

Both our editorials today demonstrate the disregard our leaders and public servants have for the people who elect them and whom they are supposed to serve.

Hospital comes to temporary halt

Someone should answer for it

WHY the entire professional staff including doctors and nurses should be made to stand as the welcoming committee for the health minister's visit to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College is beyond our understanding. This is precisely what happened on August 18. What makes us sit up and notice is the fact that all medical services were stopped for two and half hours so that the honourable minister could finish his visit.

It is a shame to see patients being carried out by family members as wheel chair or trolley services were unavailable. Patients suffering from serious injury had to go to other institutions to have their x-rays done as attending to the minister's visit far outweighed the needs of the patients. We dread to think about those patients needing serious surgery or suffering from other ailments that required immediate attention during those hours. Patients go to public hospitals because they need medical care that is affordable. Unfortunately, that option was taken away for sometime from them on that day.

The hospital authority was completely out of order and the minister should have pulled it up for halting hospital function during the period of his visit. Such practice needs to be stopped. Precisely how the hospital authorities allowed essential services to come to a halt needs to be questioned. Doctors, nurses and technicians are stationed at a medical institution for the sole purpose of attending to the sick, not to be attending a dignitary every time he or she happens to visit. We demand an enquiry and appropriate action against the responsible hospital officials.

Lawmen breaking law

When will the bad practice end?

THE photograph of the police vehicle breaking traffic rule on the busy Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue as carried by the Monday issue of this paper speaks for itself. Albeit it was by chance that the errant driver of the vehicle was caught in the act in the photojournalist's camera, this kind of flouting of traffic rules by vehicles owned by lawmen, and also VIPs, rather happens all the time. Sadly though, many in authority are often found to conveniently bend the rule of the road causing immense trouble to the common, law-abiding road users. When those in authority, who are supposed to create instances before others in their adherence to the rule of law, are found trampling on it with abandon, it is hardly surprising that it is chaos, not order, that takes charge of our road traffic system.

The predictable consequence of the errant police vehicle has been graphically shown in the picture. There was, in effect, none to stop other vehicles to follow the bad example set by the police car in question and drive their vehicles along the wrong side creating a sudden snarl-up in such a busy traffic intersection of the city. What message has the incident left with the rest of the road users?

Such behaviour from members of the law-enforcement agency in a democratic system is quite unacceptable. It reflects very negatively on a government that claims to be democratic run by the rule of law. We wonder when, if ever, such disregard for law will end.

PTI's latest move

EDITORIAL, DAWN

EVERY passing day seems to bring out a new, desperate side of Imran Khan and the PTI leadership.

Twenty-four hours after vowing to lead a so-called civil disobedience movement against the federal government, the PTI chief announced yesterday that his party was quitting all assemblies, other than the provincial assembly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while today he is to lead the PTI protesters into the high-security red zone of Islamabad which houses parliament, Prime Minister House and other important buildings, including diplomatic missions.

The latest move seems designed to allow Mr Khan to exit his so-called independence rally, not turn it into an on-off sit-in, while allowing his party to retain its prized asset, the only government it has in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government.

To be sure, Mr Khan's attempt to turn up outside, or perhaps even inside, Prime Minister House or parliament will -- and should -- be rebuffed.

Perhaps what Mr Khan is seeking is to be temporarily detained in front of cameras by the capital's law-enforcement agencies and for the PTI activists to engage in some televised skirmishes as a way of ending the PTI rally on Mr Khan's version of a high note.

Deplorable as Mr Khan's tactics are, there is an immediate challenge for the law-enforcement apparatus of Islamabad to calmly and firmly but without the excessive use of force prevent the marchers from laying siege to state institutions.

Neither has the Islamabad law enforcement exactly covered itself in glory over the last year -- as in the case of lone gunman Mohammad Sikander, who held Islamabad and much of the country hostage for many hours last August -- nor have PML-N-led administrations inspired much confidence in their dealings with protesters of late -- for example, deaths outside the Model Town headquarters of Tahirul Qadri two months ago.

Agree or disagree with their demands, consider them illegal or not, there is a responsibility on the state to protect the lives of all citizens -- even those who are protesting against the government and seeking to do something illegal. Barring some violent escalation by the PTI itself, there ought to be enough well-trained and responsible law-enforcement personnel on the scene today to allow for a peaceful end to the PTI's latest play.

The PML-N government should also be aware of the implications of Mr Khan's other announcement: mass PTI resignations outside Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's provincial assembly (the PTI has several MNAs from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) mean a raft of by-elections will be held across the country in the next couple of months.

That means the political class will be in a semi-campaign mode and the intensity of focus on the PML-N government's performance in office so far will only increase. It is uncharted electoral territory that the PTI has plunged the country into, so a steady hand on the wheel will be needed.

Our history . . . their amnesia

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

that day?

Let the lady enjoy life. Even as she does, though, observe the flippant manner in which she castigates Awami League activists on the question of their fund-raising (she calls it extortion) to observe national mourning day. Those Awami League men, she says, are thus dishonouring their leader. Their leader? Bangabandhu is not Begum Zia's leader? She conveniently forgets the hours and days she tearfully spent at 32 Dhanmondi, waiting for Bangabandhu to help solve her domestic problems. Begum Mujib consoled her, Sheikh Hasina prepared tea for her. And she has forgotten all of that?

Deliberate amnesia is most dangerous. There was a point in the early 1970s when Major General Ziaur Rahman, at a meeting with Bangabandhu (and this we have on good authority from a witness), suddenly told the Father of the Nation that any bullet intended for him would first have to go through him. Well, bullets did strike down Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Zia remained unscathed. For the six years in which he lived after 1975, Zia did all he could to make Bengalis forget that there was indeed someone they honoured as Bangabandhu. That was well-organised amnesia.

And such amnesia happens to affect all those freedom fighters who are today in the 'Bangladeshi nationalist' camp and who go all the way to repudiate their past. And how do they do that? They simply do not talk about the inspiration that came from Bangabandhu when they went to war against Pakistan in 1971. And these BNP-wallahs are not the only ones in whom memory has been fading into a flicker from the luminosity it once used to be. The notorious Khondokar Moshtaque, lucky enough to die three months before Sheikh Hasina led the Awami League to power in 1996, in his final days went on trying to convince anyone willing to listen that he had had nothing to do with Bangabandhu's murder, that indeed Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana were like his daughters. It was a different Moshtaque, a criminal Moshtaque, between 15 August and 3 November 1975.

These days there is a ubiquity of people who have decided to forget their past. On television talk shows, public figures who cheerfully joined Moshtaque's Democratic League after 1975 wax eloquent about the huge damage Sheikh Hasina's government is doing to democracy. Surprisingly, no one asks such people

BEGUM Khaleda Zia has once again celebrated her controversial birthday. That is okay. If she is unwilling to respect the nation's sentiments on national mourning day and willing to ignore the tragedy which befell us on 15 August 1975, it is her problem. Her increasingly weighty birthday cake (she is sixty nine if she was indeed born in 1945) is something her acolytes truly enjoy partaking of. So what if Bangabandhu was murdered on

about their Moshtaque connection. Move a little ahead. A number of Bengalis would not defect from the Pakistan foreign service in 1971, for they waited to see which way the winds blew. After Pakistan collapsed, they rushed to Bangabandhu, in London and Geneva, literally fell at his feet asking to be taken into Bangladesh's diplomatic service. These days, they tell you how loyally they served the Bangladesh cause in 1971.

Not too long ago, an excited former BNP lawmaker tried to undermine Bangabandhu through informing the naïve and the ignorant that the Father of the Nation had been accompanied by Shah Azizur Rahman, a Pakistani collaborator and later Zia's prime minister (!), to the Lahore summit of Islamic nations in February 1974. His designs were exposed on television when the man he called Shah Aziz (he had some photographs of Bangabandhu's arrival in Lahore with him) turned out to be Pakistan's President Chaudhry Fazle Elahi. The BNP man did not raise the subject again. But does that matter? When the record (and that includes old newspaper photographs) says General Tikka Khan saluted Bangabandhu at Lahore airport, one of our own informs you the man was not there. How do you deal with this new 'discovery'?

There are other ways in which national history goes through repudiation at the hands of certain elements. Here is a truth: some newspapers persist in addressing Bangabandhu as 'former president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman'. Ironically, on the same page they print advertisements where the late leader is referred to as Father of the Nation and as Bangabandhu. What are these newspapers trying to prove? And don't they realize that their rebellion against history is only drilling holes in their reputations?

History, warts and all, ought not to be pushed aside. The Bangladesh ambassador in Brussels, once he came to know of the violent political change back home on 15 August 1975, would not keep Bangabandhu's daughters (who were in Belgium at the time) at his residence. Bangabandhu had appointed him and he was now turning his back on the children of his murdered leader. It was to be a bold Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury, ambassador in Bonn, who would provide shelter to Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana. Everyone else stayed busy ingratiating himself with the Moshtaque clique.

There are realities we do not forget. Taheruddin Shakur, minister of state for information in Bangabandhu's government, was a never-ending presence beside the Father of the Nation in the final months of the great man's life. No one knew that he and his accomplices were finalizing their plans of eliminating Bangabandhu and his family. At National Security Intelligence, ABS Safdar, trusted by Bangabandhu, turned out to be one of the men who would push the dagger into the nation's leader. And there was Mahbub Alam Chashi, happy to be part of the murderous conspiracy.

It is a matter simple enough: our history and their amnesia. The amnesia needs to be handled, ruthlessly.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.
E-mail: ahsan.syedbadrul@gmail.com

Winning the battle, losing the war?

Israel's barbarism against Gaza's civilians

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

alive. Israel blamed Hamas for the murders without a shred of evidence, and launched its biggest post-2000 anti-Hamas campaign.

The kidnapping happened 10 days after a new government was formed in Gaza following "reconciliation" between Hamas, which had won the 2006 election in Gaza, and the heavily compromised Fatah. Although the agreement overwhelmingly favoured Fatah, Israel rejected it because it united the Palestinians and detracted from its goal of disarming Hamas.

Fatah shamefully collaborated with Israel's anti-Hamas crackdown. Anti-Fatah protests erupted throughout the West Bank. In solidarity, non-Hamas militants in Gaza attacked Israel with primitive rockets. Hamas too resumed firing rockets -- for the first time after the 2012 ceasefire.

Then came the third onslaught in five years by the world's fourth largest military power against one of its most impoverished territories. Israel targeted Al-Raffah hospital, Gaza's only rehabilitation clinic, with 17 paralysed patients.

Israel shelled a school designated by the UN as a civilian shelter, killing 16, and wounding hundreds -- despite having been given its coordinates 17 times. The UN official-in-charge said: "Children killed in their sleep ... a source of universal shame. Today, the world stands disgraced."

Israel is guilty of war crimes on three counts. It inflicted collective punishment on Gaza. Its response was grossly disproportionate. And it targeted non-combatant civilians, itself impermissible, even in self-defence.

Legal experts have debunked Israel's "self-defence" claim, including John Dugard, former UN special rapporteur on human rights in Palestine: "Israel's present assault is simply a way of enforcing the continuation of the occupation [of Gaza]... the response of the Palestinian militants [is] the response of an occupied people that wishes to resist the occupation," which is legally permissible.

But amidst a vitiated opinion climate, over 85 percent Israelis oppose a ceasefire. Calls to genocide now come from the highest levels. Thus Ayelet Shaked, MP of a Far-Right party that's part of Prime Minister Netanyahu's

coalition, posted a Facebook entry: "The entire Palestinian people is the enemy... including its elderly and its women, its cities and its villages, its property and its infrastructure".

Similarly, former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's son, Gilad, wrote in 2012: "The desire to prevent harm to innocent civilians in Gaza will ultimately lead to harming the truly innocent: the residents of southern Israel. The residents of Gaza ... elected Hamas... they... must live with the consequences..." Worse: "We need to flatten... all of Gaza. The Americans didn't stop with Hiroshima... they hit Nagasaki, too." This perversely sanctifies nuclear mass-destruction, but represents an important current of Israeli sentiment.

Israel violated the 2012 ceasefire, which required it to end the blockade of Gaza, which has turned into "the world's largest open-air prison". After al-Sisi's July 2013 coup in Egypt, matters worsened. Hamas was banned. Almost all the tunnels that had brought goods from Egypt were closed. "Those in need of treatment in Egyptian hospitals paid bribes as high as \$3,000 to cross the border..."

Gaza suffered severe food shortages, daily power-cuts for up to 18 hours, "... sanitation plants shut down and sewage flowed through the streets... more than 90 percent of Gaza's aquifer was now contaminated."

Isolated, Hamas reached "reconciliation" with Fatah. Hamas too has violated international law, but its violations cannot be equated with those by Israel, an occupying power responsible for protecting civilians. Palestine's real problem has always been the occupation -- history's longest -- and the root of all regional crises.

US-protected Israel shows no intention of ending the occupation. By torpedoing a two-state solution, Israel risks perpetuating the cycle of violence, aggravating its own citizens' insecurity. It may win the battle, but lose the larger war.

Unless there's an international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, similar to the Anti-Apartheid Movement of the 1970s, which raises the occupation's political-economic costs, it won't end.

India can play a vital role in a BDS campaign, and through creative diplomacy as regards Israel and the US. But it has failed to do this. Successive Indian governments have made their policy a hostage to arms deals with Israel, now India's second-biggest weapons-supplier.

India is now about to finalise the purchase of anti-ship missiles from an Israeli company blacklisted in 2006 for bribery. Nothing could be more myopic.

This policy won't change unless public opinion does. This means combating middle class apathy towards the Palestinian cause, and re-founding Indian thinking on a solid base of morality, compassion, legality and justice.

Going by the Modi government's conduct on the Gaza issue-- on which it equated Israel's aggression with "violence by non-state actors" before voting for a wishy-washy UN Human Rights Council resolution -- this will be an uphill task. But that's no reason to give up!

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

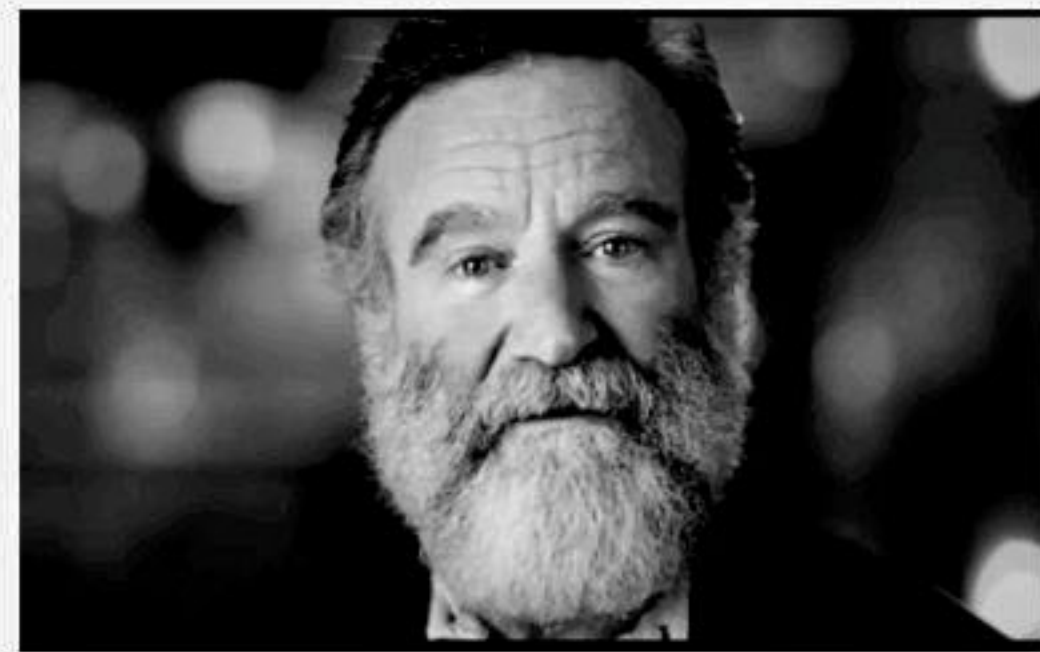
letters@thedailystar.net

BTV's August 15 programmes

The way BTV was telecasting programmes on the National Mourning Day, it seemed the national TV channel was indirectly or unintentionally making the killers look like heroes. Showing interviews of the killers who were giving out their rationale for the killing and the dead body of Bangabandhu with Azan in the background only pleased the anti-Liberation forces. Why didn't BTV just telecast programmes on the life and times of the great leader, and his struggle for and contribution to the nation?

Farad
On e-mail

Power of words and ideas



Celebrated American actor and comedian Robin Williams (Robin McLaurin Williams), who died on August 11, 2014, has left a message to us: "No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world."

Good words and ideas definitely have the capability to bring about positive changes in the world. What we need is to develop a culture of patiently listening to others' good words in the form of ideas and suggestions and implement those ideas for the greater good.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

"Who said what after August 15"

In the first page of your celebrated daily under the caption, "Who said what after August 15," a comment has been attributed to my Late father Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury. I understand the source is a totally government-controlled newspaper of that unfortunate and traumatic time. We may well question the veracity of such a report.

On the other hand, the London Guardian published his remark which said "Ask the killers". It went on to add that Justice Chowdhury believed only way to change a government is through constitutional means.

The circumstances under which he and others were inducted into the cabinet are all too known for repetition. To call it duress would perhaps be an understatement.

Abul Hasan Chowdhury
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "In prison, still ominous," published on August 17, 2014

Saleh Md. Shahriar

The AL government is quite successful in its bid to control the militant activities. But sometimes innocent people are reportedly imprisoned in the name of combating terrorism and militancy.

"Hospital won't release body" (August 17, 2014)

MH Khan

There should be a regulatory body, a commission like the broadcast commission, to regulate the healthcare providers. Some of them suck the blood of patients and their families. They allegedly keep 30 to 40 percent commission.

"A struggle for going forward and TIB's Report" (August 17, 2014)

Rahman

It's a gentle reply from a gentleman. Some private universities are sly and evade the law. They are conducting academic activities on campuses outside Dhaka, although they are not allowed to do so. The authorities are pretending that they do not see anything.

Saleh Md. Shahriar

Presenting arguments, counter-arguments with facts and figures is the real beauty of democracy. I salute our honourable education minister for showing his regard for dissenting arguments and perspectives. Although there were some methodological flaws in the said TIB report, their point was right (practice of corruption in some private universities). Now we all have to work to solve that problem.