

CEC nonchalance

It is self-defeating

ONE doesn't really know what to make of the CEC's comments made after his return from six-week leave abroad. During that time a lot had happened in respect of the UZ elections. And the actions, or rather the inaction of the EC, have caused erosion of public confidence in the commission.

We commented before on the rationale of the CEC choosing to go on leave at a time when a very important election was being held, and it is every five years that elections to upazillas are held, but we are surprised and indeed shocked by the way CEC has tried to shift the responsibility to everybody else in an attempt to absolve himself of the responsibility, and the commission for the manner in which the upazilla elections had passed off, particularly the last three phases.

It doesn't really behove the CEC to take a sanctimonious position on a matter the conduct of which is entirely the responsibility of the election commission alone. To say that what had happened would have happened even if he were here is really a self-indictment.

We understand fully that it is not individuals that matter but the institution. However, it is the individuals, particularly one who is at the helm, that make it operationally impeccable. Apparently, the CEC has not been able to infuse the degree of efficiency, and sense of responsibility in the team that would ensure smooth functioning of the commission even in his absence. Should he not do something about it?

Yet another broad daylight abduction

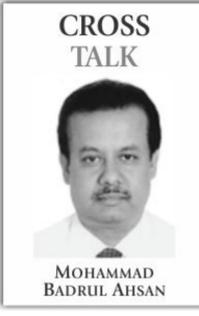
A tell-tale sign of insecurity

ABU Bakr Siddique's abduction in the middle of the day and that too at a busy filling station gives us a chilling reminder of how easy it is for criminals to whisk someone away. While it is too early to comment on why he was taken away against his will, although a number of reasons have been speculated in the media, that should not diffuse the investigation and make it lose its focus. The problem of such incidents is that we hardly ever see any solution of such abductions, which only increases the sense of impunity for culprits to commit them time and again.

Though authorities have in the past claimed that it is not possible to protect everyone, surely what can be done is to actually investigate incidents of kidnapping and apprehend the gangs involved in this type of crime. We are naturally alarmed at the increasing rate of disappearances and equally dismayed at the lack of action on the part of law enforcement agencies to take effective preventive measures after a crime has taken place. The case of Mr. Bakr is expected to receive attention given his place in society, but what of the numerous other cases that continue to remain unattended? The point we wish to make is if a person of his station in life can be so vulnerable to abduction, what of the ordinary citizens?

However, take Bakr's abduction as a test case, ferret out the culprits and their mentors and bring them to justice.

Why a little of everything is fishy!



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

FISHY things lately are having something to do with fish. Last Saturday, an orthopedic hospital was shut down in Dhaka because its self-styled surgeons, hardly high school graduates, treated patients with drill machine. One of them was a fish trader in his other life before joining his brother-in-law in this fishy business. Earlier, a number of our politicians declared in their income statements that

a big chunk of their earnings had come from fish business. Not a sheer coincidence that the fishmongers and the big fish in this country are gainfully connected.

Many fishy people suddenly have got a fish story to tell. A fish trader takes up medical profession and politicians use fish farming to hide their money. While everybody is fishing in the muddy water, this country looks like a fishing village indeed!

What do fish and humans have in common? The no-brainer answer is that both start rotting from the head. Perhaps that rotting is now in its advanced stage. Nobody knows where to draw the line between being fishy and being humane.

John Christensen, founder of Chart House Learning, developed the "Fish! Philosophy," which explores that relationship with a positive twist. He observed at Pike Place Fish Market in Washington, USA that fish sellers hurled salmon and trout through the air into a man's arms. A cheer followed as the man expertly wrapped fish and gave it to a laughing customer. Christensen modeled a technique after the energy he found in that market to make individuals alert and active in the workplace. The technique is about finding what works, deciding what one believes in and being excited about it.

This nation has got the cheer, laughter and the energy alright. But the philosophy appears to be misplaced. There's a controversy surrounding an Everest climber these days. He apparently never made it to the highest peak of the world. But fake that he may be, he had found what works in this country, decided what he should get us to believe in and then got us excited about the whole thing. All was fish that came to his net and he was soaking up the false glory. Newspapers splashed his story, civic groups threw receptions in his honour and television channels glamourised him. Our children were getting

ready to look up to him as a role model. All that time this man enjoyed the alleged hoax without as much as a healthy twitch. In this entire thing, he failed to show even the slightest decency. Instead, all that time he was fishing for every opportunity to exploit his place in the sun. As a nation we fell for it. Line, hook and sinker, we swallowed his bait.

In Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, old man Santiago says: "But, thank God, [the fish] are not as intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble and more able." The current lineup of phonies includes spurious surgeons, prevaricating politicians and a controversial climber but they certainly do not exhaust the list. There are too many fishy men and women who have turned this country into a fish pond and our lives into one big fishing expedition. It's our innocence and tolerance that provide the fertile ground for them to angle for opportunities.

French Nobel laureate Andre Gide writes that fish die belly upward and rise to the surface because it is their way of falling. This aphorism aptly captures the essence of our madness, which unrelentingly encourages falling as rising. It's equally true for scaling heights, digging depths and excavating escape routes. Pretension gets so much attention that crimes are condoned, mistakes are manipulated and excuses are excused.

This gives us a society where criminals swim like fish. The guilty gets away with murder, while the innocent suffers in quiet anguish. In this latest venture of human exploitation, the victimiser exerts cruelty but victims are too numb to scream.

Karl Marx explained this condition in 1843 when he wrote: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." In our country, patriotism is being prescribed for sedation giving people a false sense of well-being. People in their euphoric condition can't tell they're being oppressed, too drowsy to realise their country is slipping out of their grip.

We've made the world's biggest human flag with 27,117 people. Next, more than 300,000 people sang our national anthem. Last Pahela Boishakh, 60,000 people painted 326,000 square feet area with decorative art. This is called frying fish in its own oil. The irony of which is that the ordinary people laboured for this pageant of patriotism, whereas at least half of them have been denied their right to cast votes.

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The golden crest still shines brightly

Reflections of an awardee of the 'Friends of Liberation War Honour'

JULIAN FRANCIS

ON my sitting room wall in Banani, Dhaka, there is a photo of the president and prime minister of Bangladesh handing over to me the beautiful crest of the 'Friends of Liberation War Honour' which I received two years ago on March 27, 2012. Below the photo is the framed certificate for the same in Bangla and English signed by both the president and prime minister, and below that is the crest itself on top of a piece of furniture. Both the crest and the certificate are beautifully designed and they are my most treasured awards from over 40 years in the Indian sub-continent, 23 years in Bangladesh, which I now regard as my home.

Most of the over 300 awards have been given posthumously and at the second phase in March 2012 only about 20 out of 83 were received by the actual awardees. Only three awardees, including me, are still living and working in Bangladesh. We have all been working with the extreme poor and we are greatly at peace at what we are doing. The four days of functions in March 2012 and visits around the award giving were most beautifully and sensitively organised. We were able to interact with the president and prime minister of Bangladesh and other ministers and dignitaries, both formally and informally, which was a wonderful experience.

It was, therefore, very sad to recently read in the newspapers that it is alleged that there is not the right quantity of gold -- about 75% less than specified -- in each crest, and that instead of silver; an alloy of other metals has been substituted. Obviously, if significant corruption has taken place, as it has been alleged, it must be dealt with strongly under the law. If the revelations by the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution are correct, it is highly embarrassing for the government of Bangladesh, and I am sure that the prime minister will want to see that correct and very strong action is taken.

However, I am sure that the recognition given to us is more than enough and was never expected, and even if we had received a certificate only, it would have been a great honour -- very special indeed. And so, I am sure that

the recipients of these unique honours will not feel 'cheated' or 'short-changed.' I do not know of any country that has said 'thank-you' in this way. It is quite remarkable, and all of us who have received this honour feel very blessed. We are not so very special. The special ones are the unsung heroes of the Mukti Bahini who fought against all odds, and many perished on the way.

As far as corruption is concerned, three years ago I wrote in the national media about the progress Bangladesh has made since 1971. I wrote:

"A strong and courageous government is also required to reduce the amount of leakage or corruption which affects all development processes. I remember that even during the Rowmari famine of 1974-75, the chairman of a local co-operative association was systematically smuggling priceless food supplies over the border to India. Sadly, now, a certain amount of leakage is the norm, not the exception. I am told that a PWD contractor, for instance, normally pays out, for bribes, about 30% of each contract's value. Therefore, most contractors inflate their tender quotations by 30%. To overcome this, we need a 'sea-change' in the way work is done."

As far as corruption and bribery is concerned, your readers might be interested to know that an ancestor of mine, posted in the police at Noakhali and Chittagong in the 1860s and 1870s wrote the first "Police Constable's Manual" which was approved by the British government in Calcutta and translated into Hindustani, Urdu and Bengali. It was written in the form of questions and

answers and one of them is: "Q. #45 What is the greatest fault a Constable can commit?"

"A. The taking directly or indirectly of a bribe or any article of value (money or money's worth) from anyone for the purpose of being induced to perform or to refrain from performing the strict letter of his duty."

I wonder what is in the Police Constable's Manual today!

The writer was the Coordinator of OXFAM's relief programme for the refugees from Bangladesh and has lived and worked in Bangladesh for many years. In March 2012 he received the 'Friends of Liberation War Honour' from the Government of Bangladesh.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Shocked and dismayed!

The incumbent US government has introduced a new bill known as "Affordable Health Care Act" in order to enroll all un-insured Americans and legal residents in the health care system with a view to providing health care facility at an affordable cost. The official language here in the USA is, of course, English. But since people from all corners of the world are living in the USA, the government has been considerate enough to allow these people, who are inefficient in English, to fill out the forms in their language of convenience. People have been given the option to choose from fourteen different languages.

But I am shocked and dismayed to see that Bangla is not in the list of language options when a large number of the world population, 160 million people alone in Bangladesh, speak in that language. Not only this, I have asked people from different sections of society, whom I come across every day at my place of work, whether they know what 21st February stands for, but sorry to say, no one could answer me.

Saleh Mohammad Ayub
Houston, Texas, USA

Degeneration of student politics

Student organisations of Bangladesh have a long, glorious history. Our students played very important role in anti-British movement, language movement, and of course in the Liberation War. But the character of student politics has changed with the passage of time. At those times, students used to involve themselves in politics to protest oppression, injustice, etc. But sadly, now students join politics to gain unfair advantages—tender manipulation and admission business. Student politics in recent times has taken away hundreds of promising lives. Saad and Rustom are the latest victims of student politics. Jubayer, Abu Bakker ... there are many more. The killers get away scot-free while the victims' families never get justice.

Shahin Ahmed
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Comments on news report, "AL bars Star from covering its events," published on April 11, 2014

Aasfisarwar
Today TDS is banned from covering AL events and we are silent. Tomorrow, some other newspaper may face the same fate. Wake up my friends and protest before it's too late.

Nds
It will take time to wake up because they are under heavy doses of sedatives.

Mofi
The incident is shocking. But I like to believe it's orchestrated by an individual involved in media handling. It's not based on a central decision. Waiting to see how things unfold.

Deepjelejai
AL is in power and this party does not need any media to be elected again. The pious leaders of AL do not need any feedback from the media, TIB or civil society.

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed
Chances are that they will ban any media that will not sing its praises.

Shahid Imon
This is a clear indication that TDS is doing a wonderful job. Barring the most circulated English daily to cover AL's event is nothing but an indication of the ruling party's bankruptcy.

SM
PM does not want TDS -- and that is the law of the land.

Monju Huq
Has AL succeeded in keeping its secrets away from the press barring the Star correspondent?

"Saad died a lonely death" (April 11, 2014)

Alamgir
BCL has turned into a terrorist organisation with the patronage of AL.

Hardreality
Many people are raising their voice against Shibir's violent and aggressive activities (I believe this organisation needs to be banned). However, in the meantime, BCL activists' inhuman and immoral activities never get so much attention, because it has support from its masters. It has the license to do whatever it wants, like police have the license to demand money. If this article does not shake you, then I would say either your conscience is dead or you buried it thousand feet below the surface with no intention to dig it out.

What people think



Thursday: April 10, 2014
Do you agree with Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Pankaj Saran that his country's policy towards Bangladesh would remain unchanged in case of changes in Indian government?



Friday: April 11, 2014
Do you think that the government will take stern action against ship-breaking yards which are violating laws?



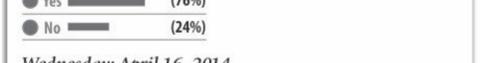
Saturday: April 12, 2014
Do you agree with senior Jatiya Party leader Kazi Feroz Rashid that people do not consider JP as the main opposition party in the House?



Sunday: April 13, 2014
Do you agree with the BNP's claim that the administration and the Election Commission were openly biased towards the candidates backed by the ruling party in the recently held upazila elections?



Monday: April 14, 2014
Do you agree with Gonotantrik Odhikar Shurokkha Parshad's demand to bring hartal under a legal framework so that it does not turn violent?



Wednesday: April 16, 2014
Do you think it was justified for the prime minister to term BNP an "illegal party"?



Thursday: April 17, 2014
Do you think it was justified for the doctors of Birdem Hospital to abstain from work protesting attack on doctors for alleged of negligence in their duties?

