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LATE S. M. ALI

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Children to go to schools in their locality

Ensure uniform standard first

THE Prime Minister's directive to the education and other ministries to take steps to make sure that all children are able to enroll into schools in their localities is certainly laudable. This is normal practice in many countries and has helped to ensure higher enrolments. The education ministry, in line with the Prime Minister's directive, has announced a 40 percent quota for local admission seekers of public and private secondary schools. This announcement, we think, should have been preceded by some serious homework.

Ideally, making education available in the locality where a child lives would solve several problems. It will ease the unnecessary anxiety parents and their wards go through every year trying to get into a school of their choice. It will lower the time and cost of travel to and from school. The huge gridlock created by traffic generated by school goers will also be lessened to a great extent.

However, there is a strong rationale for seriously examining the idea. We feel there are preconditions that ought to be addressed before the idea is implemented. In this case, the main challenge is to ensure that the standard of learning is the same in all schools, which is hardly the case in the present context. For private schools in particular, the discrepancy in standard is quite glaring, making thousands of prospective students vie for the limited seats in institutions of good repute. The government must first adopt a strategy to monitor the quality of education in all schools, public or private, before implementing this new directive. Otherwise, a good idea will not be able to deliver the results that are expected from its implementation.

Celebration of Puja

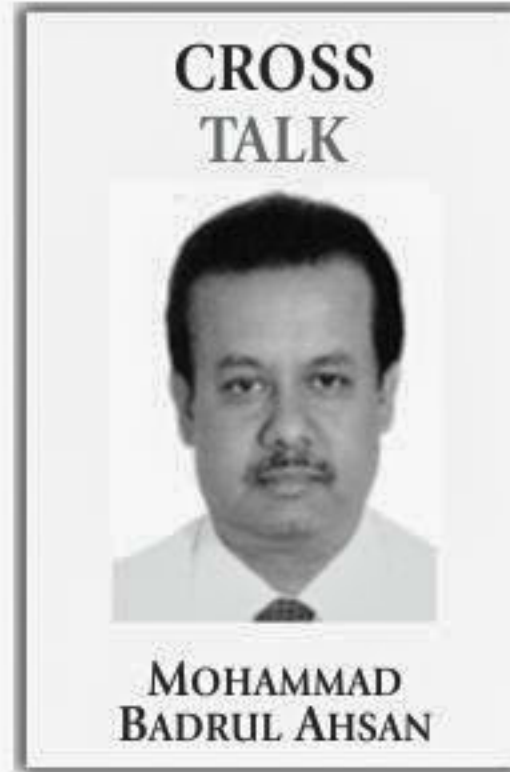
Reaffirms our syncretic culture

WE congratulate the Hindu community for celebrating Durga Puja with all the fanfare it deserves, in peace and a festive manner. It is also heartening to see that the celebration was participated by the other communities as is the tradition. That the 10-day religious festival was observed without any major incident, excepting a few isolated ones, merely goes to reaffirm our society's acceptance of all religions in the land. Although credit is due to the authorities for maintaining law and order, the real thanks should go to the people, who have always stood up for harmony amongst the major faiths in Bangladesh and against reactionary elements bent on disrupting that harmony.

Durga Puja is not only the most significant festival for the Hindu community, it is also an event that brings together members of other faiths and a reflection of Bengali culture that signifies respect for motherhood and women. These are values that have deep roots in our traditions, and we believe that the festival has invoked kindred feelings among members of all faiths in an atmosphere of peace and joy and reaffirmed, once again, our unity in diversity.

Bangladesh may be a Muslim majority country, but it is also a pluralistic one. Although religion is an integral part of our existence, we are also a people who believe in peaceful coexistence of all faiths and cultures. Harmony is a way of life for our people and we hope and pray that through such festivals, our faith in one another is reinforced, regardless of what creed we belong to.

How long can a single party rule?



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

POLITICS without opposition is comparable to motion without friction. What does that mean for the ruling party in a country when it doesn't have a competent rival?

Does that mean it will go on ruling until the end of the world? Does that mean it will never lose its grip on power? The answers to these questions are common sense: Nothing lasts forever and all good things eventually come to an end.

Sooner or later, the change comes and the ruling party is either overthrown or diminished into irrelevance. The Muslim League was once the ruling party in this country, which has gone into oblivion. The Congress Party ruled India for 49 years until it suffered a massive defeat in 1947, currently wobbling on its foundation. The longest ruling party in the world as of 2008 was Paraguay's Colorado Party, which stayed in power for 61 years at a stretch before a sandal-wearing priest won the presidential election and knocked it out of its base.

The True Whig Party of Liberia is recorded as the founder of the first single-party state in the world. The opposition parties were never outlawed in that country, but this one party completely dominated Liberian politics from 1878

until 1980. There are examples of ruling parties or coalitions which are still in power. Malaysia is ruled by the world's longest-running coalition since 1957. People Action Party is ruling Singapore since it became an internally self-governing state within the Commonwealth in 1959. The Liberal Democratic Party in Japan has been continuously in power since its foundation in 1955. The Communist Party of Cuba is ruling the country since 1959.

How that works is anybody's guess. A single political party forms the government, usually based on the existing constitution. All other parties are either outlawed or allowed to take only a limited and controlled participation in elections. A more refined variation of this single-party rule is called the dominant-party system. Unlike the single-party state, it allows democratic multi-party elections, but the existing practices or balance of political power effectively prevent the opposition from winning those elections.

Most countries having single party rule have a historical reason. When monarchic or imperial rules declined through the 1900s, the conquering political groups that overthrew colonial rulers and kings typically had power of their countries placed in their hands. These political parties either devised ways to usurp power or the system never allowed effective political opposition to strike root. Hardly familiar with the multiparty system, people in those countries harbour the desire that their political destiny will one day bring pluralism to fruition.

But reversing that desirable transformation can be tricky. When people are used to the multiparty system, it can be difficult to squeeze them into a single-party frame. An example of such backtracking is unknown, although in countries like Germany and Italy the multiparty system has produced political coagulation in the form of coalition governments. In other countries, single-party and multiparty systems have been

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disrupted by military interventions. Africa accounts for most of those disruptions, at least 70 African leaders deposed in nearly 100 coups or attempted coups in a quarter of a century.

It isn't about right and wrong that the multiparty system is more preferable than the single-party system. Until 2006, a modern welfare state like Sweden was ruled by one party for 65 of the previous 74 years. Yet people in every country aspire for the former form of govern-

ment because it gives them the freedom of choice and the choice of freedom. The single-party governments often degenerate as they have a tendency to turn into one-person rule, unless leaders are altruistic, conscientious and enlightened.

That explains why a dominant party rule in Japan is different from that in Zimbabwe. While Japan had 14 different prime ministers since 1958, Robert Mugabe has single-handedly ruled Zimbabwe for 28 years. The checks and balances concentrating in one hand, the levers of power crush individual rights to strengthen the hands of depraved despots. North Korea's Kim Jong-un, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi or Iraq's Saddam Hussein are the poster boys of that deviant genre, when the government and the people in a country are organised to serve the whims of their undisputed ruler.

A single-party rule has its benefits, such as quick decision making and ready implementation. Then it has its inherent risks in the rise of tyranny and subjugation of people. It also creates pockets of corruption like a minefield strewn with explosives.

More than anything, it goes against the grain. If people haven't tasted freedom, they yearn for it. But those who have died for freedom won't live without it. Leaders wake up before their people, and the single-party rule is a stretch after that. Once the people have woken up, the genie may not go back in the bottle.

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Rural Women: Holding up half the sky

SHAHEEN ANAM

OCTOBER 15 was the International Rural Women Day. The first International Day of Rural Women was observed on October 15, 2008. This new international day, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 62/136 of December 18, 2007, recognises "the critical role and contribution of rural women in promoting agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty."

The United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, in his speech to mark the occasion, said, "They are farmers and farm workers, horticulturists and market sellers, business women and community leaders. Rural women are the backbone of sustainable livelihoods and provide food security for their families and communities."

Unfortunately, the contribution of rural women, whether they are involved in care or agriculture work, remains largely unseen and invisible. Their role as the main source of providing food security for the family and community is ignored as most of their work is considered reproductive without any economic benefits.

Globally, the scenario of rural women is the following:

Women produce 60-80 percent of basic foodstuffs in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Women perform over 50 percent of the labour involved in intensive rice cultivation in Asia. Women perform 30 percent of the agricultural work in industrialised countries. Women head 60 percent of households in some regions of Africa: Women meet 90 percent of household water and fuel needs in Africa. Women process 100 percent of basic household foodstuffs in Africa.

However, in spite of these figures, 500 million women in the world live below the poverty line in rural areas.

In Bangladesh, the contribution of rural women remains unseen and unrecognised as elsewhere in the world. In spite of taking the major burden of household work, including food preservation, preparation and production, they remain invisible and undervalued. According to Mr. Sykh Shiraj, noted agriculture expert, the entire process of rice production requires 22 activities, from sowing of paddy to bringing it home as food. Out of these 22 activities, 17 are performed by women. The world recognises and credits Bangladesh for having attained self-sufficiency in food production. If 17 out of 22 activities are performed by women, who should get the real credit for this miraculous feat? Incidentally, the Bangla word *kishani* is

not in usage, as the term farmer or *krishak* is synonymous with men only.

The reason for women's work remaining unrecognised is because it is not evaluated. The care-work she performs at home - cooking, cleaning, taking care of children and elderly - are all considered household chores and therefore, reproductive work. Ironically, what should be recognised as productive work, such as taking care of animals, poultry, preservation of seeds, drying of paddy, husking, etc., is also considered household work or *shangsharer kaaj*. As she does not take her product to the market or does not get paid for her labour at home, she remains as economists will explain, "Out of the System of National Accounts" (SNA). Remaining out of the

The non-recognition of women's work has led to their marginalisation as a productive force, although they are by and large responsible for the food security, health and well-being of their family and community. The invisibility of their contribution has led to their devaluation and not getting the honour and respect they deserve at home and in society. Consequently, this translates into their lower status as compared to men, both at home and outside. One can go further to add that it is the lower status of women that results in inequality, discrimination and violence against them.

On the other hand, there are approximately 20 million rural women who are employed in forestry, fisheries and agriculture labour. The situation is no better

disrespects and demeans women, seeing them as dependent, a burden and therefore, deserving of discrimination, inequality and violence. It is widely believed that violence and discrimination against women is an offshoot of their lower status at home and in society. Massive campaigns are required to change such negative attitudes towards women.

Although Bangladesh has made great strides in the last 20 years in terms of political, social and economic empowerment of women, the plight of rural women still remains an area of concern. To change the present situation, radical policy support is required side by side with campaigns and awareness raising mobilisation. The present system of



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

SNA means her contribution cannot be counted in the GDP.

In a recent study conducted by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) for Manusher Jonno Foundation, it was revealed that on an average, a female member of a household undertakes 12.1 non SNA activities on a typical day, the corresponding figure for a male member is only 2.7. However, the most stunning finding of the study is "if women's unpaid work were to be monetised it would amount to 2.5 or 2.9 times higher than the income of women received from paid services." The study goes on to summarise that the estimated value of women's unpaid non-SNA (household) work, if monetised, was equivalent to 76.8 to 87.2 percent of GDP (FY 2014-2014).

for them. They are involved in back-breaking work all day, get paid less than men for the same amount of work and yet when they go home, they are required to perform all the duties and responsibilities that society has accorded to them as wives and mothers and homemakers. The meagre salary they earn is spent for the wellbeing of their family, leaving them poor, disempowered and in constant ill-health.

Manusher Jonno Foundation, with other partners, has launched a campaign titled "Equality through Dignity" to reduce discrimination and violence against women, by highlighting their contribution and thereby, raising their status. Highlighting their contribution through quantifiable evidence would create a change in mindset that presently

counting the national account (SNA) has to be revisited to include the unpaid and un-estimated work of women, so that their contribution is included in the GDP. Society needs to understand that women have dual roles, reproductive and productive, and they are capable of performing both these roles equally and effectively. Both these roles deserve respect and appreciation. Disrespecting and demeaning half the population can never take us forward towards a future of prosperity and human dignity. It was Mao Zedong who said, "Women hold up half the sky"; perhaps he understood the importance of women's work and what a catastrophe it would be if they stopped working for a single day.

The writer is Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation.

COMMENTS

"THE LAW IS KING!"
(October 21, 2015)

Adriano Zahid

Powerful people always use law for their own purpose.

"Harassed for no crime"
(October 20, 2015)

Saidur Rahman

We live in a strange country. Lawlessness seems to be the norm. Laws are violated by influentials while innocents are harassed.

Kamol Babu

It's shocking to see people being punished for no crime.

Ahmed Farhad Salim

What a society we live in! You get arrested for helping homeless children. But you get away for drunk driving and killing people!

"Fish delight"
(October 19, 2015)

Wishingboy Sabuj

The Marine Fisheries Academy has done a great job.

"THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER"
(October 19, 2015)

Md Jahid Hasan

Congratulations to Sir Fazle Hasan Abed for winning the prestigious World Food Prize.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters@thedailystar.net

Obstruction in Muharram procession

The Muharram procession is a historical religious programme of the Shia community of Bangladesh. It has been taking place in Dhaka for many centuries. But for some reason it was obstructed this year by our law enforcers on flimsy excuses.

The Shia community has always brought out their Muharram mourning

procession in a peaceful and disciplined manner and with due permission from the law enforcing agencies. But this year permission has been denied in majority of the Shia religious institutions in Dhaka and authorities have been dilly-dallying on the issue.

We ask the authorities to not create hurdles for the people of the country to exercise their religious rights.
Waiz Mahmood Dhaka

Simply outrageous

It's outrageous that our police did not arrest the intoxicated teenage SUV driver who created havoc and played with the lives of innocents on the streets due to reckless driving. The teenager, who is related to a former lawmaker of the ruling party, hit two

rickshaws and injured four people as a result.

We should not only blame the police for their inaction, but also our culture of nepotism and abuse of power. Ruling party supporters and patrons ought to be responsible. We demand that the government nab this culprit without further delay.
Nawfal Talukdar USA