

PM's remarks versus reality

SHAKHAWAT LITON

IT has been a long pervasive culture in Bangladesh -- the government warmly accepts a Supreme Court order if it goes in favour of them. The reaction is different if the court order goes against the government. In many cases, policymakers of successive governments had criticised the Court for any order which went against their interests or strategies.

So, nothing new happened this time around. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's reaction to the High Court order regarding the arrest of three ex-Rab officials in connection with the gruesome murder of seven people in Narayanganj can be analysed in the light of this pervasive culture.

What did she say? On Wednesday, an annoyed Hasina said that the enthusiasm of some quarters in filing petitions on various issues before the court was creating obstacles for the executive branch. While addressing a meeting of the ALCWC at Gono Bhaban she said, referring to the three organs of the state, "We should be careful about the jurisdiction of every organ and should not impede on the activities of one another." The premier also said: "We know when and what steps should be taken. But what would the executive branch do if the judiciary performs the duties that are basically under the jurisdiction of the executive?"

Her remarks are very significant and should be analysed in light of the constitutional provisions. The constitution has distributed the state

powers among the three organs -- legislative, executive, judiciary -- and has also demarcated their boundaries so that none can create obstacles for the other. So, the prime minister's remark that "we should be careful about the jurisdictions of every organ and should not impede the activities of one another" is praiseworthy.

But the reality is different. The executive branch of the state, which Hasina heads now, has been influencing the functions of the other two organs in many ways over the past two decades since restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991. As a result, the executive has become all-powerful, particularly the prime minister as chief of the executive branch, and has been encroaching on the jurisdiction of the other two organs. Sheikh Hasina has been exercising almost unlimited power. Her archrival Khaleda Zia enjoyed a similar authority. In fact, the existing system has evolved in such a way that anyone holding the office of the prime minister will be entitled to exercise immense powers. It is really difficult to find such an all-powerful PM in any other country where parliamentary democracy exists.

The prime minister leads and controls the functions of the cabinet. The prime minister determines the number of the council of ministers. S/he also exercises almost all of the powers of the president given by the Constitution as the president has to perform and exercise all the functions and powers on the advice of the prime minister, excepting the appointment of the prime minister and the chief justice.

The cabinet, led by the prime minister

according to the constitution, is collectively responsible to the parliament. But the parliament has been made powerless to hold the cabinet accountable. None of the successive governments has moved to empower the parliament to discharge its functions as stipulated by the constitution. As the Leader of the House, the prime minister controls the functions of the parliament in many ways. Transparency International Bangladesh, in a study released on Wednesday, said that the current parliament was dysfunctional. Who made it so? Of course, the present government.

The executive branch has also been impinging on the jurisdiction of the judiciary in some ways, though independence of the judiciary is one of the basic structures of the constitution. The judiciary has not been effectively separated from the executive in the last four decades. The government has yet to enact a law in line with the constitution on the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court. Therefore, controversial and political appointments have largely diminished the independence of the judiciary and also tarnished its image. And the executive's interference in the functions of the lower courts cannot be described briefly.

Given the above situation, it is now clear which organ of the state is impeding the activities of others? And which branch of government is all-powerful? The answer is -- it is the executive branch and the prime minister is its leader.

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INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY 'Museums' Collection makes Connections' Liberation War Museum and the paradigm shift

MOFIDUL HAQUE

THE Liberation War Museum (LWM), established in 1996 as a civil society initiative, has the community as its source of collection and inspiration. The museum undertakes special efforts to address the new generation and the younger generation also brings back history to the museum by collecting eye-witness accounts of the 1971 days. In the editorial of March 2013 issue of the monthly ICOM NEWS, published by the International Council of Museums, the editors observed that innovative actions are carried out by museums around the world to promote and encourage local participation through a number of different approaches. The editorial noted: "From Bangladesh to Brazil, museums are working to reinforce the communities' identities, with a view to enriching the lives of local residents, and in some cases helping to bring about social change."

It is not that Bangladesh was used as a metaphor only, a special article on the issue highlighted the global perspectives on how museums are engaging with communities and observed, "Possibly the greatest paradigm shift in museums over the past few decades has been the notion of valuing the visitor over the collection. Museums are responding to this shift by creating spaces that connect visitors through activities that promote knowledge and opportunities for dialogue and collaboration." The article cited the example of Brazil's Museum of Modern Art-Sao Paulo which welcomed street art in order to preserve social memory, organised graffiti workshop to celebrate International Deaf Day etc.

Another example was the establishment of the new Louvre Museum in the French town of Lens where the museum's efforts revitalised the town that suffered repeated economic crises. Yet another example was the Art Museum of Ivory Coast's economic capital Abidjan in taking art to the people rather than bringing them to the confines of four walls. The example of oral history project of the LWM of Bangladesh also got prominent place in the article. Thus it was truly an effort from Brazil to Bangladesh to develop innovative ideas in activating links with community.



Museums are redefining their role in society, they became more explicit in the past decades when emphasis was given not only on the collection of the museums but also on how innovatively the museums can promote and project their collections, thereby creating a new synergy between the objects and people interacting with them. This new awareness has broadened the concept of a museum, and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in its Rio congress held in 2013 addressed the theme of how memory joined by creativity can lead to social change. This is more than the educational role that museums have been playing for centuries; it involves the community in various ways to promote the new role of the museums.

This year, the theme of International Museum Day is "Museum Collections Make Connections." The theme recognises the role of museums as living institutions that help create bonds between visitors, generations and cultures around the world. Most importantly, the collections of the museums create greater opportunity to develop and cement ties between the institution and the community. The collection of the LWM has been enriched over the years with contributions from members of the society. Moreover, historical archives and collection of various archives from different parts of the world is a treasure which can enrich our historical search for truth. At the same time, each and every collection of a museum is important and every collection has multi-dimensional value. While the collection itself is important, how it reached the museum is also an important part of the story.

LWM can cite the example of one such collection which carries great historic value and now is open to the public to see it and do further research and study on our glorious Muktiyuddho. In 1971, the youth of Bangladesh jumped into the war to liberate their motherland with arms in hand. Most of them had undergone 3-4 weeks short training in the centres all around the border and carried out guerrilla operations inside the occupied territory. While leaving the training camps operated by the Indian military forces they had to fill-in a form providing basic information. Many years after the war Major General (Retd.) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury, the then MD of the Muktiyoddha Kalyan Trust, persistently carried out his search and could get hold of copies of those induction forms, 50,000 plus in all, and brought them under the custody of the Kalyan Trust.

During the last one and half years, LWM was engaged in digitising the forms bound in 208 volumes and after completion of the job has made it public. LWM has also announced that any freedom fighter who had undergone such short training can come to the museum and get certified copy of his form free of charge. The family members of the freedom fighters are also encouraged to come and collect the form of the proud member of their family. On International Museum Day, LWM will present the digital copy of 208 volumes containing basic info of more than 50,000 freedom fighters to the Muktiyoddha Kalyan Trust.

This is one example of how collections can make connections, and in this case it is not only the establishment of a connection but also a bond between the past and the present that promote relationship in the community and keep its history alive. The community, or in our case the new generation, carry the mythical Jeonkathi in their hand and when they touch and feel a historic object or listen to the tale of a past document, the sleeping princess of the past awakens and joins hands with the present to work for a better future. That is the importance of collections making connections.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



POWER PLANT AND DEEP SEA PORT IN MAHESHKHALI Human catastrophe likely

ANSARUL KARIM

MAHESHKHALI, lying along the coast of Cox's Bazar, has enormous development potential that can contribute to national economy. Recently, the area has attracted news headlines because of the government's decision to establish a deep-sea port between Sonadia Island and Maheshkhali proper, and build coal and LNG based thermal power plant. MOUs between the financiers and the government agencies are being negotiated to implement those mega projects. The government has also declared the area as an energy hub.

Power System Master Plan (PSMP) envisages that dependency of electricity generation by using natural gas, which is diminishing quickly, will be reduced by diversifying fuel use. According to the PSMP, 50% of fuel should come from coal by 2030. The government, therefore, considered establishing coal and LNG based thermal power plant of about 10,000 MW at Maheshkhali, which will be based on imported coal.

The country has a discovered stock of 3.3 billion tons of high quality coal reserve, so coal power units can be built near coal mines instead of concentrating them in one area.

However, the wrong notion of some top policy makers that the areas where those power plants will be established are all "wasteland" (which is not true) probably prompted them to go ahead with acquiring land without studying the socio-economic and environmental impact of the proposed development projects.

Initially, the programme to set up such projects at Maheshkhali received positive response from local people who hoped for socioeconomic improvement. But the way the government authorities acquired land without appropriate rehabilitation plan has caused anger and a sense of deprivation among the local community.

In Bangladesh, land acquisition has always been a difficult and delicate issue due to limited land resources and one of the highest population densities of the world. The proposed power plants and LNG terminal at Maheshkhali will need a big chunk of land. According to newspaper reports, the government plans to acquire about 10,000 acres of land, which are mostly shrimp and salt bed category and also a small area of agriculture category. Much more land will be needed when the deep-sea port is built. The environmental impact of such projects will also be very high due to increased concentration of SPM with harmful gases in the air and increased pollution load of the water in the

vicinity of the project area.

The size of Maheshkhali upazilla is estimated to be about 140 mi² with a population of about 4 lacs, and a shrimp and salt area of 12,970 acres. More than 80% of the local resident population is dependent on the shrimp and salt land. Only 10%-15% of the salt producers produce from their own lands. The remaining are landless labourers working on other people's land, and some are engaged in transporting salt. Thus they are tied to salt lands for their livelihood. Shrimp production and transportation also employs a large number of people. So, acquiring the proposed area will displace about 50- 60 thousand families from their lands and livelihood.

Recently, the deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar notified the land owners of acquisition of their land under Land Acquisition Act 1982 (LAA). As per this law, only the recorded land owners -- a small fraction of the affected people -- will be entitled to get compensation (only 10%-15 % will be included for monetary compensation). Vast majority of the affected people will not be benefited by the present land acquisition process. These people will enter into a cycle of unemployment and permanent poverty, which may result in their migration to inland areas as destitute and cause social disintegration.

Bangladesh is a land-starved country. The lands to be acquired for the plants are highly productive multi-crop land used for salt production during dry season and shrimp cultivation during rainy season. Annual income from these lands is much higher compared to income from national average agricultural land. Due to proposed acquisition of land about 1/6th of the total salt production land of the country will come down, resulting in annual deficit of salt production and increasing dependency on imported salt. Land acquisition of such a magnitude will also result in loss of shrimp production, affecting foreign exchange earnings.

There appears to be no transparent and integrated process of determining minimum land requirement for the projects in Maheshkhali. The project proponents made their own proposal for acquisition separately. It appears that PDB proposal for acquiring land for the thermal power plants is very high (1 acre/MW) in comparison with neighbouring countries ((0.31 acre/MW in Indonesia and 0.2 to 0.36/MW in India). This questions the rationale of acquisition of such a large area. A transparent and comprehensive procedure for minimising land acquisition can save loss of productive lands and livelihood of the dependent population.

At present, there is no statutory policy for resettlement and rehabilitation of livelihood of the people affected by the project. The only legislation, the LAA 1982, also deprives most of the affected people, particularly the landless who are displaced from their livelihood sources. It is an ethical and moral imperative that the people who lose access to their livelihood should be fairly compensated and rehabilitated by the project proponents.

The promise of employment generation has only limited potential, particularly for the unskilled local people. In a project where livelihood of almost 60% of the 4 lac resident population will be lost, a comprehensive rehabilitation plan should be in place before their land and livelihood are taken away.

Worldwide experience suggests a number of options towards fair compensation and rehabilitation of the projected affected people. The World Commission on Dams, and many others, recommend sharing of part of the benefits generated by dam operation with affected communities, in addition to mitigation and compensation measures for environmental and social impacts of dams. Some examples of good practices are also available within the country, where the government has gone above and beyond the provision of the inadequate LAA (Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge and Padma Bridge) by offering generous compensation packages for all affected people. Although those resettlement and rehabilitation plans only partially achieved the goal of reconstructing and restoration of the pre-project living standards, a solution can be found to ensure fair compensation and livelihood restoration of affected people.

If the growing frustration of the resident population of the islands is not addressed quickly, it may go out of control, repeating the fate of failed mega projects of the past. To avoid such catastrophic situation and also to ensure justice to the affected people the government should adopt a policy that:

Ensures transparent and inclusive process for determining minimum land required for acquisition;

Provides just and fair compensation to the affected families for their land loss;

Makes adequate provisions for resettlement of all categories of land dependent affected persons and rehabilitation of their livelihood,

Ensures that the affected persons become partners in development through benefit sharing, leading to an improvement in their post acquisition social and economic condition.

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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

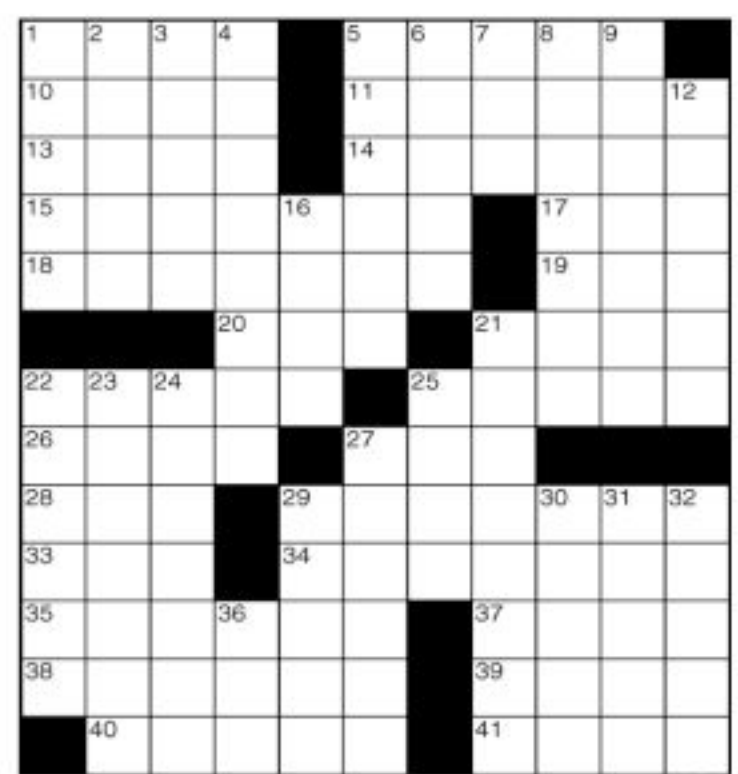
ACROSS

- 1 Blanchett of "Blue Jasmine"
- 5 Biological division
- 10 Fans' favorite
- 11 Blows one's top
- 13 Memo
- 14 Milk choice
- 15 Studied at the last minute
- 17 Anger
- 18 Taking a sabbatical
- 19 Greek vowel
- 20 Gun owner's org
- 21 Hightailed it
- 22 Owned amounts
- 25 Blouse with a sailor collar
- 26 Historic times
- 27 Sewing aid
- 28 Buddy
- 29 Israeli city
- 33 Be inquisitive
- 34 Rudolph feature
- 35 Lemon color
- 37 Large family
- 38 Baltimore player
- 39 Coup d'
- 40 Flair

41 Pouchlike parts

DOWN

- 1 With 22-down, Mexican holiday
- 2 Decorate
- 3 Add up
- 4 Periodic table listing
- 5 Swiss city
- 6 Eat away
- 7 Convent resident
- 8 Toward one of the goal lines
- 9 Began
- 12 Unwavering
- 16 The Red Planet
- 21 Monetary resources
- 22 See 1-down
- 23 Pencil ends
- 24 Illuminated from behind
- 25 Not spicy
- 27 Baseball's Reese
- 29 Fantasy creature
- 30 Italian physicist
- 31 Violinist Stern
- 32 Air outlets
- 36 Myra of movies



Yesterday's answer

C	H	A	R	O	N	T	O	N	S
H	A	V	A	N	A	U	N	I	T
A	G	E	N	C	Y	T	A	C	O
S	U	R	G	E	C	O	R	E	R
M	E	T	E	P	A	R	A	D	E
				R	O	O	M	F	A
				H	M	S	B	O	U
				S	E	A	E	L	S
				A	L	L	A	Y	S
				N	O	A	H	S	S
				D	I	R	E	S	A
				A	S	I	A	A	M
				L	E	A	D	D	E

CRYPTOQUOTE

SCV TNXV RNL AZGV RNLXHAU, SCV AVHH RNL DXV AZGV DWRNWX VHV, MCZBC TDGVH RNL LWZPLV.

- MDAS IZHVV

Saturday's Cryptoquote: MY FATHER GAVE ME THE GREATEST GIFT ANYONE COULD GIVE ANOTHER PERSON: HE BELIEVED IN ME - JIM VALVANO

QUOTABLE Quote

The best museums and museum exhibits about science or technology give you the feeling that, hey, this is interesting, but maybe I could do something here, too.

Paul Allen