

Realising full potential of RMG sector

All stakeholders need to act in concert

NEARLY a year since the devastating Rana Plaza building collapse, our RMG sector remains under the global radar screen of concerned quarters. The EU, North American retailers' alliance and the ILO, among others, have visited our RMG sector to see things at first hand. They underscored the need for radically improving workers' safety standards, workplace environment and their rights situation. Whilst noting a certain uplift in the deficient areas, they laid stress on more to be done in specific areas.

They attach considerable value to our RMG sector's potential to be a bigger player in the US\$ 50 billion worth of garments market which again is on an expansion course. The latest to give some sound advice is the UK Minister for International Development Alan Duncan who has been to Dhaka. He made three cogent points: First, Bangladesh should take factory standards to next level meaning that it needs 'clean regulations in setting up and monitoring factories.' Second, he hoped that global clothing brands would 'help Bangladesh improve working conditions in the units.' This can be ensured through good business practices both on the exporting and importing sides. Third, Duncan believes that exporters' claim of having insufficient funds to improve the working conditions is 'untrue'.

Actually, it would take concerted efforts of all stakeholders to give a better, secure and wholesome deal to the workers. There is a precious social commitment involved here when you consider the size of women's employment in and their consequent empowerment through this sector.

Murders on campus

Authority can't be mute spectator anymore

SOON after the targeted killing of a student in Bangladesh Agricultural University another student was shot dead inside a dormitory at Rajshahi University. In both cases, the murdered students were members of the ruling party's student body. In the first case, involvement of BCL elements was confirmed through the reported telephone conversation of the severely injured victim with his brother. In the second case, though it is not yet confirmed who the killers were, several witnesses had seen two fellow BCL activists on the spot with one of them holding a pistol. Both of these incidents prove that safety and security of students in public universities are at stake and the campus environment is left vitiated.

The victim Rustam Ali Akand was a fourth year student at the department of political science in Rajshahi University. He was vying for president's post of BCL hall unit in the upcoming council. It is reported that inner party rivalry had brewed over his candidature. In the Agricultural University case, murdered Saad was a vice president candidate in the faculty election, which had triggered an internal feud.

Against this background, it is essential to establish the motive behind the murders and identify the killers. The investigation should be done rising above any political and organisational considerations. The university administration and law enforcing agencies should not be lenient and predisposed in conducting these investigations as we had seen happened in cases of JU student Zubair and DU student Abu Bakar. The burden of the corpses of students of the highest educational institutions is too much to bear for the

Can one violate the traffic signal if there is sufficient gap?

RIDWAN QAUIUM

THOUGH it is mandatory to follow the traffic signal unless otherwise instructed by the traffic police, many people ask that if they are stuck at a traffic signal and feel that there is sufficient gap for them to cross the intersection, then is it permissible to violate the signal?

According to traffic laws, if a vehicle is waiting at a red light or if the traffic police has not permitted the vehicle to approach the intersection then, regardless of whether there is sufficient gap or not, it is mandatory to wait as long as its side does not turn green or the traffic police permits it to approach the intersection.

If you are waiting at a four way signalised intersection and one side has a green light while your side and the other two sides have a red light, they are not permitted to cross the intersection until they receive the green light. If no vehicles are approaching the intersection from the side that has a green signal and you start to approach the intersection, you find that vehicles from the other two sides that have a red light have also approached the intersection. This means that you and the vehicles from the other two sides have created the possibility of an accident.

The objective of a traffic signal is to ensure that vehicles crossing an intersection can do so in a safe and smooth manner in a minimum amount of time. To reduce travel time people violate traffic signals, though in reality it is not possible to reduce travel time by violating traffic signals, rather it increases the possibility of an accident due to chaotic traffic movement. If it was possible to reduce travel time by violating the traffic signals then the concept of traffic signals would not have existed.

If vehicles do not follow the traffic signal or the instruction of the traffic police at an intersection then vehicles from all sides would gather together at the intersection, creating traffic disorder resulting in traffic congestion. Traffic congestion increases everyone's travel time, which is not desired by anyone. Therefore, it is important for every road user to abide by the traffic signal or the instruction of the traffic police to ensure that everyone is able to commute safely with minimum delay.

The writer is a transportation engineer working in Thailand.

Not taking the long view

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

ELECTION watchers, political analysts and others who want to see democratic institutions and with them democracy flourish in this country have expressed their disappointments over the conduct of the last phases of the recently held upazila parishad elections. At the same time, they emphasised the pointlessness of the electoral victories claimed by the pro-ruling party candidates using illegal methods like capturing polling booths and stuffing ballot boxes amid widespread violence that led to a number of deaths. The point that many of these critics have tried to drive home is that these gross irregularities in the elections with attendant violence have sullied the image of the Election Commission (EC) and, especially, the ruling party, and made fairness and credibility of future elections under the incumbent government questionable. Some, who are bonafide well-wishers of AL, have also pointed out how these rigged upazila elections will lend credence to AL's arch rival BNP's long-standing allegation that elections under AL were not fair.

The concerns expressed are undoubtedly genuine and the arguments placed in their support are unassailable. But is there ever any indication that the AL and its leaders are at all perturbed by the concern expressed and pleas made by various well-meaning quarters? We are not aware of any so far. But what we see on the contrary is that the ruling party leaders are often annoyed at such 'uncalled-for' critiques or words of advice which they rather consider as meddlesome, even inimical. Instances abound.

Consider the post-fourth round upazila polls remarks made by Communications Minister Obaidul Quader. Trashing all allegations to the contrary, he declared: "Upazila elections once again proved that people are the source of power and they have elected their favourite candidates."

So, those glaring cases of faking and stealing of votes were a demonstration of people's power and the candidates who thus usurped the public offices at the upazila parishads were the 'favourites' of the constituents! Note that this is not coming from any of those government leaders or ministers, whose words people hardly ever take at face value, but from someone who is otherwise well known for being plain-spoken! If his version of the elections is to be accepted as true, then we will have to discard all that was reported in printed and electronic media as false!

We may also note at this point the view Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself expressed earlier about the upazila elections at an Independence Day discussion (on March 27). Placing the blame squarely on a section of the media for what she termed its "propaganda in a planned way" about the allegations of rigging in the UZ polls, she argued: "I can say, had AL resorted to vote rigging, then no one of the Jamaat candidates would have been able to win."

We are flabbergasted. However, Jamaat must have been happy about the reference as well as the comparison. But the fact remains that a single incident in support of a case is far weightier than tons of unsubstantiated arguments

marshaled against it. And the suggestion that the success in fielding a single candidate from each constituency by effectively eliminating the rebel problem paid dividends for pro-AL candidates should be equally applicable to the case of their rival pro-BNP candidates, as the latter also suffered from a similar problem and took measures to tackle their own rebels. But then why were the results not the same?

In fact, the way the pro-ruling party candidates ensured their victory in the upazila elections has taken them nowhere. Even if their rival pro-BNP candidates continued to maintain the lead they enjoyed in the first two phases that would hardly cause any damage to the ruling party in real terms. If anything, the BNP might regain some of its lost confidence. But would that amount to a big loss for AL? Not in the least. On the other hand, it might prove to be a loss for BNP, since they would then be left with little argument to convince the people and the international community that their decision to boycott the January 5 general election was right. And that would have been a big moral victory for AL.

But the ruling party is too impatient to take the long view. And so, to keep its façade of invincibility and ensure that its rival BNP was defeated, the AL has made the very electoral system itself redundant. In an ideal situation



The electoral system and its institutions cannot be allowed to be tampered with and laid to waste in this manner. If the political parties fail to protect these basic institutions through which people can voice their choice, the days are not far off when they will be hoisted by their own petard.

where democracy works, the responsibility for the failure of the electoral system would be laid at the Election Commission's (EC) door. But our case is different. Here the EC has lost all its independence and has rather become a government stooge. So, by default, it is the ruling party, or the government for that matter, that has to accept the liability for the failure.

The electoral system and its institutions cannot be allowed to be tampered with and laid to waste in this manner. If the political parties fail to protect these basic institutions through which people can voice their choice, the days are not far off when they will be hoisted by their own petard.

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Spare the rod

RUBANA HUQ

THEY were beating a guy in a blue check shirt. Kicking him. Tugging at his collar. Throwing him around. Mahmudul Haque Munshi of Gonojagoron Mancha was under attack. Last Friday, April 4, the television screens just focused on that one scene alone. Thanks to technology, that scene was looped over and over again and no matter how many channels the viewer surfed, one would only end up watching that 'one single scene.' Question is: what does media do? How is it supposed to serve its goal? Well, one cannot expect an ostrich to fly away, though evolution has given it wings. But in spite of being "wingless" it has a powerful clout, and a full swing of its clawed leg can rip open a tiger's belly.

Electronic and print media, the Cyclops of our postmodern times and the apotheosis of our popular culture, in spite of all their weaknesses, indeed made many think that night. That single scene literally was strong enough to rip open one's faculty and pose a single question: what if he was my son?

In spite of Mancha having landed up with controversies and critique, I don't think there's even one citizen who thinks that when they started their journey on February 5, 2013, they had any other purpose other than bringing about a change in the culture of impunity. True the platform got diluted, true that many shied away from even going there, but does any of this justify the power of the brute force unleashing violence on their bodies? No. While they were being chased away from Aziz Super market, National Museum and eventually Bangabandhu Medical College, could they not have been spared the rod? And for how long shall we just continue watching history repeat its violent episodes over and over again?

Our history seems to be perennially courting violence. The Friday scene brought back a memory of an estimated 87,000 students participating in protests, defying the interim regime's emergency laws, way back on August 28, 2007. The military-backed regime in Bangladesh, through its indefinite curfew in six major cities on August 22, attempted to suppress student agitation, which erupted from just a football match. 1,500 police were sent to Dhaka University and many were injured, while security forces used force to disperse the crowd. Media reportage was banned, cell phone networks were also jammed and yet, in spite of the authorities having detained more than 250,000 people in less than nine months till August 2007, could they escape the verdict of the mass? Fortunately, no.

However, most turning points in world history do revolve around violence, starting from the American, French, or Russian Revolution, the 1857 Revolt in India, or World War II, down to Martin Luther's Reformation and the beginning of the Thirty Years' War. History, to say the least, has always chronicled violence. Now, a couple of questions spring up at this point. How necessary is violence as a political language? How does it alter outcomes in intense political discourses? And can 'force' replace violence? Are 'violence' and 'force' terms that can be easily interchanged? And most importantly, can persuasive force impact the public mind?

Gandhi's "truth-force" as a nonviolent anti-colonial movement is certainly one example, and the scene of African Americans sitting at a segregated lunch counter in

the South in 1960 exerting substantial "force" on the public is another. The more recent event of an essentially non-violent regime change in Egypt brought about by ordinary, unarmed people is also a similar reference. In many African civil wars, rioting has been a manifestation of violence that targeted to change society, politics, and economy and craved for freedom from discrimination and disenfranchisement. There are also instances in history where "actual violence" and "nonviolent force" have aimed to achieve the same goals and in many cases, violence has been justified when it came down to "people" and not to "power." If oppressed mass resorts to violence to secure change, then can it ever be made legitimate? Should we ever say "why not" to violence?

While Gandhi had said: "It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of nonviolence to cover impotence," Martin Luther King in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech also has an explanation: "A riot is the language of the unheard." These endorsements do make a case for political violence committed by the oppressed and calls for it to be treated as an expression of unmet demands, while a more structured and more intense critical examination of power deserves to be studied with regard to how it is gained, controlled and perpetuated through violence.

Whether or not Gonojagoron Mancha took the permission to host rallies in Shahbagh, it is imperative to understand that movements don't require approvals and that, irrespective of whether they are marred by controversies or not, nothing justifies the violence. The Mancha, which could have represented a moment of struggle and could have crystallised politics at one point, may have succumbed to powerful interventions and have been questioned to an extent, but that does not give right to the security forces to exert brute power from the circumscribed space at the top.

While violence has become a part of political construct in many societies including ours, one must also carefully remember that we are treading sensitive grounds as only in February this year, more than 100 were injured while police charged batons and fired rubber bullets on 5,000 agitating students in Rajshahi. In less than three months, in that same university, Bangladesh Chhatra League called for an indefinite strike following a killing of a fourth year student of Political Science. Currently, there is more news of discomfort and fear in Bangladesh Agricultural University where students are tense about the killing of a 21 year-old Saad Ibne Momtaz, a fourth year student of Fisheries Faculty.

One must also remember that we live in a country where often the youth have been the most vocal, desirous of change and wanting unparalleled freedom. The sole focus is then to only eradicate illegitimate violence instead of fighting daily battles with security forces hiding behind safe shields while the protestors remain exposed to the aggressive boots of the police forces. While one shouldn't resort to blanket condemnation of violence, one must critique the monopoly of terror. After all, violence antagonises and does not invoke commitment. One ought to also remember that the debate of any struggle runs way beyond the powerful vertex and often rests in horizontal axes in society that quietly pop up in the democratic societies.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters@thedailystar.net

Zia's declaration

Re: Syed Badrul Ahsan's news analysis, "History, as the Zias see it", The Daily Star, Saturday 29th March, 2014.

In referring to the second declaration of independence by Ziaur Rahman, Mr Ahsan is unfortunately, incorrect in stating that "Zia quickly grasped the truth. Within minutes, he wrote out another statement..."

This statement, which he refers to, was in fact drafted by Mr AK Khan. Sensing that the first statement by Ziaur Rahman would be construed as a coup, Mr AK Khan drafted the second statement which was later read out by Ziaur Rahman, on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 28th March 1971; as documented in Volume 15 of Govt of Bangladesh Document: "Liberation War Documents", page no. 129 (reprinted in 2010).

I was an eyewitness to this process, as I, along with late M A Hannan (Chittagong District Awami League Party Secretary General) and Mr Mosharrar Hossain (the then MPA), currently Minister of Housing and Public Works, went to see Mr. A. K. Khan in Fatikchari, Chittagong. There Mr. A. K. Khan handed us the draft. We then proceeded to the Kalurghat Transmitter Centre, and gave the draft to Ziaur Rahman, which he read out on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the morning of 28th March 1971.

For the sake of historical accuracy, the proper corrections should be made.

Mirza Aboo Mansur
Former MPA, Fatikchari
Awami League, Chittagong
Zonal Commander, Sector - 1, in War of Liberation

SBA's response

Syed Badrul Ahsan thanks the writer of the above letter for his response to the article in question.

Meanwhile, note may also be taken of some points in relation to Major Ziaur Rahman's statements on 27 March 1971.

A.R. Mallick's words

Dr. A.R. Mallick, at the time vice chancellor of Chittagong University, states in his memoirs, Amar Jibonkotha O Bangladesher Mukti Sangram (Agamee Prakashani December 1995, Second Edition September 2007) on page 66:

"On 27 March Ziaur Rahman declared independence in his own name. I remember he said, 'I, Major Zia, do hereby declare . . .', et cetera. Right then I voiced my objection. I told Hannan to send news to Kalurghat that the words of the declaration should be changed. I suggested that in the interest of the country the declaration had to be recast. Zia could declare independence on behalf of Bangabandhu Mujib. That would bring international support for us. No one in the outside world knew Zia. Support from outside the country would not be forthcoming if people heard that Major Zia had made the announcement. Thus it was that Major Zia rephrased his declaration. It is my feeling that on my advice M.R. Siddiqui and Hannan may have got in touch with Major Zia and had the declaration changed."

Belal Mohammad's comment

In his work, Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Anupam Prokashani, Fourth Edition February 2003), Belal Mohammad notes on pages 40-41:

"I handed him a single sheet of paper. He took out a pen from his pocket. Initially he wrote, 'I, Major Zia, do hereby declare independence of Bangladesh.'"

I then told him, "Would you like to say something like 'on behalf of Bangabandhu'?"

He replied, "You are right." Drawing an arrow after his name, he wrote: "On behalf of our great national leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman..."

... The declaration was written mainly after consultations with me and in the presence of Captain Oli Ahmed. I was assisted by Professor Momtaz Uddin Ahmed in the translation of the announcement into Bangla."

Mahfuzur Rahman's view

In the compilation 1971: 25-30 March Biplobi Betar Kendra Shonglishto Tothyaboli (Samaj Anushilon, Chittagong, March 2005, the following quote from Dr. Mahfuzur Rahman's Bangalir Jatiyotabadi Sangram Muktijuddhe Chotogram has been reproduced on page 155:

"At one stage of the broadcast, his announcement of himself being acting head of state could have had one reason, which was that he mistook a people's war for a rebellion. That a people's war and a rebellion are not the same was something he realized after he had made the broadcast and come under pressure, the result being an amended statement on his part. . . After his (original) announcement, Major Zia was requested by Dr. A.R. Mallick, A.K. Khan, Professor Mohammad Khaled, indeed everyone, to change his declaration."

Comments on news report, "M Kamal takes a swipe at Muhith," published on April 1, 2014

Snr Citizen

Let this not become something like the BCL faction or division. Let there be respect for each other.

Mofi

Our finance minister loves the word 'rubbish'. I noticed he used it many times on many issues. It's time he examined whether those things are really rubbish or his understanding (pretension) is rubbish.

Touchstone

Finally, someone spoke out against this incompetent minister.