

Indicting opposition men en masse

Corroding credibility of legal system

A Dhaka court on Monday charged 147 leaders and activists of BNP-led alliance for offences like assault on police, blasting of cocktails and creating panic during a rally held by the alliance in March last year. It is indeed a rare instance of so many political leaders and workers being indicted in a single case in the country. And it simply boggles the mind to think that the accused, many of whom are senior and respectable citizens, committed offences like attacking the police or blasting bombs in a rally that they organized near their central party office.

It is worthwhile to note that initially the charges were brought against the accused about two weeks after the said political rally last year under the speedy trial act. But nothing was heard about the prosecution of the case during the last one year and a half. Perhaps it is not a strange coincidence that the case has been revived at a time when the BNP-led opposition is planning to hold street agitations.

To all intents and purposes, it is a clear case of turning a legal process into a farce. It is a clear case of using various state institutions including the law-enforcement agencies and the legal system to thwart the opposition political parties' constitutional rights to hold their programmes like meetings, processions and rallies. Regrettably, the government by resorting to such means has in effect been corroding the integrity of those state institutions.

We believe the government would shun using high-handed, politically motivated methods to suppress dissenting voice. This is in the interest of protecting democracy and establishing a credible political system.

Tendering process flouted

Counting the cost

A LLEGATIONS of anomalies in the purchase tender of three old ships have been raised against the Chittagong port authorities. By what has been revealed through investigative journalism, we are taken aback at the various instances of flouting set rules, from choosing a hitherto unknown company winning the bid to failure to clear customs duty before taking delivery of the said vessels. It is very interesting how authorities could allow a company to participate in the bidding that is said to have come into existence a month after the tender was floated. This automatically raises the question of whether it qualified to take part in the bidding process at all. The question must be asked as to how it qualified since minimum requirement for such a contract requires a company to have at least ten years' work experience and at least five years' experience in the purchase and sale of vessels.

From the very inception of procurement, the process is riddled with unanswered questions. The manner in which the port authority has expedited partial payment of dues to the company, why customs duties on two ships estimated at more than Tk80million has been waived all remain unanswered questions. The biggest puzzle remains how port authority has authorised the purchase of old ships which is beyond its jurisdiction. With some eight shipbuilding yards operating in the country and four of those companies capable of building container ships, why are we expending valuable foreign exchange on buying old ships breaking all the rules?

Social Business for Community Tourism

ZIAUL HAQUE HOWLADER

THE globally acclaimed concept 'social business' of Prof. Dr. Muhammad Yunus, can be linked with the community tourism development of Bangladesh. The social business concept helps in tourism product diversification, employment generation, tourism promotion among the local community. One of the key issues for sustainable tourism development is community benefit. Local community through social business can easily be involved in different activities of community tourism development like handicrafts production and promotion, local food production in hygienic manner, cultivation of fruits and flowers, etc. Linking the social business in the overall tourism activities can augment national tourism and help benefits cascade down to the local community.

If we can properly relate social business concept with the community tourism development activities, it will need less investment or, in some cases, no investment as whatever the skills and assets available are the main investment for entrepreneurship development. A small scale micro-credit to the local people can be provided for handicrafts production, promotion of local recipe and training the local unemployed youth like tour guides, ushers, souvenir sellers etc. It would yield a good result within a short period. It would also help women becoming self-dependent. The PKSF may come forward in implementing this concept as it can easily exert the local NGOs in implementing the micro-credit activities.

Visit to some heritage sites of Bangladesh – Paharpur, Mahasthagarh, Kantajew Temple and Sixty-domed Mosque, has revealed an immense potential of community tourism development through social business. One found here some local women selling their products. Even women bargain for prices with the picnic parties for helping cook food. Some of the local women run tea stalls at these heritage sites. Tourists as well as local people buy necessary items from these tea-stalls.

Involving the local people in any project formulation and implementation of community tourism development is essential. Sometimes, it is hard to involve local community in community tourism projects formulation and implementation, as awareness level of local people in this sector is yet low and they are not much aware about the future benefits. Here, social business can be an effective tool to involve local people in community tourism development, as social business is easy for them to understand. Community tourism development synchronization with social business may be incorporated in the national tourism policy.

The writer is Deputy Manager of BPC. He can be reached by ziaulbpc@gmail.com

Tales of wicked, ignorant men

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THERE is quite something to be said about those Bengalis who somehow cannot rest easy with the place of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in history. We now have the callow Tareque Rahman spewing venom against the Father of the Nation. He does it from faraway London. Bangabandhu, he tells us, killed Speaker Shahed Ali. And Sheikh Hasina, he tells us again, planned the whole 21 August 2004 carnage. How much more ignorant can a nearly fifty year-old man get? He quotes from books he has not read. He quotes illustrious politicians he knows nothing about. His mother projects him as Bangladesh's future leader. The Lord help us if that wicked day ever comes to pass!

Tarique Rahman is not the only one suffering from delusions. His mother's party is surfeit with people who either have little understanding and knowledge of history or deliberately try to mislead an entire nation. These are all people who need to save themselves from themselves. As for history, it flows in natural manner, like a river. History has little time for the likes of Tarique Rahman and that other man of confusion, Pakistan's Imran Khan.

More than decades ago, Syed Najmuddin Hashim enlightened yours truly with remarkable tales of some Bengali civil service officers trapped in Pakistan in the aftermath of Bangladesh's battlefield triumph in late 1971. Dismissed from service by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and placed in discrete camps all over Pakistan, these Bengali officers spewed venom against Bangabandhu and even made the dire prediction that his new country would soon return to the fold of Pakistan. These men had, after all, lost their cushy jobs and did not quite relish the prospect of working for a country that had till recently been a mere province of the state that now was disowning them. And yet the irony is that these very men came home to Bangladesh and rose to high positions. They proved relentless, though, in their antipathy towards Bangabandhu.

That only reminds you of the Bengali officer in Pakistan's foreign service stationed at the Pakistan mission in Delhi in 1971. On his annual leave he did not go to 'East Pakistan' but travelled to West Pakistan, where he quarrelled with other Bengalis and rudely described the Bengali liberation struggle as a conspiracy against Pakistan. You only have to read the late Khalilur Rahman's book to go into the details. He is today a valued 'Bangladeshi nationalist' in the Begum's party.

There is then the tale of the brother of Munier Chowdhury. An officer in the Pakistan army, he agreed with his Pakistani friends that Bangabandhu was destroying the Muslim country. When he first received news that his sibling had been kidnapped and killed in Bangladesh on the eve of its liberation, he quickly blamed the Mukti Bahini for the tragedy. He lapsed into stupefied silence when it swiftly became known that it was the al-Badr, the collaborators who had served as the quislings of the army he was serving, that had murdered Munier Chowdhury.

Tarique Rahman has that passport. His mother has it. All those who spend their waking hours cursing Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman travel on passports that came by way of his leadership of this country. When will these people ever feel ashamed of their perfidy?

In independent Bangladesh, we have had precious little dearth of Bangabandhu baiters. A retired military officer once stranded in Pakistan and who rose to a high perch in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (before subsequently being sidelined as a reformist in caretaker times) informed a relative without shame at a point that he did not regard Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Bangabandhu. It did not occur to him that the peaks he had climbed after 1971 all had to do with the politics Bangabandhu had pursued in his career. This man retired as a general in the Bangladesh army. Had Pakistan survived in these parts, he would have retired as a lieutenant colonel. And those men Hashim spoke about would, minus Bangladesh, have gone into superannuation as mere section officers.

Ziaur Rahman did not murder Bangabandhu, sure. But he knew about it and kept quiet. That was a treasonous act, concealing information that your president is about to be murdered by men you hobnob with. The Zia regime made sure that Bangabandhu was airbrushed out of history. In the Ershad period, more humiliation was piled on Bangabandhu, on all of us, when the killers of the nation's founder were allowed the privilege of forming a political party and taking part in elections. The fact that the process of the trial of Bangabandhu's assassins was halted soon after the BNP-Jamaat alliance found itself in power in 2001 was a fresh demonstration of the animosity with which the 'Bangladeshi nationalists' and the old defenders of Pakistan looked upon Bangabandhu.

Go beyond these political spaces. There are journalists in Bangladesh who do all they can to strike at Bangabandhu's stature. Erstwhile pro-Peking elements (and you have journalists among them too) will give you long dialectical arguments on how Bangabandhu and the Awami League 'commandeered' the liberation struggle just when these leftists were about to bring freedom to our people. The fact is that leftists like Abdul Haq were in 1971 busily engaged in subverting the Bengali cause. Their continued links with Pakistan, as late as in 1974, remain proof of their perfidy.

There are newspapers in this country which take asinine pride in refusing to accord Bangabandhu his place in history. For the men behind these publications, Mujib has never been Bangabandhu. You double over with laughter when you see the pains these men go through when they refuse to accept the official term of the August 1975 killers' trial as the Bangabandhu murder trial and instead continue to call it the Mujib murder trial. For these men, Bangabandhu was no higher than being president of Bangladesh. And the four national leaders murdered in prison in November 1975 were no more than four Awami League leaders.

You travel abroad, holding that green Bangladesh passport in your hand. If you wish to deny the heritage of the Big Man that was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, look at that passport. It is the legacy he has left you with.

Tarique Rahman has that passport. His mother has it. All those who spend their waking hours cursing Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman travel on passports that came by way of his leadership of this country. When will these people ever feel ashamed of their perfidy?

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

Impeachment of Judges: A suggestion

RIZWANUL ISLAM

THE Cabinet has approved the draft proposal to amend the Constitution and vest the power of impeachment of judges of the Supreme Court in the Parliament. The fundamental issue now is how the law should be framed so that it achieves its professed goal i.e. ensures accountability of the Supreme Court judges. This article will deal with one aspect that the proposed law on this issue may contain to reduce the scope for misuse.

Vesting the power in the Parliament in itself is not a bad thing and if crafted well, may function better than the current system of Supreme Judicial Council (SJC). A good outcome of the proposed amendment to the Constitution is that the process of impeachment would gain the much needed transparency. In the past, allegations against judges may have been investigated by the SJC, but the public has not been able to know what the recommendations of the council were. In today's world, when transparency is gaining more and more importance, it is unacceptable that such an important matter should escape public gaze and be swept under the carpet.

On the other hand, politically motivated criticism and skepticism aside, the critics of the proposed amendment have question marks about power the Parliament will exercise, mainly because they lack faith in the democratic culture of our political parties. History of the impeachment power (or more appropriately the veiled threat of its use) by the Parliament in Bangladesh would also make many apologists wonder about the smooth functioning of the proposed mechanism.

In not so distant a past, Mr. A.Q.M. Badruddzoa Chowdhury, a former President of Bangladesh, had to resign from his post because of the prospect of impeachment by the Parliament. There was no credible allegation of physical or mental incapacity or misconduct against him. Nonetheless, he had to resign because the then Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia and her colleagues were not convinced about his loyalty to the party or was displeased with his perceived venture to create an image of being a personality who could go beyond petty party politics. There was widespread insinuation in newspaper reports at that time that by not visiting General Ziaur Rahman's grave on his death anniversary he infuriated the high ups in the ruling party and was accused of hurting the party's sentiment.

When the President of the Republic has to suffer such indignity on flimsy grounds, simply because he has lost favour of the party that appointed him, it is not certain that a judge of the Supreme Court would be immune to the wrath of the ruling party on fragile grounds. One can argue that after all Mr. Chowdhury was a politician and when he lost confidence of the political party that nominated him

for the post there was none to defend him. A judge, being a non-partisan person, would be more difficult to dislodge in such a disgraceful way. That said he has no backers but his office and the power accompanying it, support of the bar, and public confidence. The judges are secluded from public and when a government with a two-third majority would proceed with the impeachment motion of a judge on not so cogent evidence, it is uncertain how much would public sentiment be able to protect him. Thus, the possibility of whimsical exercise of power remains.

It is well known that because of the provisions in Article 70 of the Constitution on voting in the Parliament, the MPs are barred from voting against party decisions. Many analysts have identified it as an obstacle to effective functioning of the Parliament and advocate its complete repeal. But it must not be forgotten that the practice of horse-trading of MPs is not unknown in Bangladesh. It is also quite common in this country that when a politician fails to secure the nomination of his political party, he/she swiftly joins another party. Hence, wholesale abolition of Article 70 is a complex issue and beyond the scope of this short article. Instead, the proposed Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution may provide that in case of voting on an impeachment motion of a judge, the MPs would be allowed to caste conscience vote, that is, they can vote according to their conscience rather than on party lines. With the current state of hierarchical politics, the effectiveness of this mechanism is uncertain but this would give MPs a chance to respond to the calls of their conscience, not that of the

leaders of their respective parties. This can also be a test case for further amendment or complete abolition of Article 70 in future.

Of course, the defenders of the proposed Amendment to the Constitution would argue that the power of impeachment of judges would be exercised by the Parliament very judiciously and on the basis of a credible accusation followed by a scrupulous inquiry (which would include giving the concerned judge an opportunity of presenting her/his arguments). After all, the parliament is accountable to the people and impeachment of a judge on unfounded accusations would not be accepted by the people, they would argue. Such accountability to the public should be an effective safeguard against any capricious exercise of the impeachment power by a government with an overwhelming majority in the house. Only time will tell if our democracy has matured enough to ensure this but precedents say otherwise.

The writer is an Assistant Professor of Law, BRAC University Bangladesh, <rizwanul@alummi.nus.edu.sg>.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Acceptable level of chromium in food

I thank Professor Abul Hossain for replying to my letter on chromium scare. I have nothing much to say about the acceptable limit of chromium except the fact that different values for the same parameter are not uncommon in the field of Environmental Science. For instance, in an EPA-sponsored Toxicological Review of Trivalent Chromium, the National Research Council has identified an Estimated Safe and Adequate Daily Dietary Intake (ESADDI) for trivalent chromium at 50-200 microgram per day, while the Food and Drug Administration has selected a Reference Daily Intake of 120 microgram per day. These numbers represent the amounts that are adequate to meet the essential body requirements and do not necessarily indicate that any amount in excess of these would be harmful to health. Based on an experiment, the authors of the same review article have chosen a value of, what they termed, No-Observed-Adverse-Effect Level (NOAFL) of trivalent chromium at 1.5 milligram per kg body weight per day. That means a 60-kg person can tolerate 90 milligram of trivalent chromium per day without any adverse effect. Thus even if a person eats daily 1 kg of chicken brain which, according to the article, contains the highest amount of chromium (4.56 milligram per kg), s/he is within safe limits, provided that all the chromium is in the trivalent state.

Now about the question whether it is necessary to measure hexavalent chromium. My answer is yes. As far as I know, there is no evidence that trivalent chromium is carcinogenic. In contrast, hexavalent chromium is widely known for its carcinogenic properties. But can't some trivalent chromium become oxidized into hexavalent chromium during the process to make poultry feed? In presence of reducing agents present in chicken and eggs, hexavalent chromium may rather be converted back into trivalent chromium. Only direct measurement of hexavalent chromium can provide an unequivocal answer.

Professor M Lutfor Rahman
Department of Environmental Science
Independent University, Bangladesh

"I'm a Palestinian, don't kill me"

The current slogan in Ferguson, US, is "I am black, don't shoot me". I have sympathy for the innocent boy Michael Brown and the black community. Now think about what is happening in Palestine? Does Barack Obama realise the situation? Please Obama, wake up. If you are a human being, if you have a heart and if you have children -- cry for the hapless 2,000 in Palestine who were killed like birds by your Israeli brethren!

A F Rahman
On e-mail

Bauls are bleeding

While going through the news item, "Souls of bauls bleeding," published in your esteemed daily on August 24, 2014, I was shocked and tears welled up in my eyes.

Bauls are humanists. They render songs praising their gurus and the Creator and never get themselves involved in mundane family life. Mere rejoinders or protest rallies will not take away the cruelty done on the bauls. The perpetrators deserve immediate punishment.

Jahangir Hassan
A political activist

Comments on news report, "Bangladesh keen to join BRICS Bank," published on August 20, 2014

Kumar

"However, NDB is yet to decide on whether it would give membership to any country other than its founder members." It is not that NDB is yet to decide but has already decided that its membership is open to all UN members who may be interested to join the bank and hold the 45% share based on contribution that they may make, but yes, not as founding members who will hold 55% share with 11% each. So I don't see any problem for Bangladesh to join the bank. Hope it would join at the earliest.

Mohammad Rahman

It would be a wise decision for Bangladesh to join BRICS and reduce dependency on World Bank and IMF.

"MP Kamal finally shuts his 'court'" (August 24, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

It has been proved that the media has great power to change something.