

A beast in human form!

The culprit must face justice

THE report that a man over 60, Ahmed Ali, raped a six-year-old baby girl twice is too mind-bogglingly devilish to believe. And then think of some elders posing as arbitrators condemning, not the perpetrator of the outrage, but the victimized child, as being blemished and hence ordering her to leave her village in Nandigram of Bogra, the place of her birth! It's all too shocking and terrible to come to terms with.

But it's all real and has taken place within earshot of the sane, civilised and enlightened members of our society.

What is most horrific about the incident is that the demon in human form, Ahmad Ali along with so-called village arbitrators, is still roaming free, while the local police is looking hard for the proofs of the crime. Shameful and unfortunate though it is, the local police was not forthcoming about assuring that the rapist could be held to justice, if only because the physical evidences of rape are so elusive, especially with the passage of time.

This is totally unacceptable. Why have the police to grope so helplessly for clue of the crime, when the tormented child herself, her parents and the villagers are there to bear witness to the outrage? We believe the victim child's statement about the incident can be considered as enough proof to arrest and prosecute the contemptible culprit.

The law should be unforgiving and harsh for such beasts in the guise of humans walking amidst normal people in society.

Chairman with a difference


An example for others

SELDOME do we come across public representatives at local government level fulfilling their pre-election pledges and still less do we find them being re-elected for another term of office. Mr. Osman Gani Talukdar has achieved both. He has been re-elected as Chairman, Louhajang upazila parishad in Munshiganj. Mr. Talukdar is widely respected for his commitment to giving back to the people rather than taking benefits which, as chairman, he is officially entitled to. He has forsaken his monthly salary and refrained from taking other benefits like the fuel and maintenance allowance for his vehicle.

Being a businessman, he has actually used his own resources to give back to the community that put him in office. Whereas we are used to seeing his compatriots utilise all the services and powers of office to serve and advance personal interests, this chairman stands out by introducing stipends to deserving students in the district and donating in millions to a medical institution in the upazila that serves public health.

Public representatives have much to learn from Mr. Talukdar. He is head and shoulder above most of his peers who vie for the coveted position which brings power and access to development funds for the area. But how many actually go out of their way to do public good? Rather, local elections have turned into a race to riches for most and the public are left to pick up the pieces that result from bad governance.

What people think



Friday: March 28, 2014
 Do you think it would be justified for the government to collect toll from all vehicles using national regional and inter-district highways?
 ● Yes (28%)
 ● No (72%)

Saturday: March 29, 2014
 Do you think Bangladesh would be able to meet the deadline of European Union for implementing the measures to ensure workplace safety within April 24?
 ● Yes (16%)
 ● No (84%)

Sunday: March 30, 2014
 Do you agree with Sushasoner Jonno Nagorik's (Shujan) claim that law enforcing agencies have failed to play effective roles during and after the upazila elections?
 ● Yes (93%)
 ● No (17%)

Monday: March 31, 2014
 Do you think it is justified for the BNP leaders to claim that Zia was the first president of Bangladesh?
 ● Yes (41%)
 ● No (59%)

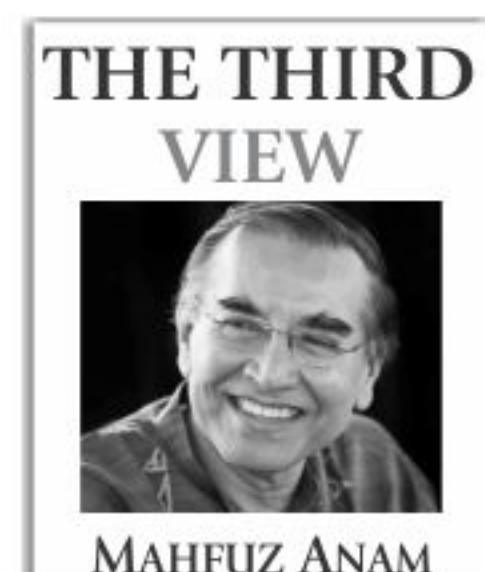
Tuesday: April 1, 2014
 Do you think it was justified for the government probe committee to blame the 20 teenagers of Tongi Juvenile Development Centre to protest abuse by the authorities last month?
 ● Yes (10%)
 ● No (90%)

Wednesday: April 2, 2014
 Do you agree with the claim of the ruling Awami League that the fifth phase of upazila elections took place in a peaceful manner as the Election Commission has taken all necessary measures?
 ● Yes (11%)
 ● No (89%)

Thursday: April 3, 2014
 Do you agree with AL leader Obaidul Quader's claim that the upazila elections were held in a more free, fair and credible manner than any other local government elections in the past?
 ● Yes (13%)
 ● No (87%)

Do we have to swallow such "rubbish"?

Reckless political rhetoric damages us all



RECENTLY we came across three examples of political rhetoric going haywire. They were, to quote our hardworking, often smiling and affable finance minister, simply "rubbish." It is as if our people are so foolish and dumb that anything can be said without the least bit of substance to back it up. And interestingly the three examples come from completely different sources.

First, of course, is the claim by the BNP chief, a two-time former prime minister, that her husband, late Gen. Ziaur Rahman, founder of BNP and a former president, was in fact the first president of Bangladesh.

This "new discovery" was first announced by her son from London, where he has been based for the last seven or eight years. This new history was then promptly copied by the mother. What really boggles the mind is what possible benefit the BNP thinks it will reap from such a lie? All these years we have been familiar with BNP's claim that Gen. Zia, then a major, declared independence, in Bangabandhu's name. This does not preclude the Awami League's version of the independence declaration. But the fact is that there was a declaration by Zia and millions, including this writer, heard it over the radio. There may be some contestation as to the importance and effect of that declaration. But nobody can challenge the fact of it.

However, the latest claim that Ziaur Rahman was the first president of Bangladesh sounds not only ludicrous but is also like the product of an imbecile who neither has any knowledge of history nor an iota of respect for it. Political parties are known to be always searching for new messages to propagate in order to attract new supporters, but seldom do we get examples as false and devoid of substance as this one.

Several things become clear from this absurd claim. First, that Tarique Rahman, who tries to direct his mother's party from London, is living in a "fool's paradise" and that over the years has lost touch with his country of birth. We have been fed with stories that while in exile Tarique used his time well by doing some serious studies (which he needed, as his early education left much to be desired). If his latest claim is anything to go by, and if we are to believe that he has been reading books, then the only conclusion we can come to is that he has been reading books which he must have written himself.

A bigger puzzle is how could Khaleda Zia, who has established herself as an astute politician and an effective leader over the last three decades, swallow such "rubbish" and repeat it before the nation? It is a case of intellectual bankruptcy, deep seated frustration and desperation that made her go public with such a claim, something that can be benignly termed as childish but more accurately as foolhardy. Whatever confidence she still retained among her well wishers has definitely suffered a serious blow.

Though not comparable in terms of history, nevertheless a good example of political "rubbish" that we have to suffer is a recent statement by the PM, to the effect that all the violence that occurred during the just concluded upazila elections was perpetrated by the BNP and in no case were Awami League workers involved.

Well, as journalists we can only say we either live in two different planets or that our PM is so isolated from reality that she believes all the "rubbish" that her intelli-

gence agencies feed her with. There could be another explanation which, if true, would be extremely dangerous for both her government and for Bangladesh: it is that our PM has decided to deny every negative news about her party and its workers. Otherwise how can she make a statement like the one she did when all evidence points to the contrary? We cannot have such opposing views about the same events if we are both well informed. With hardly any exception every newspaper, TV channel and other media extensively reported on election related violence and in most of them responsibility for the violence, vote rigging and assault on opponents was laid at the door of Awami League activists.

With all the evidence of AL complicity in the upazila poll violence, the fact that the prime minister could take such a stand boggles the mind.

Our final instance of political rhetoric going absurd refers to what the acting chief election commissioner, Abdul Mobarak, said about Khaleda Zia and BNP's participation in the upazila elections. In his words: "BNP chairperson is rubbing her nose in the dirt by participating in upazila parishad polls. According to her we are worth nothing, we are zero. But the fact is that her party is participating in the elections under this zero. She is groveling." Would he rather that BNP did not participate in the upazila elections? Would that have been better for Bangladesh and its democracy?

Never before have we had a CEC or any member of the EC making such politically charged comments against the leader of a political party. It is not for the first time that an Election Commission in Bangladesh has come under attack from a political party, especially one that belongs to the opposition. Neither is it for the first time that the EC was asked to resign because of what the opposition considered to be its partisan role. In all past instances, the EC held its cool and did its duty in silence. We have been shocked by the acting CEC's comments, which were not only inappropriate but blatantly partisan.

One of the biggest weaknesses of our electoral system is the lack of independence and neutral image of the EC. Such comments, as made by the acting CEC, do not help but only drag the EC further into political controversy. We think Mr. Mobarak's statement has hurt the EC and that he should withdraw these comments and restrain himself from making such remarks in future.

The untimely leave of absence of CEC Kazi Raquibuddin Ahmad, from March 3 till date, has baffled us all. Why he chose to absent himself during the upazila elections, and that also without giving any specific reason, has to be most harshly judged.

The five-phase upazila election that started quite peacefully saw a gradual rise in violence and vote rigging and ended with the most blatant and shameless demonstration of false voting, ballot paper stuffing and capturing of polling booths, making it among the most violent upazila election ever held, with, intriguingly, the acting CEC expressing his satisfaction all along.

Given the nature of our last parliamentary election, with 153 uncontested MPs and with very poor voter turnout, people expected that the upazila election would provide a reasonable chance for an expression of the "public will." That was not allowed to happen.

How long will the practice of making reckless comments by our leaders and people in responsible positions continue? When will our leaders learn that people of Bangladesh are no longer the fools that they take us to be? The faster our leaders start showing the people a little more respect, the quicker will the quality of our politics improve.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Umar Gul's bad manners

From the photo published on TDS, March 31 by Firoz Ahmed, I was appalled to see Umar Gul, Pakistan's pace bowler, flexing his muscles purposefully at Bangladeshi opener Tamim Iqbal after dismissing him at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium during the ICC World T20 Super 10 match on March 30. While Tamim was leaving the crease with his head down for being clean bowled, Umar Gul tried to humiliate him by his unmannerly gestures. He was directly looking at Tamim while flexing his muscle.

A bowler has every right to rejoice when he bowls out a batsman but there are standard norms to do so. He can be ecstatic, he can jump to sky and he can share his joy with his colleagues or the spectators if he wants, but he cannot make any gesture to humiliate his opponents. This is not cricket.

Abdul Matin
 Dhaka

An achievement for Bangladesh

Recently World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared Bangladesh as polio-free. Polio or infantile paralysis is a damaging disease. Sources said that BD has been polio-free over the past few years but it is now formally accepted by WHO. It has been made possible due to media coverage, immunisation campaigns, popularising oral polio vaccines etc. I believe it is a great achievement for the entire nation.

Neehal Hasnain
 Dept. of Business Administration
 Shahjalal University of Science and Technology

Outsmarting whom?

Many ruling party leaders and some observers are constantly saying that the opposition political party did not match up to the smartness of the ruling party. Mohammad Badrul Ahsan in his article published on March 21, 2014 wrote, "The ruling party leaders are exuding the vitality of the Horlicks babies. They are looking sharper, taller and stronger. They've been outsmarting BNP blow by blow, often by guile and often by gumption." I think these words are not well said. It is not the opposition, but the people who have been duped. They have been deceived, tricked, and looked upon as if they do not exist. Their basic rights have been snatched. To remain in power, Awami League has chalked out a blueprint which is very loathsome. We remember Sajeeb Wazed Joy saying many months before the election that he had information that Awami League would come to power again.

People do not care which party comes to power under a free, fair and credible election, but this election was far from being fair. So, giving credit to Awami League and calling them smart for grabbing power in this heinous way is deplorable.

I am curious to know the mental state of those who took charge of the country without people's mandate. Are they feeling at ease?

Nur Jahan
 Chittagong

All that fuss over the first president



THE controversy over who must have been the first president of the country exposes an underside of our contentious politics hidebound to what psychologists call the Birth Order Effect. BNP started it when its senior vice-president, domiciled in London, claimed that his party's founder was the rightful claimant to that title. Other BNP leaders chorused to embellish that claim as if it was some kind of rote learning. The prime minister personally returned the volley, calling the BNP founder a freedom fighter in name only. Her party leaders soon rallied around her as if a group of singers was accompanying the soloist. Our politicians are playing buzkashi with history.

Buzkashi is a Central Asian sport in which horse-mounted players attempt to drag a goat carcass toward goalpost. For couple of weeks the two political parties have been dragging history, each side trying to run with its verdict. It's a pity that so many years after independence they're still busy sorting out the basics.

Going back to the birth order, Australian psychologist Alfred Adler was the first to propound it. His competent disciple Michael Grose authored *Why First-borns Rule the World and Last-borns Want to Change It*. The book suggests how birth order, through human evolution, determined that the first-born inherits power and the last-born is sent to war.

Our own history also started out with some kind of a twist. The leader, who mobilised the people, didn't go to war. The leader, who mobilised the war, had no popular background. Had both leaders been the same person, we would have been spared the turbulence making us so sick!

We've stumbled on the controversy over the primogeniture among our two patriarchs. So, who should come first between them? One was a political leader who had roused the nation to fight for independence. Another was a military leader who had stepped in at a critical juncture of our history. Why must the highway of our national sensibility be so narrow that it can't handle the traffic of our admiration for both?

History has been neatly arrayed in other countries. Gopal Krishna Gokhale was famously the political mentor of Mahatma Gandhi, and he is credited for being amongst the early dreamers of Indian independence. Even though the two of them eventually fell apart over the means, Gandhi never denied Gokhale's influence on

him in his pursuit of their common end. Gokhale was a middle child, who died in 1915 at the age of 48. Last-born Gandhi led the freedom struggle, while his first-born disciple Jawaharlal Nehru inherited power.

The Americans have given the rightful place to their leaders. They have duly recognised their founding fathers for their contributions, dividing them into two key subsets: the Signers of the Declaration of Independence and the Framers of the Constitution. How a country accommodates its great leaders tells a lot about its own greatness.

The independence struggle has never been the work of any single leader in any country. Sparked by Father Miguel Hidalgo, José María Morelos saved the Mexican independence struggle from failing after Hidalgo's execution in 1811. Francisco de Miranda's first attempt to liberate Venezuela with British help failed, but he returned in 1810 to head up the First Venezuelan Republic with Simón Bolívar and others. José de San Martín led the fight for Argentine independence, but victory did not come until he joined hands with Chilean Bernardo O'Higgins and his rebel army to defeat the Spanish in 1818.

Why are we so obsessed with the pecking order of history? Why are our politicians bickering over who's who in their wishful thinking? This time they're behaving like land grabbers, going after the last vacant lot of our history stretching from the proclamation of independence on March 26, 1971 to the formation of the Mujibnagar Government on April 17, 1971. These 23 days, once the no-man's land, has been turned into a battleground.

True, the BNP founder wasn't running the country during that time but he was technically running the show. But how could that make him the first president since the republic hadn't come into existence yet! At the same time, it would be grossly unfair to say that he wasn't a freedom fighter just because his successors have embarked on their fancy.

The first-born-last-born hypothesis doesn't work for our two great leaders, because one was the third child in a family of four daughters and two sons. Another was the second son of his parents. According to Darwin, the middle children learn to be more flexible and sociable. They compromise and build coalitions.

It's an irony that these two leaders being middle children, their legacies are captive to their first-borns. Birth Order Effect says the first-borns are more interested in ruling the world instead of changing it. Enough to explain why the controversy exists!

Comments on news report, "Kids blamed for all that happened," published on March 30, 2014

Vikram Khan
 Horrible situation! It is well known what happens in the government-run institutions with vulnerable people like children or young girls. However, we keep silent about it. The attitude of the government and the outcome of the so-called 'investigation' are really shameful!

Nazmul Haq
 This is not surprising. That's the way it is in this country where illegal is legal, traitor is patriot, and the most unselfish man is the most selfish person.

"History, as the Zias see it" (March 29, 2014)

Rawshan Iajdani
 I heard the radio message where Zia declared independence on behalf of Bangabandhu but proclaimed himself as the President as well.

Touchstone
 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the father of the nation and he doesn't need anybody to glorify him. BNP is carrying out personal vendetta.

"BNP will write 'true history' of 1971: Khaleda" (March 30, 2014)

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed
 With an ally that openly opposed the existence of Bangladesh and committed heinous crimes against humanity in the name of Islam, BNP would be delusional to think that people will sit idly as they re-write history as per their own whims and beliefs. Such arrogant statements will not win over the voters.

Vikram Khan
 We should have pity on 'mentally deranged' people.

Sara
 Ever since her article was published on the Washington Times, her views and words have been sending the wrong messages.

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