

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA FRIDAY MARCH 13, 2015

Thank you 24 years and counting

TODAY we celebrate our 24th anniversary. For this journey of more than two decades, so satisfying and rewarding, we profoundly thank our readers, contributors, patrons and advertisers without whose inestimable support we would not have been able to come so far.

When we began in 1991, in the wake of a democratic revival in Bangladesh, we pledged that it was our responsibility to serve as a watchdog over the establishment and protection of democratic ideals, values of the Liberation War and people's inalienable rights. Over the years, we have redefined and reinvented ourselves with the changing times, but we have tried to stay true to our core values in our continuous quest to practice ethical journalism and promote rule of law, economic and social development, human rights, media freedom and accountability of institutions.

We have been unwavering in our goal of being the spokesperson for the nation's achievements and aspirations, of its conscience and ideals. Despite pressures from different quarters, we have remained free from affiliation with or influence from any political party, grouping or alliance.

In the process, sometimes we have made mistakes, but we have learnt from each of them; they have made us ever more aware of our professional obligation, challenging us to steadfastly protect people's right to know.

As we look towards the future, we see many challenges ahead as we encounter new territories, changing socio-political contexts and a global transformation of print media. But we vow to tackle these head on and remain relentless in our pursuit of being an independent, just voice.

Indulgence towards bigots

Double standards regarding arrests

RELIGIOUS extremists are using the internet to spread their fanatical propaganda throughout the world and Bangladesh is no exception. The brutal murder of Avijit Roy on February 26 has been a wakeup call regarding just how serious these religious bigots are about carrying out their threats. But it is also the sluggish attitude of the authorities on catching those who blatantly promote religious bigotry on social media, that is disconcerting. Avijit Roy had been receiving death threats online for about a year from religious fanatics including the arrested Shafiqur Rahman Farabi. It is a mystery why the law enforcement agencies remained indifferent to such clear motives for murder.

A Daily Star report (March 12, 2015) quotes an IT expert saying that the government has closed down over a 100 websites in the last three months for uploading anti-government contents. Several individuals, moreover, have been arrested with alacrity for making derogatory or threatening remarks against leaders of the ruling party. It is therefore not about lack of technical expertise or coordination that law enforcers have not been able to catch the killers of certain bloggers but rather a dearth in their sincerity to do so.

When a citizen's life is being threatened, regardless of what his religious or political affiliation maybe, the law enforcers' job is to do everything possible to investigate a death threat and catch potential assailants. According to the same report a barrister of the Supreme Court has mentioned that a death threat is a specific criminal offense and police can take action under section 57 of the ICT Act. The law enforcing agents must not have any bias when catching cyber criminals.

COMMENTS

"While Avijit and I were being ruthlessly attacked, the local police stood close by and did not act."

—Rafida Ahmed Bonya, wife of murdered blogger-writer Avijit Roy

Nirjon Pranto

The government is interested only in securing power, not people's lives.

Anup Kumar

They should be punished for failing to discharge their official duty.

Kawsar Ahmed

They are useless. Shame on them.

Ziaul Ahsan

Is it something new? Police did not act while Sheikh Hasina was attacked on the 21st August, 2004 and they even let the criminals flee the crime scene.

"What a farce, BNP!"
(March 11, 2015)

Syed Kaiser

Democracy is a lot like pancake



CROSS TALK
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

AMERICAN basketball coach Pat Riley mapped out the terrain in the following words. He said it starts with a nobody, who becomes an upstart, who becomes a contender. And when the contender is a winner, he becomes a champion, who then creates a dynasty. In politics, that is often the case before it succumbs to the stranglehold of a few influential families. Dynasties are always nasty because their politics thrive on power and not on people.

That's why dynasties are a riddle for democracy. Once American politics was dominated by the Roosevelts and the Kennedys, and now the Clintons and the Bushes have stepped into their shoes. The Indian politics since independence had been in the grip of the Nehru family until last year. The Bandaranaike ruled Sri Lanka until 2005. In South Korea, the incumbent president Park Geun-hye is the daughter of former president Park Chung-hee. In Bangladesh, we're all too familiar with the two families who control our national politics like a river hemmed in between two steep banks.

The creation of a democratic society is comparable to the making of pancake. The flour is placed in a large bowl and then a well is made in the middle. Eggs and milk are added to it with a pinch of salt. Next, egg and milk are whisked together, drawing in the flour gradually until it creates a smooth paste. The mixing continues until the lumps are entirely eliminated.

Lumps are also critical for democracy because they interfere with its success. Luck and talent favour certain families. Hence, the fortunate few are rulers and the miserable most are ruled. The concept of democracy had emerged hundreds of years ago to prevent lumping and make all men equal in the eye of law. The fervent passion of egalitarian politics was supposed to produce the



batter to make government fluffy and yummy for the masses irrespective of their class, creed and competence.

Dynastic politics prevents mixing and promotes lumping. It focuses less on the flour, meaning the people, and more on eggs and milk, meaning power and money. Instead of drawing in the people gradually, it alienates them from power to create pockets of tyranny. Inequality gravitates politics towards concentration of power in a few hands in any form of government other than democracy.

That explains why our politics is primarily divided into two magnetic fields. That also explains why professionals are polarised, institutions are pulverised and people are perfunctory. It all

has to do with the mixing, which is performed to allow heat and mass transfer to occur between one or more streams, components or phases. In our case, the lumps have got lumpier as power concentrated in certain hands. The magnetic fields of power have been turned into minefields for people.

So, our democracy has been a dubious intermediate between plutocracy and oligarchy. The charisma of patriarchs has been used like franchise by their families. And these families have created their respective spheres of influence, politics reduced to sycophancy. The spirits of descendants are light years away from the dreams of their ascendants.

In dynastic politics, the link gradually weakens between people and their rulers as the bond gets diluted between rulers and their ancestors. And, this brand of politics eventually suffers from ideological fatigue because the inherited leadership becomes obsessed with power, neglecting its source and means. To consolidate power, inheritors are often ready to liquidate both.

Meanwhile, the country becomes a breeding ground for lumps, which appear in business, bureaucracy, academia, media, medical profession, law-enforcement and legal practice. And these lumps choke the arteries of people's aspiration as hunger for power fuel desperation amongst the rulers and their lackeys. Concentration of power has its trickle-down effect, creating a culture of concentration, concentrated on the subcultures of plunder and deceit.

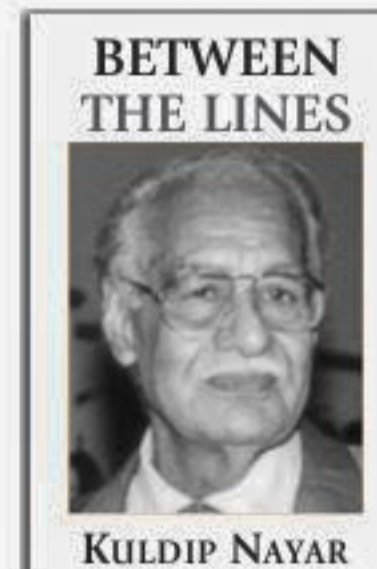
Fu Sheng is known as the "One-Eyed Tyrant" in Chinese history. This emperor of the former Qin kingdom was blind in one eye and apparently very self-conscious about it. He would have people killed if they used the words "without," "devoid of," "lacking" or any other words that would remind him he had lost his sight in one eye.

The example entails the sensitivities surrounding dynastic rules for all the wrong reasons. All such rulers are one-eyed and paranoid. They're intolerant and impulsive at the slightest reference to their reigns because it reminds them how they must have failed in their obligations to the people. A dynastic ruler is a ruler in the manner soup of the soup is also soup.

If we're looking for one silver bullet for our political crisis, it must start with the mixing to remove the lumps. These lumps are anathema to democratic sensibilities, because they work politics like filter in the reverse order. Impurities clutter politics, while people are extracted from power.

The writer is Editor, First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star.
Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

Is AAP going Janata way?



BETWEEN THE LINES
KULDIP NAYYAR

WHEN movements convert themselves into political parties they lose their original shape. The ethos of collective leadership takes a backseat and the personal assertion comes to the fore. Power gets concentrated in one person. In reality, the leadership acquires the meaning of one-man rule, which becomes synonymous for the party.

It was expected that the Aam Aadmi Party would be different because it was a product of people's aspirations. The well entrenched political parties like the Congress and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) were run down because they had become part of old furniture. When people see the AAP going in the same direction they feel betrayed because they thought that the party would introduce a new way of thinking, a fresh approach to politics, transparent, clean and open.

Unfortunately, the same one-man cult has taken over the party. Granted, Arvind Kejriwal was bound to occupy the central position because he was elected to lead the party which swept the polls in Delhi. Yet the ethos of Aam Aadmi Party demanded that he would act as a leader of the equals. This is where the fault lies. Kejriwal tends to concentrate power in himself. Not only that, he was seen as being behind the ousting the two co-founders of the party, Yogender Yadav and Prashant Bhushan from the National executive, the apex body for the decision making.

That Kejriwal had a majority in the party's executive does not mean that he would be the sole spokesman. Once where there is a trial of strength even the executive gave him a divided verdict, 11 to eight.

Every day new disclosures are coming out in the open. One is that Kejriwal had maneuvered to oust from the AAP the critics of his style of functioning. The second is that he is using his official position of Delhi's Chief

Minister to bash his critics. I hope that all this is not true and the inner democracy that the party promised is intact. But the functioning is disconcerting.

The party's inner Lokpal has also expressed his unhappiness over the manner in which the AAP is functioning. He has expressed his helplessness. It is heartening to know that he is not accepting defeat but is appointing an inquiry committee for a probe. Probably, he should have threatened to quit to jolt the party and make it realise that the functioning of Kejriwal is far from healthy.

The AAP is a child of a movement which Anna Hazare initiated against corruption.



Arvind Kejriwal

Why has he not taken up on himself the task to ensure that those who control the party act to complete the task of appointing Lokpal (Ombudsman) at the Centre to eliminate corruption in high places? Instead, Anna Hazare has run away from his responsibility and hidden his failure behind a movement on a land bill.

Probably, Anna Hazare realises that his word would not be respected. This is precisely what the Gandhian Jaya Prakash Narayan felt. He had founded the Janata Party which had appointed Morarji Desai as the prime minister. The fact is that Morarji did not listen to J.P. should not have made him withdraw from the field. He should have

joined issue with Morarji, who was only a creature of the J.P. movement.

I recall telling JP that the people voted at his behest and expected him to intervene to make the Central government work according to the movement's ideals. He did not contradict me but explained that his health did not allow him to go to the public again. This was another way of admitting that he did not want to join issue with Morarji lest the Janata Party should get a bad name.

This was JP's rationalisation. He knew Morarji would not listen to him. I thought I would approach Morarji. When I told him that JP would have come to Delhi, but his health did not allow him to do so. I thought I had given a sufficient hint. Morarji understood what I wanted to convey. He said in anger that JP was mistaken that he would go to meet him. "I did not go even to meet Gandhi. JP is not above him," said Morarji. It is not surprising that the Janata Party cracked up and practically died.

Anna Hazare can end the obsession of Kejriwal to kill dissent. The fact that he sits on dharna with Anna Hazare on a Land Bill should not hide the fact that Kejriwal wants to oust the critics from the party. Yogender Yadav and Prashant Bhushan are among the founders of AAP. Kejriwal has seen to it that they are out of the decision making bodies. He does not realise that they have a large following of their own. He should not emulate the example of Morarji Desai who destroyed the Janata Party, which had nominated the prime minister, but did not accommodate others.

It looks as if the AAP is going the way of Janata Party. It is a pity that the supporters of Kejriwal, instead of correcting his authoritarian methods, are going for the critics. He should know that if the experiment of AAP fails, it would take years for the alternative to the Congress and the BJP to build.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

It looks as if the AAP is going the way of Janata Party. It is a pity that the supporters of Kejriwal, instead of correcting his authoritarian methods, are going for the critics.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Political leadership

Political leadership is the most serious responsibility in any democracy and must not be a matter of whim, pride, grudge or personal or political vendetta. But unfortunately that's the norm in politics these days. We are starting to wonder if politicians care about people's well-being at all. They should focus more on how to take the country forward and less on settling personal scores.
Frustrated Bangali
On e-mail

Bangalee Ma?

I read a news analysis titled "Not just a PM" in TDS dated March 4, 2015. I, however, differ a little when the writer very emotionally epitomises the present PM as a "Bangalee Ma". Our PMs (both the current one and the former), unlike in other civilised countries, are very selective in paying visit to victims of violence. I have yet to see either one of them showing their love and concern when the victim belongs to the other party. A PM once elected is the PM of all the people of the country. 'Bangalee Ma' or any other 'ma' loves all her children - beautiful or ugly, obedient or unruly. When she discriminates, she is anything but a ma. Probably politics and motherhood do not mix - at least not in Bangladesh.
Shahjahan Hafiz
Gulshan, Dhaka

Women's contribution must get equal treatment

This year the International Women's Day was observed with the theme "Empowering Women-Empowering Humanity: Picture It!" This year's event also marks the 20th anniversary of the landmark Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 that set the agenda for realising women's rights. Since then women's status in communities and countries has witnessed remarkable improvement—especially in the field of nutrition and food security—women's contribution is commend-

able. In an event participated by FAO, IFAD, WFP representatives in Rome, IFAD President Kanayo F. Nwanze delivered the opening keynote address pointing out that "as men in developing countries migrate to urban centers or shift to better-paid work, a feminisation of agriculture has occurred with approximately half of the agricultural workforce worldwide now made up of women". This is indeed encouraging news. I strongly feel that governments in the developing countries should take appropriate measures so that women workers working in agricultural and other industrial sectors get equal pay and status like their male counterparts.

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