

Sonali Bank's management indiscipline

When will the rot be stemmed?

SONALI Bank's profit has plummeted 70 per cent. And why not? If you have a bank where you can swindle out nearly four thousand crore in loans without necessary papers, if you can have a bank's vault broken into and have cyber crooks play havoc with money transfer, it is a wonder that even 30 per cent profit has been made. The Finance Minister has said that the bank needs to improve its internal control and better manage the branches. Our question is shouldn't this have happened much earlier, especially when the Hall-Mark swindle came out?

Sonali Bank has been at the centre of controversy for several years running. The steps taken so far have fallen far short of what is needed to rebuild the bank's reputation. Political influence in selecting its board has been a major bane in its functioning. This problem afflicts all state owned banks and appears to have no solution in sight. Succeeding governments have taken such directorship of banks as a method of rewarding party loyalists, some of whom took these appointments to be an opportunity to do favours for a price. Thus, over the years Sonali Bank became almost a symbol of the indiscipline that became a trait of our state owned banks.

The only good news is that in 2013 Sonali Bank's default loans dropped by nearly 24 per cent and recovery stood at Tk. 4,330 crores which was 511 per cent higher than in 2012.

We urge the finance minister to spare no efforts to streamline the management of this bank and restore strict discipline especially in its running of the branches.

Ambush of prison van

Lax security of high risk prisoners

THE ambush of a prison van and snatching away of three JMB prisoners, two of whom are under sentence of death, is perhaps the first of its kind in Bangladesh. We condole the death of the policeman killed in the miscreant action. However, given the circumstances of the attack and the security measures employed to transport high risk prisoners over a considerable distance, the apparent ease with which the operation was carried out is not surprising. Obviously, the extremist group is not only alive it can be active too when it wants.

It was obviously a well planned action which must have taken the policemen accompanying of the JMB convicts as guards, by surprise. And it is the security measures employed by the police that evokes several questions.

One wonders whether three policemen accompanying three prisoners are adequate and whether they were themselves well protected with bullet-proof jackets. And one wonders too if there was any other police vehicle accompanying the prison van. Only one vehicle carrying both prisoners and security detail is a rank bad idea. And should high-risk prisoners be transported in vehicles that do not have bullet protection?

We are sure all these questions will be addressed by the concerned authorities and corrective measures taken for the future, but should these have not been looked at before? That might have saved the life of the policeman. It is a pity that in matters of security we wake up only after an incident occurs, but by then the damage is done.

Making science interesting in school

ALAMGIR KHAN

AT a Physics conference at Shahjalal University in 2012, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid expressed his concern about lack of interest in science among students and said that it might lead to problems in future. On the World Day of Radio, he said Jagadish Chandra Bose was the pioneer in the field of wireless waves and facilitated global communication by making the radio. Last year, at an international physics conference at Dhaka University's Bose Centre, he remembered the contributions Professor Satyen Bose made to modern science and emphasised the need for making science education more attractive to the younger generation.

But there has been little initiative from the government to make science education interesting. The Education Policy says: "Textbooks must be attractive, easily comprehensible and full of illustrations," for the primary level. In secondary education, science fairs and Math Olympiads will be organised "to popularise science and mathematics among students." In higher education, "employment opportunities will be created to attract meritorious students in the study of sciences."

But how will primary and secondary level students know about Bangali scientists like Jagadish Chandra, Satyen Bose, Prafulla Ray, Meghnad Saha, Quadrat-e-Khuda, Jamal Nazrul Islam and others if there is nothing about them in their textbooks? This lack of knowledge has deprived us of our legitimate pride and made us intellectually poor, and taken away the dreams from the minds of our children. At most, our science students can dream of nothing better than becoming doctors or engineers or IT experts -- salesmen for western businesses.

Jagadish, Prafulla, and Meghnad were born in Bangladesh and Satyen Bose taught at Dhaka University for 24 years. Rabindranath dedicated his science book 'Biswa Parichay' to Satyen Bose and wrote poems addressing Jagadish Chandra. The Nobel Laureate poet and Jagadish were close friends throughout their lives. Jagadish Chandra was the father of Bangla science fiction and *Abyakto* bears the imprint of his exquisite literary mind. Students' interest about science will not rise just through lamenting about it. In addition to solving the existing problems, write-ups by Bangali scientists as well as articles and stories about them should be included in our school textbooks in order to boost interest in science education among our learners.

The writer is Research and Publication Officer, Centre for Development Innovation and Practices (CDIP).

Haze of denial and complacency

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

HAVE the results of the just completed first phase of the upazila elections come as a surprise to the ruling AL, or as something expected? Obviously, it is not being easy for AL to digest the outcome because the polls results show that the BNP and its alliance partner Jamaat have taken a clear lead over the incumbent AL.

Even so, they are trying to put a brave front on it saying that this electoral event has again amply demonstrated that elections held under this government are free and fair. So how wrong BNP was in its decision not to participate in the January 5 election to the 10th Jatiya Sangsad!

But if the ruling party's prime objective in the upazila polls was to show to the world that elections under it are always free and fair, then shouldn't it have also encouraged BNP to participate in the polls? Otherwise, how could AL prove its neutrality and fairness in an election? But consid-



ering the pre and post upazila polls remarks made by some AL leaders, it appears they were not at all happy about BNP and its partners' participation in the polls. Industry Minister Amir Hossain Amu, for instance, rather than welcoming rival BNP in the polls, mocked and criticized it saying it must lick the dust before participating in the UZ polls. Why? Because by not participating in January 5 JS polls or by terming the post-January 5 AL government illegal, it has lost its moral right to participate in any election under AL rule, etc, etc. What then was AL expecting? Another uncontested election in the style of the January 5 one? Would such an upazila polls be good for AL's image?

But one finds it hard to reconcile the AL leadership's pre-upazila polls mindset with that of the post-polls reactions. Worse yet, they are not even willing to accept the fact that AL performed rather badly in the upazila polls. On the contrary, they are trying to explain away their lackluster performance in the first phase of the upazila polls with various lame arguments: AL did actually perform better than its rival BNP, only that its votes were divided among its own rebel and loyal candidates. So, they

would argue, if one counted all the votes cast in favour of all AL candidates, rebel or loyal, the total would be greater than that obtained by the BNP and its allies.

These are nothing but face saving excuses. This kind of argument of aggregate votes only confuses the issue. For what we are practicing here is Westminster system in which the candidate who passes the post first is considered to be the victor. So, the number of chairman and vice-chairman seats AL-backed candidates had won should be the measure of their performance. Once in the game, one should have the mentality to play it and accept the results in a sportsman's spirit. But AL is still continuing to exhibit its characteristic denial mode about accepting the polls result. As a result of such attitude, AL is actually depriving itself of deeper understanding of the jest held polls, for example, shift, if any, in the voting behaviour of the electorate, what factors were responsible for relatively poorer performance of the AL candidates, why contestants from the rival parties have fared better and what, if any, were the mistakes in the AL's electoral strategy and what corrective measures it can take not to repeat those in the future.

A closer scrutiny would show some very startling outcomes of the election. With results of the city corporation elections held last year in retrospect, BNP's better performance in the upazila polls might not have raised many eyebrows. But how would one assess Jamaat-e-Islami-backed candidates' phenomenal performance in the polls? Consider that by grabbing 12 chairman and 30 vice-chairman posts, it has emerged as the third largest party in the upazila polls, while the Jatiya Party, which was so far touted as the third largest party has just been able to scrape through winning only one chairman seat and eight vice-chairman posts. Does this result carry any message, not only for future elections but also for the politics of the country as a whole?

Consider Jamaat's performance in spite of all the bad press it has been receiving over the violent activities it and its student front, Shibir, had been pursuing since the International War Crimes Tribunal (ICT) started to pronounce the verdicts against its convicted leaders since February 2012? And then the unleashing of deadly violence, anarchy and chaos that engulfed the entire nation in the run-up to the January 5 general election, the blame for which has been put squarely on Jamaat's shoulder. Also, remember the continued police action against its activists, especially the combing operations carried out in the southwestern and northern districts where this party has strong bastions. How, against all the odds, could Jamaat achieve this amazing feat when leaders and activists of this party and its front organisations should have been on the run, and they are actually so? Has AL leadership given a serious thought to this strange development on the country's political horizon? And will they ask themselves, why is it so?

To all appearances, the ruling party is completely swallowed up by a sense of complacency, self-delusion and denial. It's hard to discern things in such haze.

It's time to pay up

HAMEEDA HOSSAIN

TWENTY FOURTH FEBRUARY: Ten months ago 1,135 workers were killed in the Rana Plaza collapse due to corporate criminal negligence and non-compliance with the Bangladesh Building Code 2006. Over 2,000 received immediate medical care. The disabled need long-term treatment. 285 children lost their parents.

Reports suggest that 2,515 persons were rescued alive, twelve of whom later died in the hospital. Another 199 workers remain missing. The official number of unidentified victims is currently 136. These numbers amount to a total of 3,985 people who may have been at Rana Plaza at the time of the collapse. Their bodies were buried after a DNA sample was taken. Some relatives are still awaiting DNA test results for an identity match.

TWENTY FOURTH NOVEMBER 2012: A year and three months ago 112 workers died in a fire in Tazreen Garments caused by corporate negligence and non-compliance with Bangladesh Fire and Safety Regulations.

Both Rana Plaza and Tazreen have been major disasters. They have given a strong message that the industry must be restructured for workers' safety, and reformed to ensure workers' participation in trade unions. Legal reform must also address the low compensation standards.

An immediate priority is the compensation for workers dead or injured in these two industries. The delay has caused untold miseries to many families and workers, whose labour supplied over 30 European and US brands and kept the wheels of industry moving in Bangladesh.

Initial rescue operations were mopped up within a month. 339 workers were severely injured, and had to undergo major operations. Some need long-term treatment for severe head injuries, pelvic fractures and backbone injuries; workers released from hospital within a few weeks are still unable to return to garment work and others may never do so.

Survival of these workers continues to be at stake. What are we doing to rehabilitate the injured workers, take care of their orphaned children and help families of dead workers? Some interim payments may have been made on an ad-hoc basis, but this is no substitute for a fair compensation. Reports indicate that approximately 700 workers received Tk. 700,000 each from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund of Tk. 1,270 million collected specifically for Rana Plaza. Three brands, Primark, Loblau and Bon Marche, are reported to have paid Tk. 5,000 per month each to 1,629 workers for the last six months. These amounts are inadequate for families supported by a working member who may have earned from Tk. 5,000.0 to Tk. 8,000 only per month.

The process for determining fair compensation has dragged on. On April 30, the High Court had directed the GOC to set up a committee for assessing compensation claims. These directions were acted upon only after a reminder from the High Court in September. The GOC set up two committees, one to decide on modalities for

compensation claims and the second to assess rehabilitation needs of the injured. After studying various precedents in other countries, the Compensation Committee, without consultation with trade unions, has recommended Tk. 1,450,000 for families of the dead and for the seriously injured and lesser amounts for other injured workers. The Committee's calculations seem to be modest and inadequate if one takes into account the life expectancy of young workers supporting a family of four to six persons, cost of medical care, rehabilitation as well as the pain and suffering. IndustriALL Bangladesh and SKOP had recommended compensation up to Tk. 2,800,000 based on standards of ILO 121 and best practice in Bangladesh. The Committee also recommended that funds be contributed by the brands, BGMEA, factory owners and government in the proportion of 45:18:28:9.

At a recent meeting a Rana Plaza worker demonstrated two artificial arms, which looked alright but were too stiff to allow her to work. Children have not been able to continue their education for lack of funds. Many injured workers reported that they discontinued their treatment because they could not afford to pay for it. Some workers and families gave up hope of settling their claims and went back to their remote villages.



Global markets have made textile trade a great success. Post Rana and Tazreen we have bemoaned the loss to the industry and feared the impact on Bangladesh's export earnings. What amends have we made to the dead, on whose labour we have thrived, or to their families?

A Rana Plaza Trust Fund has been set up with the ILO as trustee to receive donations from all those involved in the trade. In Europe, 70 European brands that have subscribed to the Accord on Fire and Safety must make good their commitment. Manufacturing companies such as Tuba Group (owners of Tazreen), which own multiple export factories, must take responsibility, as should BGMEA members. The Prime Minister's Relief Fund received substantial donations from several banks and others. BGMEA members have also collected a fund.

There should be no excuse for shortage of funds. There is no reason why these commitments cannot be met. Those who have gained from this global trade must pay for its flaws.

The writer is convener of Sramik Nirapotta Forum.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Bangladesh should play attacking cricket

Bangladesh cricket team has beaten all the Test playing countries in one day cricket. For the last few years we have been playing good cricket and winning also. But even in the matches that we win we do not play attacking cricket. While playing Test cricket, we should keep close-in fielders not only for the new batsman on the pitch but also for the batsman who has already settled on the pitch. If we keep the close-in fielders, we can always put pressure on the batsmen. In a nutshell, we have to be more aggressive in taking wickets rather than stopping runs. When Sri Lanka scored 67/8 in the First ODI, we removed the close-in fielders so that the batsmen could get easy singles and boundaries. There was no pressure put on them. Regarding batting, we also have to learn to play regular attacking shots.

Md. Imran Zahedi
Infrastructure Specialist
Solidaridad Network Asia

Set up speed-breaker near Dhaka Cantt. School

I travel through the Mirpur Cantonment flyover at least twice daily. Near the flyover Dhaka Cantt. Public Girls' High School is situated. And hundreds of students of the school cross the road at ECB circle point regularly. There must be a speed breaker close to the school gate, where the students and their parents cross the road risking their lives as most of the vehicles run at high speed at that point. My humble request to the Dhaka cantonment authorities is, please set up a speed-breaker there without further delay before any accident takes place.

Nazakat Ali
One-mail

Comments on post editorial, "Zawahiri's 'call' should not be taken lightly," published on February 21, 2014

Nds

Why is the slogan 'Islam khatre me hai' or 'Islam is at threat' always chosen by the fanatics to organise the Muslim population in this country as well as all other Muslim dominated countries? Why can't they get rid of this imaginary threat?

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

AL-Qaeda's spirit is decreasing worldwide. AL-Qaeda style Islam is not original Islam and our conscious people will not fall victim to their conspiracy. The government should deal with this threat with an iron hand and BNP needs to cooperate with the government in doing so.

Nasrullah Khan

The post editorial truly echoes the voice of the people who are concerned with the al-Qaeda chief's call for an Intifada in Bangladesh in the name of Islam. Instead of playing blame game, both the government and the opposition should join together to find the root of this threat and the people involved in it.

"Turnout 62pc" (February 21, 2014)

Shahin Huq

I believe Jamaat people never stopped anyone from casting votes, nor did they force anyone to vote for them. They also never threatened anyone in election times. They themselves are on the run from police chase. If they can win so many seats in such a circumstance, in a normal situation they would win definitely more. It proves that the media propaganda has not been able to isolate Jamaat from the people, because people can correctly examine the character of Jamaat people and clearly distinguish the right from the wrong.

OpeeMonir

So Jamaat is very much a part of society and the polls results show their hold in the grassroots level is quite firm.

Deep Purple Blue

Why is the AL happy with the outcome? They should have won two thirds. The voter turnout figure is not correct given that ballot stuffing by AL backed candidates were rampant in upazillas where they won. Once again, it is evident that democratic or free and fair elections are not possible under party government.

"Ruling party unruly in some upazilas" (February 20, 2014)

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

After this assault on polling agents we were expecting a briefing from the Awami League spokesperson. They could not control their unruly cadres. How can we rely on the AL administration for a credible and peaceful election?

Khan

Is there any documentation of BNP-Jamaat activities?