

## Rajshahi University VC slammed

*The cat is out of the bag!*

ONE of the fundamental prerequisites for good governance is the distinction between the party and the government. This stood blurred and now seems to be totally removed now. We are compelled to come to this conclusion because of the reported verbal rapping the Vice Chancellor (VC) and the Pro-VC of Rajshahi University was administered by Khairuzzaman Liton, the president of Rajshahi City Awami League, for refusing to entertain the list of AL party cadres provided by him for recruitment in the university administration.

The cat is out of the bag regarding the pervasive politicisation of the administration, including public universities, when Liton charged the RU VC and Pro-VC that it was not because of their qualifications but because they were involved in AL politics for which they were made the VC and Pro-VC, and that it would not take the local AL much time to remove them from office.

We are heartened by the VC's stand in this regard and his refusal to violate the recruitment rules. But more than that, the matter reveals the deep malady - that of the insidious politicisation of institutions. It looks as if all government jobs are meant for the AL party men only, fit or unfit - as if it were their right!

We request the ruling party leader to look beyond the immediate satisfaction of having party cadres employed in various government institutions. The PM should look at the long term harmful consequences that such employment is causing to the institutions. If heads of the public universities are under so much pressure from ruling party leaders, we wonder what sort of pressure other less important or visible institutions of the government are enduring to meet the illegal demands of the party. The long-term cost of destroyed institutions is incalculable.

## Women trafficked as sex slaves

*Government must put a stop to this*

WE are deeply troubled by the allegations that women from Bangladesh are being trafficked to war-ridden Syria as sex slaves and domestic workers. According to a report in a leading Bengali daily, Rab has expressed concerns regarding the issue to the government, citing at least 43 cases of women being trafficked to Syria. Three victims, upon being sent back to Bangladesh once they fell grievously ill, told the newspaper that hundreds of women from Bangladesh are being used as sex workers in different cities of Syria, after being tricked into believing that they would get jobs as domestic workers in Lebanon. The victims claim that there is an organised transnational network trafficking women, of different ages and appearances, from Bangladesh and selling them for approximately Tk 3 lakh.

We are at a loss to understand how these women ended up in Syria when they were supposed to go to Lebanon. Did they have the necessary documents to go to Syria, and if not, how could they pass the immigration?

Trafficking of women and girls is a serious crime, and one which the government must take a zero tolerance policy on. The foreign and home ministries must work together to rescue the women who are already there, and take urgent steps to identify and bring to book the networks and agencies involved in this, particularly those that have already been named by victims and their families.

## COMMENTS

**"Hanif comes under fire"**

(November 04, 2015)

▼

**A reader**

I don't understand why he had to say those things.

▼

**Nazli Humaira**

Thank you so much, Honourable PM.

**"Feeling insecure like in 1971"**

(November 05, 2015)

▼

**Biplob Rahman**

We all feel the same way. The government has to ensure security for all.

**"Crocodile tears won't stop the killings"**

(November 05, 2015)

▼

**Rahamat Ali**

Police is not fit for this.

**"Killing of lawman linked to recent murders: Home minister"**

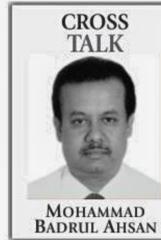
(November 04, 2015)

▼

**Rois Mahmud Hridoy**

I think he is a total failure as home minister.

# BNP is getting peeled like an onion



CROSS  
TALK

MOHAMMAD  
BADRUL AHSAN

FAMOUS American poet, writer and editor, Carl Sandburg, once said that life is like an onion which you peel off one layer at a time, and sometimes you weep. The first half of

Sandburg's saying is now a manifest reality for BNP as it appears to be peeling off layer by layer. Many of its leaders are absconding, scores of them are in jail, one or two are quitting, and some are abstaining from party activities due to old age, dissatisfaction and fear of persecution. What about the other half of the saying? Is anyone weeping because this former ruling party is being run into the ground? Does anybody wonder why this party, still enjoying its share of popularity in the country, is looking like a falling meteor?

As we all know, meteors burn on entering the atmosphere. They move through the vacuum of space and typically travel at high speeds. When they hit the atmosphere, the air in front of them compresses incredibly quickly and raises temperature. This causes the meteors to heat up so much that they glow before the air burns them until nothing is left.

It can be debated where on the meteor trajectory BNP lies today. Is it still travelling through the vacuum, or has it hit the atmosphere? Is the air in front of it getting compressed? Has the temperature risen? Is it glowing? Or, has the burning started already?

Perhaps no two minds will agree on any single answer. Perhaps nobody including the party high command has an answer for us. All said and done BNP looks as if it's headed up a creek without a paddle. Even worse, its leaders in their

mad scramble are giving the impression of running around like headless chickens. If sympathetically said, they're helpless like those Greeks in Homer's Odyssey, who were trapped inside the Cyclops' cave and waited for the monster to devour them.

Three causes are being discussed as likely reasons why BNP is in this tight

hugely undermined confidence in existing leadership.

Thus BNP in its present predicament is a logical conclusion of its past blunders, an early warning for any ruling party wishing to take power for granted. There's something called force of nature that brings salmon upstream to their spawning ground, or prompts an ele-



phant, according to legend, to head for the elephant graveyard when it knows the end is near. It could be the same force that also has been driving BNP, haunted by the ghosts of its past aberrations.

One unmistakable message emerges from this wretched condition. In its own sweet interest, a political party shouldn't

encourage its leaders to indulge in corruption. It's for the same reason that army conducts surprise drills to test "combat readiness" of its units. Another message is that a party should feed its leaders and workers on the ideological diet to keep the fire burning in their belly. When leaders lose focus, the party goes adrift!

BNP is still one of the two largest political parties in the country, and a large section of people would like to vote for it. But why is it reeling like a boxer under a hail of blows? Why are its programs failing to ignite sparks like striking a match on damp surface or putting a plug into dead socket?

One obvious reason is that the government has been pounding on it harder than a hammer hits an anvil. But BNP is also to blame for its own distress. The party is divided, confused and callous, underprepared, if not unprepared, to cope with its formidable adversary. Since its last days in power, it has failed to project a consistent vision or strategy. It has resorted to ad hoc activities, failing to make an impact and then going forward to build on it.

Onions get peeled down to the nub, and for BNP that means one of the two things. The party will either get splintered or marginalised unless a Phoenix-like resurrection turns the tide. Right now we're watching a case of muscular atrophy in politics. A political party is wasting away its hard-earned popularity just because it can't get its acts together.

If BNP goes down, others should be warned because senseless politics, like unbridled tongue, leads to disaster. Power invariably abuses those who abuse power, and BNP is paying through its nose. Hope it will ride out the storm and learn not to repeat its mistakes again.

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## NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY STRATEGY

# A roadmap to poverty reduction in Bangladesh

SHAMSUL ALAM

SOCIAL security is important not only for addressing vulnerability, but also for solving the problems of entrenched poverty and reducing marginalisation. The importance of a well-designed social security system has increasingly been accepted within national and global policy circles for addressing triple problems of poverty, vulnerability and marginalisation. Bangladesh's latest initiative in social security—National Social Security Strategy (NSSS)—takes up the challenges through an inclusive, focused, and coordinated approach to poverty reduction.

The provision of social security is embedded in Article 15 (d) of our Constitution as citizens' right to social security. In line of the constitutional obligations, the main vision of the newly launched social security strategy is to "build inclusive social security system for all deserving Bangladeshis that effectively tackles and prevents poverty and inequality and contributes to broader human development, employment and economic growth." To that end, the goal of the NSSS is to "reform the national social security system by ensuring more efficient and effective use of resources, strengthened delivery systems and progress towards a more inclusive form of social security that effectively tackles life cycle risks, and prioritises the poorest and most vulnerable members of society."

Social protection is embedded within the Seventh Five Year Plan. The plan outlines the implementation of the National Social Security Strategy as a core goal in building the foundations of a progressive and inclusive social security system. The priority challenges planned to be addressed over the next five years amongst others include (a) expanding coverage of core social security schemes for the extreme/hardcore poor and most vulnerable people of the society, focusing on mother and child, youth, working age, the elderly and people with disabilities; (b) ensuring that the most vulnerable women are provided with income security and greater opportunities to engage in the labour market, in particular when they enter motherhood; and (c) expanding coverage to the residents of urban areas and to socially excluded people.

Human beings face shocks and challenges at different stages of their life cycle and the poor and vulnerable segments of the population are the worst victims. If not addressed on time, some of the underlying risks could have life-lasting negative impacts. While coverage of safety net beneficiaries has increased over the last decade, the targeting performance suggests need for improvement and streamlining.

Many of the existing social safety net programmes of Bangladesh fit in with the life cycle framework, but

concerns of targeting have been paramount. Much of the social security budget is spent on government pensions and food distribution schemes. Programmes to mitigate pregnancy and early childhood risks and disability are remarkably limited in both beneficiary coverage as well as financing. The average benefit of the old age allowance programme is very low and lots of poor, old people are excluded. The disability benefits and vulnerable women's programmes similarly suffer from low coverage and low average benefits since most current programmes are small and the average benefit per individual is low.

The successful implementation of the NSSS will provide a strong basis for Bangladesh to extend proper social security to its poor and vulnerable populations. It recognises the differences in risks at different stages of the life cycle and provides support to various demographic groups. The proposed reforms too are to

*The successful implementation of the NSSS will provide a strong basis for Bangladesh to extend proper social security to its poor and vulnerable populations. It recognises the differences in risks at different stages of the life cycle and provides support to various demographic groups.*

be instrumental in eliminating leakages, improving targeting, increasing the average value of the transfers, lowering the risks faced by the poor and the vulnerable, reducing poverty and income inequality.

The reforms through the NSSS seek to consolidate the multitude of often duplicative programmes into core programmes based on the life cycle, enhance beneficiary coverage so that the programmes are by design inclusive of the poor and the vulnerable, with special emphasis on the extreme poor, and increase the average programme benefits to make a meaningful impact on the recipients. The NSSS has placed greater emphasis on strengthening the administration and management of Social Security schemes. This increases the efficiency and effectiveness of schemes while also reducing fiduciary risk. Improvements have generally

focused on three main areas: professionalising staff and institutions; improving management information systems; and, the delivery of transfers to recipients.

The government understands that improvements in the administrative arrangements for the NSSS will be critical to its success. Administrative problems and weak governance in the implementation of SSPs are interlinked. Establishing good institutional arrangements for administering well-designed SSPs will also help lower leakages. The review of past experience suggests that there are a number of areas that need to be reformed.

The key priorities, accordingly, are to address a vastly simplified institutional arrangement that allows proper planning, implementation, and M&E of the NSSS. The professionalisation of staff is also important to create a group of public servant experts in the delivery of Social Security schemes both at national and local levels. The effectiveness in identifying recipients for social security schemes also require (a) upgrading the MISs so that they are able to underpin the effective and efficient delivery of transfers and promote cross-governmental coordination and monitoring of performance; (b) strengthening payment mechanisms to minimise leakage and to use the social security system to promote financial inclusion, in particular among the poor; and (c) establishing an effective grievance redress system so that all citizens have recourse to appeal decisions on selection and can notify the competent authorities about instances of misconduct and failures in the delivery of the promised benefit.

The government will continue deepening the partnership with different stakeholders in the area of delivering social security services based on the NSSS. NGOs can be helpful in piloting innovative ideas for possible scaling up, identification of potential beneficiaries, especially those that are hard to reach because they live in remote areas or belong to marginalised or vulnerable social groups of the population, and helping redress grievances and disputes relating to the implementation of the NSSS.

Bangladesh now has a roadmap to a social security system that is inclusive, focused, as well as coordinated enough to achieve the objectives and get the maximum value of public money. The targeted, focused and coordinated approach will ensure that we do not embark on a fragmented implementation, with both duplication and under-coverage resulting from improper targeting, leakages and lack of inter-ministerial coordination. With a comprehensive strategy, our task in the future is to make sure that the roadmap is followed for further reduction in poverty.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Outstanding article by Milia Ali

Thanks to Milia Ali, a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent, for her article titled "All in the name of God?" published in the Opinion page of The Daily Star on November 1, 2015 where she has focused on the humane and peaceful aspects of Islam.

She mentioned, "I will explain to my grandchildren that there are no Shias, Sunnis, Wahabis, Hindus, Jews or Christians in this story. There are only human beings... there are just two sides: right and wrong." I praise her for expressing such an outstanding view.

Wasequzzaman Mubashshir  
Dhaka University Residential Area

### Empty statements

- The whole nation is socked and furious at the attacks on bloggers and publishers in which a publisher was killed and three others badly injured. Five bloggers have been killed this year but the government has not yet been able to find the killers. What is the government doing? If they can't even apprehend the perpetrators, how will they ensure justice?
- We want action from the government, and not just empty statements.
- Jahid Hossain
- Bashabo, Dhaka