

Why make patients suffer?

Good sense must prevail

AS if the two-day strike on Sunday and Monday by the interns and honorary physicians of the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) was not enough, the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) has made another one hour's work abstention call at all public and private hospitals on Wednesday demanding safety at workplace. Specialist doctors, too, will abstain from attending their private chambers for two hours on Thursday.

Angered by assault on some of their DMCH colleagues at the hands of troublemakers, doctors in the name of these strikes have thus been refusing treatment to patients, who have no connection with any attack on doctors. Already, scores of outdoor and emergency patients, many of whom in critical condition, had to leave the DMCH without treatment. Now with the BMA's call for nationwide strike, one wonders, how many more patients will have to suffer even if for an hour or two.

The development is most unfortunate and must be rolled back in public interest. Doctors may have had resentment against persons who wronged them, but why should unsuspecting patients be punished for that? Moreover, if only due to the very nature of their calling, which is bound by the lofty ideals of Hippocratic Oath, doctors are not supposed to behave like a trade union or a pressure group. They must work in a way that restores public confidence in the health care system, which the people turn to at an hour of their greatest need.

MRP booklet supply in a bind

Sort it out urgently with Malaysian company

IT may come as a surprise why the authorities persist in working with a foreign company that has failed to supply booklets for machine-readable passport (MRP) to passport authorities. As a result, not a single new MRP has been issued from any of the 33 regional passport offices over the last six months. The contracted Malaysian company (IRIS) is apparently in breach of contract and the national exchequer continues to incur both financial and time losses.

Unfortunately for millions of Bangladeshi people both domestically and internationally, the drama over MRP issuance comes at a cost. We have half a million workers, students and other citizens in Malaysia waiting for these documents. When taking into account the Bangladeshi labour force working abroad in the Middle East, the number jumps to nearly 5 million people, all of whom are in the pipeline for getting new passports.

Whatever maybe the differences of opinion between the passport authorities and IRIS, these must be straightened out without any further delay. We are informed that the principal point of contention between Bangladesh government and the Malaysian company is non-technical in nature; rather it has to reportedly do with the diffidence on the part of the company to allow the other Bangladeshi companies involved in the project to get a glimpse of its system. Enough time has been wasted and now authorities need to take a firm stance to resolve the situation, if need be, by resorting to legal measures for non-compliance by the company in question.

Threat of asbestos in Bangladesh

MD. ALAMGIR

ASBESTOS is a name given to a group of naturally occurring minerals contained within rocks, largely produced in Russia and other countries. Those who are working in the factories and industries must be cautious about the presence of asbestos material and must protect themselves from inhaling asbestos. The use of this substance is banned in many countries. Having known that it is carcinogenic and also the cause of some other fatal lung diseases, we must take steps to protect our people working in areas with presence of Asbestos.

Asbestos was extensively used for thermal insulation in factories like refrigeration, power plant, etc. The asbestos was commonly used in brake pads, automobile clutches, roofing materials, vinyl tile, cement pipe, corrugated sheeting, etc. These materials are still present in old buildings, ships and automobiles. Being unaware of the consequences there is a huge possibility that these are being recycled and still available in the second hand market and are being used by our people. Our people are at grave risk of inhaling asbestos fiber, which is a great concern for lung diseases. Unfortunately we are not attentive enough to control the spread of asbestos fiber in our air.

Most old ships that are scrapped in Bangladesh contain asbestos material in abundance. Knowingly or unknowingly this asbestos goes to our lung through our nose. Unsafe handling of asbestos can be observed in the Ship breaking yards at Chittagong. Asbestos is also available in the factories and industries. We are afraid if the owners of the factories are aware of controlling the spread of asbestos-fiber in the air.

Control of Asbestos: We must be aware of the products which were made of asbestos in the past. Similar products in the market now should have asbestos-free certificate issued by internationally accredited laboratory. When International Society is doing so much to ban use of asbestos, are we doing anything to control it? When one will buy furniture or a material that are suspected of containing asbestos, he should have asked for a proof that these are free of asbestos. The seller should be able to produce a certificate from the manufacturer of the product that the item is free of asbestos.

Compared to other countries in the world, health and safety of the people in Bangladesh could not be properly addressed by our government. This is probably due to our ignorance and poor economy. However, it may be controlled by banning use of asbestos in our country. Ministries of Health, Industry and Trade & Commerce should take collective measures to ban the use of asbestos. Our national media should take initiative to create awareness among the citizens.

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Truth, ethics . . . and hypocrisy

GROUND REALITIES



Syed Badrul Ahsan

among many who, in imperial Japan, laid millions of lives waste in China and Korea and elsewhere in the Far East.

We do not question the gruesome manner in which Japan's soldiers killed tens of thousands of Chinese in what has come to be known as the Nanjing Massacre in the 1930s. Our concern is not with how many were killed in Nanjing -- 300,000 or 155,000 or 200,000 --- but with the truth that genocide was committed, that it is a reality we cannot and must not question.

We do not take kindly to anyone who seeks to inform us that it was the communists in Indonesia who were behind the abortive coup in September 1965, a tragedy that left a number of senior military officers murdered. What we do know, and accept as the truth, is that the Indonesian army, led by General Suharto, went on a long rampage and would not stop until it had killed a million Indonesians.

The world does not question, and morally should not, the reality that the Khmer Rouge, in their frenzy to push Cambodia into what they thought would be a pastoral past, ended up killing anywhere between one and a half to two and a half million Cambodians. The scars remain, despite the passage of time.

Because we do not play truant with history, we do not disrespect the three million Bengalis who died at the hands of the Pakistan army and its local collaborators in 1971. Tikka Khan's assertion that only two passers-by were killed on 25 March 1971 or the Hamoodur Rahman Commission's finding that 26,000 Bengalis were murdered in 1971 is a badly peddled lie. The truth is in what men like R.J. Rummel have gone to pains to unearth about Bangladesh's sad legacy. Observe:

'... the Pakistani army killed 100,000 Bengalis in Dacca, 150,000 in Khulna, 75,000 in Jessore, 95,000 in Comilla, and 100,000 in Chittagong.'

A mere glimpse into what would be an ever-widening tragedy.

And Susan Brownmiller speaks of the Bengali women raped by Pakistan's soldiers:

'... 200,000, 300,000 or possibly 400,000 women (three sets of statistics have been variously quoted) were raped. Eighty per cent of the raped women were Moslems...'

Sit back and do your mathematics. And what you then have is an unassailable truth you cannot ignore. Those who question the Bengali death figures of 1971 are doing what Holocaust deniers have attempted doing over the decades.

There are assaults on our history elsewhere as well. And, predatory in nature as they are, calculated to create mischief, they must be fended off ruthlessly. There are elements, both in Bangladesh and outside it, who keep up the refrain of the 1971 conflict being a civil war between East and West Pakistan. They are wrong. Or they deliberately provoke us to outrage. Or they do not understand history.

In 1971, the war was between an occupied Bangladesh and a militarily aggressive Pakistan. An already gathering

THERE are certain truths we do not tamper with when it comes to dealing with history. Unlike men like David Irving, we have no reason to question the Holocaust and the reality of six million Jews perishing at the hands of the Nazis.

Like so many men and women around the world, we are saddened every time a Japanese prime minister treks down to the Yasukuni shrine to pay homage to Japanese soldiers who died in the Second World War. We are unhappy because these dead men were

political crisis took an eerie new dimension, of a brutal kind, when the Pakistan army pounced, in the dark, on the people of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did not decree that Bangladesh was a free state until the Pakistanis launched Operation Searchlight. Bangladesh became a free state, albeit under occupation, when it came under violent attack by Pakistan.

It was no civil war. Neither was it secession by any stretch of the imagination.

Secession was when the southern states of the United States of America, calling themselves the Confederate States of America, decided to move out of the union in 1861 over the issue of slavery. Secession occurred when eastern Nigeria, led by Odumegwu Ojukwu, declared itself the independent republic of Biafra and moved out of the federation of Nigeria. Secession happened when Moise Tshombe chose to take Katanga out of a newly independent Congo.

The United States eventually returned to being a full-blooded, unified family in 1865. Biafra, unable to beat off the pressure exerted on it by Nigeria, capitulated in 1970. Katanga was simply unable to go its own way and a few years later Tshombe took charge as prime minister of the Congo.

Bangladesh did not lose the war against Pakistan because it had not seceded from Pakistan. The Pakistan army launched a blitzkrieg against Bangladesh. The Bengalis hit back hard. Morality was on the side of the Bengalis and so was political discretion.

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History apart, there are the self-righteous who speak to us of the need to uphold international standards as we seek justice over the war crimes committed forty three years ago. Observe the fact sheet, theirs:

International standards were not followed when Iraq was invaded, occupied and destroyed in 2003.

Nothing of international standards was there when Afghanistan was occupied by the western powers in 2001.

The law and decency became casualties when America did not take Osama bin Laden alive and put him on trial but gunned him down before disposing of his corpse in the sea.

The sham of a trial the fallen Saddam Hussein was subjected to came nowhere close to a preservation of international standards.

Panama's Manuel Noriega was abducted on George H.W. Bush's orders and lodged in prison in America. International standards were nowhere to be seen.

Rendition flights seized suspected terrorists and had them maltreated in countries known for brutality. Where were international standards of justice here?

Hypocrisy is no substitute for ethics. And inhabitants of glass houses ought not to proffer advice to those who live in poverty-driven yet enduring tenements.

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Modi's Bangladesh bashing

MAHMOOD HASAN

INDIAN Lok Sabha elections came to an end on 12 May, 2014. From the different opinions and hype in the Indian media it appears that the BJP-led NDA will dethrone the Congress-led UPA and form the next government in Delhi. Interestingly, the election campaign has sharply divided the Indian polity into two camps -- the secularists and the followers of "Hindutva". Hindutva has several connotations, but is generally understood as Hinduism mixed with ultra nationalism.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is led by the controversial Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat. Modi was accused for his complicity in the Gujarat riots in 2002, in which more than 2000 people were killed, mostly Muslims. Rise of Modi as BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate has alarmed many within and outside of India. Modi has relentlessly played the communal card to polarize the Hindu vote and isolate the Muslim communities. His diatribe against the so-called "Bangladeshi immigrants" was a rude jolt for Bangladesh.

On 27 April 2014, Modi in his election speech at Srirampur (West Bengal) threatened to deport "Bangladeshi immigrants" if NDA came to power. He accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for pursuing vote bank politics. He however made a distinction when he said that Hindu migrants from Bangladesh must be accommodated in India. Clearly, Modi too was playing vote bank politics.

Earlier on 30 March in Karimnagar (Assam), BJP president Rajnath Singh warned "illegal Bangladeshi migrants" will not be tolerated and action will be taken against them. People who came from Bangladesh after 1971 should be treated as "illegal migrants", he said.

On 18 April BJP leader Subramaniam Swamy said in Guhawati that Bangladesh should compensate India with land if it did not agree to take back the so-called immigrants. "According to my estimate, one-third of Bangladesh's population lives in India", he added. Thus according to his theory one-third of Bangladesh territory should go to India.

Evidently such statements coming from Modi and top BJP leaders have caused concerns in Bangladesh. Bangladesh civil societies have been discussing this over the past weeks. Some have expressed dismay, some have rejected the threat and some described it as ominous.

Let us see what the BJP manifestos say about the so-called "Bangladeshi immigrants".

In its 1998 manifesto BJP claimed "The total number of illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh is officially ascertained at over 1.7 crore" and "unabated illegal infiltration from Bangladesh was the reason for destabilization of North East India. The 2004 document vowed, "Putting an end to infiltration from Bangladesh and vigorously pursuing the 3-D formula -- Detect, Delete and Deport". In its 2009 manifesto BJP said, "We will systematically detect, detain and deport illegal immigrants who have emerged as a major source of homegrown terror". The 2014 document does not mention Bangladesh but talks about, "illegal immigration across the eastern border" and threatens "punitive measures will be introduced to check illegal immigration".

The terminologies used by BJP are indeed very confusing. Modi used the term "Bangladeshi immigrants". He did not say "illegal". People naturalized as citizens in a foreign

country are known as immigrants. Rajnath Singh used the term "illegal migrant". BJP manifestos have used the terms "infiltrators" and "illegal immigration". Each of these terms has different legal meanings.

Several questions can be raised here. How did BJP arrive at the figure of 1.7 crore in 1998? Sixteen years later what is the figure now in 2014? Is it on the basis of any census? Has the enumeration been done by checking any identification document? When did India introduce citizen identification cards? Does this figure include only Muslims or Hindus too? Why are Hindus, who left Bangladesh, not considered as "illegal immigrants"? Where are these people living in India?

Even if we accept this figure for the sake of argument -- the question is why did these people migrate to insecure India -- where communal riots are a frequent phenomenon? Is India better than Middle East -- a natural destination for Bangladeshi workers? Are all these 1.7 crore beggars and rickshaw pullers? Could not a single immigrant rise to be recognized in the Indian society as an educated professional during the past four decades -- taking 1971 as the cut off date? Haven't the Bangladeshi Diasporas in Europe, America and elsewhere produced highly qualified professionals?

Bangladesh's border with India has largely been fenced. The BSF routinely shoot down petty smugglers and cow traders from Bangladesh. If 1971 is the cut-off date -- what have the BSF been doing while this so-called 1.7 crore crossed the Bangladeshi border and walked over to India?

When the A.B. Vajpayee-led NDA government came to power in 1998, the Bangladesh "illegal immigration" issue was hotly pursued by some BJP leaders for several months. Scores of Bangladeshi speaking people were herded from slum areas of Mumbai and transported by train to West Bengal for a "push back" into Bangladesh. Ultra Rightist "Shiv Sena" leader Bal Thackeray helped BJP in their sordid ploy. Attempts were made to "push back" some people into the Bangladesh across the border in West Bengal, which was thwarted by Bangladesh. It was the towering Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, who put an end to this woeful affair by warning Delhi that any attempt to send people across the border would be resisted by West Bengal.

Though Mamata Banerjee has no love lost for Bangladesh, she too warned Modi. "Let him touch any person, I will rock Delhi" she declared on 4th May at Ranaghat. She went on to accuse Modi of ignorance about Bengal's history. She pointed out that during undivided India people came to Bengal to live and Modi was unnecessarily creating a rift between Bengali and non-Bengalis.

Interestingly, there has been no reaction from the ruling party leaders in Dhaka. For obvious reasons, the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry cannot react officially to such utterances of Indian politicians. At least not at this stage, when BJP is not yet a part of the government in Delhi.

Modi has not elaborated on his foreign policy priorities during this election campaign. But some BJP sympathizers are talking about a "Modi doctrine". Dhaka would be keeping a close eye on who eventually leads the government in Delhi and what its policy will be towards Bangladesh.

If Narendra Modi ascends the throne in Delhi after 16 May, Bangladesh bashing would no doubt be a favourite pastime for some members of the BJP.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Making legal aid accessible to poor

On 28 April 2014 the ministry of law, justice and parliamentary affairs has celebrated the National Legal Aid Day. The government of Bangladesh has enacted Legal Aid Services Act, 2000 with a view to providing legal aid to the poor and underprivileged people. Access to justice is a constitutional right of every citizen of the state. But most of the time, the poor and helpless can not reach the court to establish their legal rights. Even many of them are ignorant about these services. The government should publicise these legal aid services throughout the country and also make the procedure of getting the services convenient and simple to people.

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Wal-Mart's indifference towards Rana Plaza victims

Wal-Mart is one of only a few major retailers that have refused to sign on to the new safety standards after the Dhaka tragedy. Tazreen Fashion fire killed 112 workers and left hundreds injured. And Rana Plaza collapse killed 1,127 and left more than 600 or 700 injured for lifetime. And in that shareholder meeting, they haven't even expressed any condolence for those families. They haven't felt sad. No word for those.

One worker of Rana Plaza said, "We didn't want to go up in the factory this morning, but the management forced us to go up and said there was no problem with the building. Just after that, I sat on my table to work, and the building just collapsed. I couldn't even leave. I was trapped at my table."

Despite a spotty record on labour issues, Obama's visit to Wal-Mart was the first ever by a sitting president to a Wal-Mart store -- to the world's largest retailer who raised the ire of some labour advocates; who have long criticised the retailer for low wages and importing goods from China rather than buying from U.S. manufacturers. Yet the same cost-saving motivations that have led Wal-Mart have cut corners on labour!

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Comments on news analysis, "Reform of Rab is a must," published on May 8, 2014

Aasfisarwar

While there is no doubt that RAB needs reforms, there are a few questions that need to be answered as well:

- a) Why did Hasina accuse BNP of the murders in the first place? What is she trying to hide?
 - b) How did Shamim Osman know everything about the murders within 10 minutes?
 - c) Lt. Col. Tareque is an accused and a close relative of a minister. Why he is not arrested yet?
 - d) Who gave the main accused safe exit and shelter?
 - e) Tk. 6 cr. had been exchanged via two specific banks and even their branch names were mentioned. So why is police not mentioning anything about it?
- Now the last question: who needs to be reformed or dismantled first, RAB or Hasina government?

Mumeen

Reform of RAB is inadequate when you take into consideration the fact that our political culture nurtures this corrosive, pervasive corruption.

"Maya denies his family's link with the accused" (May 10, 2014)

Molla A. Latif

Allegations and denials are both subject to investigation and proof. May be those will come at proper time. But a minister is a powerful instrument to influence investigation. So it would have been proper for this minister to step down and stand aside to prove his innocence.

Aasfisarwar

The facts and evidences are crystal clear. The difference between truth and denial is like that day and night.

"Living in a hole..." (May 10, 2014)

Snr Citizen

This ghastly, inhuman and senseless act and the 'remedy' would not have been applied or accepted if there was a bit of enlightenment around. This girl has to be rescued and admitted to CRP for treatment and rehabilitation.

Dev Saha

How could this stupidity go on? Have people gone blind and mad?