

Establishment of indigenous people's rights

Government should do more in this regard

WHEN we are concerned with the rights of the indigenous people, the government has created an unnecessary controversy by asking the media, experts, academics and members of civil society to avoid using the term 'Adivasis' in relation to them at any discussion on the occasion of World Indigenous Day.

Indigenous people in Bangladesh are citizens of country who have been, regrettably, kept marginalised so far. They have been under pressure in these past many years through systematic assaults being made on them, particularly for the purpose of seizure of their land. Human rights bodies in the country and abroad have consistently drawn attention to such activities on the part of vested interest groups.

These groups, whatever name one may choose to call them by, form only a small percentage of the country's population, which makes their problems both easy and difficult to solve. If the issues are not looked from a majoritarian angle, their problems -- of land, which is their main stay, of language and culture -- would not be a hard task to overcome.

It is unthinkable that a section of our population should still have to strive to establish their rights as a citizen of the country. We call upon the government to remove all hurdles in this regard. The government will be doing itself and the country a huge favour through ensuring that all indigenous groups in Bangladesh enjoy the rights that have been theirs because of geography and history.

Mayhem on river routes

Woeful lack of interagency coordination

INVESTIGATION by the media after the sinking of Pinak-6 has revealed some dismal facts about the inland water transportation system. The number of violations ranges from vessels not having fitness certificates to faulty design. What is even more alarming is that there is no coordination among the various agencies tasked with overseeing that passenger-carrying vessels conform to safety standards. And once a vessel goes down, the severe lack of both manpower and salvage equipment has once again been highlighted with the Pinak-6 ferry, which has yet to be located, let alone salvaged.

It is a shocking fact that more than 1,500 risky vessels are operating on our rivers carrying tens of thousands of passengers who may or may not get to their destinations safely. That BIWTA and the National Shipping Corporation do not see any reason to call representatives of the other agency in the investigation into the latest sinking merely goes to highlight both lack of coordination and sincerity in getting to the bottom of the accidents. And precisely how are we to expect change for the better when a mobile court suspends the registration of a launch belonging to the shipping minister's family due to lack of safety equipment on the vessel?

It is not only graft that is responsible for letting unfit and faulty-design vessels ply river routes but also the lack of political will to make different departments function in a cohesive manner to ensure that standards are maintained

Who were behind the MH17 tragedy?

ABDUL MATIN

MALAYSIA Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) was shot down on July 17 while flying over Ukraine from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, killing all of 283 passengers and 15 crew members on board. It is alleged that the Boeing 777 aircraft was hit by a Buk missile supplied by Russia to the pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine. Russia denies the allegations.

What could prompt the pro-Russian rebels to shoot down a civilian aircraft of the Malaysia Airlines? First of all, the rebels have no conflict with Malaysia. A civilian aircraft flying over its territory could not be carrying arms for Ukraine. It is also reported that the Buk antimissile system was supplied with Russian crews. They could not mistake a civilian aircraft for a military one. Secondly, have the rebels benefitted in any way by this tragic accident? No. On the contrary, both the rebels and the Russians have become victims of the tragedy. While blaming the rebels for the tragedy, the allies of Israel are using the incident as a pretext to impose new economic sanctions against Russia.

Now look at the other side of the story. Israel started its assault on the Gaza Strip, basically genocide, on July 8 when the world was gripped by the World Cup fever. It was also the month of Ramadan when the Palestinian Muslims were fasting during the day and having meals at night. Naturally, it was difficult for them to observe blackouts during the night. This was, therefore, the most opportune moment for Israel to strike at Gaza.

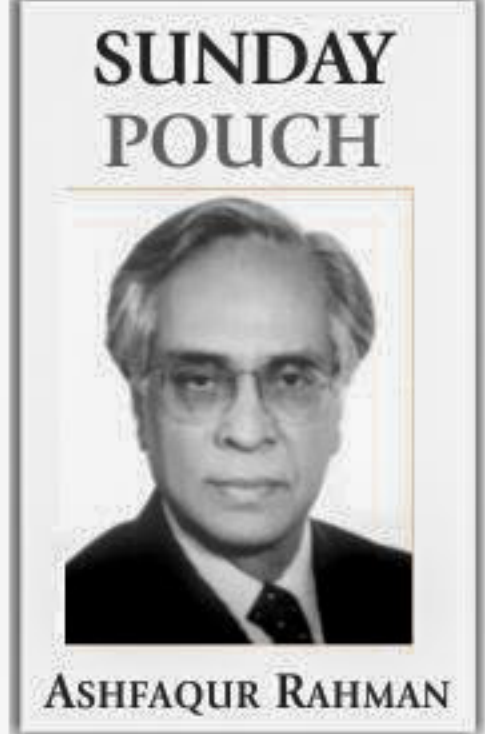
The World Cup was over but the Gaza operation remained unfinished. Israel badly needed a dramatic event to divert the world attention from the genocide. The MH17 tragedy was the drama that Israel needed. For days and nights, the Western media remained occupied with news and views on the MH17 accident, eclipsing the genocide taking place in Gaza.

Israel indiscriminately bombed residential areas including schools, hospitals, mosques and refugee camps. By August 2, more than 1,700 Palestinians were killed and thousands maimed. Most of them were civilians including children. Its allies have been vocal in supporting Israel's right to defend itself but remained hypocritically silent on the right of the Palestinians to liberate their land occupied by Israel.

It is now obvious that the main beneficiaries of the sad MH17 accident are not the rebels in Ukraine or the Russians but Israel and its allies. Under such circumstances, who would take the blame on the rebels for the MH17 tragedy without a grain of salt and exclude the probability of a stealthy operation by the beneficiaries?

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Big government but weak governance



ASFAQUR RAHMAN

OUR prime minister must be very proud to appoint several thousand physicians and 10,000 nurses by this December. She must be happy to know that she will be able to establish a viable health service in the country. There is a need for many more reliable service holders in various sectors so that this nation of 160 million can move forward. Take the case of the police and security services. The prime minister has not left any stone unturned to see that in order to curb terrorism and other security challenges she can muster enough manpower to handle them. When we see TV footages of the police on duty in the rural areas and small towns we know that the government has recruited enough police personnel to look after our needs.

Then there is the case of education workers. From the primary school level to the secondary level, we are slowly overcoming the shortage of teachers and books to cater to the need of our students. The pay and emoluments of government personnel at all levels use up much of the government revenue budget as well as part of the development budget. The finance minister has to devise new ways to raise taxes every year to meet the growing costs. Education is what will take the country to the next stage of development.

But what is happening in reality? The thousands of government employees recruited each year swell the ranks of those who are expected to serve the people. But the quality and competence of these people are much below normal. Take the case of government employees who are in the employment of the Inland Water Transport Authority and responsible for ensuring safe travel in launches and steamers. This Eid, what happened to a launch which sank in the Padma was a disaster. The launch was a dilapidated one, and had got a certificate for 17 days for renovation. It was painted and cleaned, but was not given a license to operate. So, it was idle for the 17 days before Eid. Somehow, before Eid, it could get a certificate to run with maximum capacity of 85 passengers. The sareng (driver) took 100 passengers from the port of departure, but on the way to its destination it picked up about 200 more passengers. The overloaded launch sank in the Padma river. Hundreds of passengers, including old people and children, were drowned or went missing. Three nieces of the shipping minister were caught in this disaster. The owner of the launch and the sareng have not been traced as far as we know.

Our point is that the person who knowingly gave the certificate and allowed the launch to run is the one who is mainly responsible for being swayed to take this decision, perhaps knowing that what he was doing was possibly a criminal act. But our Marine Law is so outdated and subject to different interpretations that the guilty are likely to go scot free. What a tragedy and how deeply fraught with consequences for the disaster-hit families. Now, the sunken launch cannot even be located and all bodies

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recovered. So what is the government going to do? Nothing of any serious consequence, I am afraid. That for you, dear citizens, is the nature of governance in Bangladesh.

Then again, during the Eid, a train rammed into a bus loaded with passengers. Where was the guard who is to ensure that the bus driver stops his vehicle when there is a train approaching? Is there anybody who will be held accountable for this disaster? This again, dear citizens, is the nature of governance.

Have the authorities not noticed the dilapidated state of the public and private buses that run on the streets? How can the government authority issue fitness certificates to them? Are we to assume that there is a nexus between the governing institutions and the governed?

Our neighbouring countries, including China, have designated people to monitor and regulate vehicles, launches and aircraft so that the ordinary citizens can use them knowing that they will not be subjected to fraud and bad governance. We have political leaders and bureaucratic high-ups who care for our people. But a small section of unscrupulous individuals flout good governance for personal profit. Can a proud people like Bangladeshis allow this to happen?

Look at the national image of the country. Our reputation is sliding down because of these few elements. Our government has been vested with civil and criminal powers to take corrective action without fear or favour. In this matter our focus moves to the police force, who are a force for good. See what the Dhaka Metropolitan Police did recently in checking the rampant use of chemicals in our fresh produce. Bravo to them. This is a good initiative and will be a precedent for good governance in the future.

The question that bedevils us all is how did some petty bureaucrats stoop so low as to make governance a farce? Who trained them in their respective areas? Why are they not supervised regularly? What about the big bosses in the various offices, why do they not try to find out how the citizens are suffering?

In Germany, there were trade guilds where each professional was tutored for at least seven years before he was given a certificate to operate on his own. Even today, government officials, however big or small, are trained in their professions and given the tools for ethical operation once they go to serve their masters -- the citizens.

Our prime minister has to think before allowing recruitment of large number of government employees until they are professionally fit and have high ethical standards. They must be made aware that getting a government job is not a right but a responsibility that has to be earned at each level. Let us assure the prime minister that Bangladesh will achieve middle income status soon, but she has to change the quality of governance.

We remember clearly that time and again Bangabandhu lamented that although Bangladesh was a Golden Land it could not remain as such until it produced golden people. Where are such people?

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Delwar's fallen workers

JYOTIRMOY BARUA

THE tragedy of Tazreen Fashions on November 24, 2012, shattered the whole nation. Delwar Hossain, the owner, managed to avoid arrest or even face any criminal charges until December 2013. After the incident, there had been two cases registered with the Ashulia Police Station by the Ashulia police and in both the cases Delwar Hossain was not made accused in any manner. The language of both the FIRs was somewhat sarcastic and smacked of political influence. The whole blame was put on conspiracy rather than the willful negligence of the owner of the factory. The Factory Inspector, whose paramount duty was to save lives, has not been held to account yet. In one of the above mentioned cases, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was vested with the investigation and they repeatedly said to the media that they could not find Mr. Delwar as he had gone into hiding.

We know how difficult it is to find someone who was hiding from the long hand of the law enforcement agencies. There had been regular protest by the workers and the activists for his arrest and proper compensation to the family members of the victims. None of the demands has seen any consideration apart from distribution of dona-

The 1,600 workers of five factories of Tuba Group went on hunger strike on July 28, 2014, as a last resort to get their arrear wages and the ball was in the court of the workers for almost 7 days from July 28. They managed to get attention of the people from all walks of life and many demonstrations in favour of the workers were clearly visible in the capital city.

learned from newspaper reports that none of these previous attempts and the order passed had been mentioned in the fresh application. Moreover, a Division Bench of the Hon'ble High Court in their order passed on July 24, 2014, clearly mentioned that "it has been submitted by the learned advocate that there has been agitation for non-payment of wages to the workers and the learned advocate undertakes that on release, he will pay the wages to the agitating workers." This clearly shows that the issue of payment has been used as a means to facilitate his bail from the High Court.

Whether a person would be granted bail or not is the discretion of the court but the bail of Delwar Hossain was taken by way of supplying misleading information to the court. It is evident from the records of the Ashulia P.S. Case No. 62 dated 25.11.2012 that he was arrested on February 9, 2014, and since then there had been no question of non-payment of wages for the months of March and April 2014. An artificial crisis was created by the Tuba Group authority to facilitate the bail from the High Court -- this is what the workers were alleging since they started their protest for the arrear wages, which has proved to be true in the end. This clearly gives us a message that in future no one will dare to touch the owner of any industry even if he commits a serious criminal offence. If we do then the consequences

will be that the workers will suffer with no pay. We all know the Tuba Group is a private limited company registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies in accordance with the Company Law and runs by the said company law. If the company argues that they cannot pay the workers as the Managing Director is away then one must think that there are serious violations of the Company Law

which have set consequences like cancellation of registration and so on. For the sake of argument, if Mr. Delwar was away for medical treatment for six months then would the authority have argued in the same way? I guess this is what we are going to see in future.

The 1,600 workers of five factories of Tuba Group went on hunger strike on July 28, 2014, as a last resort to get their arrear wages and the ball was in the court of the workers for almost 7 days from July 28. They managed to get attention of the people from all walks of life and many demonstrations in favour of the workers were clearly visible in the capital city. The whole scenario turned upside down when Mr. Delwar finally came out from the jail custody on the 8th day of the hunger strike on August 5, 2014. Police and local goons took over possession of the streets on August 6 and on August 7 they entered into the factory premises and cleared the premises by using excessive force. The government role in dealing with this humanitarian issue is equally frustrating. Many political activists were severely injured by the police due to police action and like in all other incidents no one came up with any satisfactory explanation as to why these people were beaten so mercilessly!

The write is Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Death of dreams

We always think about the number of the dead or the financial loss incurred due to an accident. How many times do we think of the thousands of dreams that also die with the dead? Tragedies like Rana plaza collapse and launch capsizes do not get any place in our films or books or novels. Thus these unfortunate people's stories of hopes and dreams remain unsung, and eventually get lost into oblivion.

Bayzid
On e-mail

Congrats to BD chess team

Congratulations to both the Bangladesh men's and women's chess teams at the World Olympiad in Norway! Nice job by Niaz Murshed and the 62nd ranked (according to FIDE -- the FIFA of chess) men's chess team for holding the 40th ranked Belgium team to a 2-2 draw. Nice job by Rani Hamid and the women's chess team for crushing Ghana 4-0. I believe more investment and sponsorship could be made so that Bangladesh becomes a chess powerhouse. Their example of mental toughness could be positively contagious to the other sports communities in Bangladesh.

Scott Elliott
Uttara, Dhaka

Excesses by ISIS in Iraq

A few days back, we were shocked at the news of blowing up of the shrine of Hazrat Yunus or Jonah, a Prophet of the Muslims and Christians, and Mosque at Mosul, North-West Iraq, by the Jihadist fighters and rulers belonging to ISIS. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) headed by a self-proclaimed Caliph have meticulously planned the demolition and executed the plan in broad daylight in front of thousands. We condemn the incident in the strongest terms.

ISIS has reportedly destroyed or damaged 30 Muslim shrines as well as 15 husseiniyas (Shia mosques). The shrines are the burial places of both Sunni and Shia venerated religious leaders. ISIS fighters are reportedly Muslims who believe in and espouse the extremist, fundamentalist, retro Salafism/ Wahabbism. It is rumoured that ISIS is being financed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar etc. We would like to see the reactions of Muslims of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and other Islamic countries to the above atrocities.

Dr. SN Mamoon
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "On the bank of Padma, they wait in tears," published on August 6, 2014

Abul Kalam Azad

There was strong current in Padma but no warning was issued before the disaster. I think the concerned officials of BIWTA and district administration should be held responsible and punished.

"Proposed broadcast policy" (August 6, 2014)

Taslima Islam

A forceful editorial. This policy could come only from a government that wants to gag not just the media but dissent against it everywhere.

Md Azim

May be the government is afraid that the media will destabilise it by revealing the truth about all their corruption and irregularities.

Mortuza Huq

Very relevant observations. It will be interesting to watch whether the freedom-loving people of Bangladesh will let their society travel back to those Baksal days.

Lipon Ghosh

The policy does not provide any clear evidence about the transparency and accountability of Information Ministry as they will implement the policy before formation of the independent commission. Independent commission is a must to amend the policy.

Anwarul

This is really bizarre and disappointing that the government is enacting this policy for their own interest.

"Freedom does not come in fetters" (August 6, 2014)

Md Azim

It's a matter of concern whether the media-related commission will truly be in a position to exercise its freedom without interference by the government.

Yousuf

It's undoubtedly an excellent article representing what the alleged National Broadcast Policy 2014 would actually be. Many thanks to the writer.