs to find out what portion of that money was transferred from Bangladesh and when. It should be an easy job, I guess. Bank statements should be enough to find this.

What about doing similar investigations against AL big shots? Nuh, ACC doesn't have the guts. No worries, BNP will do that job when it comes to power.

Nazmul Haq

Yes he did his PhD in the UK during the period of Liberation War of Bangladesh. As far as I can remember, the scholarship on which he pursued his higher studies only paid him 40 pounds per month.

bour? And that fear gets reinforced every time the Indian government opens its patronising mouth. Why does it have to justify our election ratified in our minds? Why does it have to certify our government when we should be the best judge of its performance?

Alberto Alesina of Harvard University gave the Joseph Schumpeter lecture in 2003, which was titled "The Size of Countries: Does it Matter?" He said that one of the many advantages of large countries is that they're less subject to foreign aggression. He also concluded that safety is a public good that increases with country size. If run backwards, that's one of the biggest disadvantages of small countries. These countries have to put up with arm-twisting by big countries, at times in the most condescending manner.

The game between the big and small nations can be broken into two spheres. One is dominance without hegemony and another is hegemony without dominance, the difference depending on whether a big country builds its relationship with a small country based on its government or people. If people of the small country are afraid of the big country or hold it in high regard, they also tend to accept its influence. But if the big country skips the people of a small country and builds relationship with its government instead, it only shows desperation and, occasionally, the readiness to use force.

Only India knows best why it has been constrained to choose government in Bangladesh over people. It has its share of extremists like we do. Except for that overzealous section of people, the rest of this country is accommodating and tolerant. Despite many disappointments over corridor handover, water sharing and trade imbalance, people of this country have never done anything to show contempt for their neighbour.

Again, nations can be likened to individuals as some are strong and prosperous, others weak and wretched. China has a population of 1.2 billion. Tuvalu, the smallest country in the world, is inhabited by 11,000 people. But both countries are inspired by national