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Dual citizenship challenges expression of national loyalty

Vehicles on the wrong side

Stop the unlawful practice

TRAFFIC rules are one of the most fundamental guidelines of any modern civilisation, which if not followed will cause much of the city life to go awry, endangering lives, as is happening in Dhaka. In fact in this city, it seems that traffic rules are more honoured in the breach. The death of Joseph Barman, a 28-year-old school teacher, on Wednesday when the rickshaw he was riding was hit by a bus driving on the wrong side of the road, points to this dangerous habit. The bus was hired by the jute ministry and its driver thought nothing of zooming along the wrong side to avoid the traffic. On February 22, Riazuddin Topu, a university student, was similarly killed when a police-requisitioned van driving on the wrong side of the road, collided with Topu's motorbike.

For long, we have been highlighting the dangers of this illegal practice. To start with there were only a few flag cars of ministers, but soon other VIPs followed suit. And now any one remotely connected with high ups do not have qualms in breaching the rule of driving on the proper side, like the two above mentioned cases. And accidents are bound to happen and people will get killed or suffer grievous injury if vehicles suddenly go on the wrong side. The deaths of Joseph, Topu and many others, because some individuals think they are entitled to break the rules with impunity, should move the relevant quarters take action to stop this behaviour.

If this horrendous practice has to stop it should happen from the top. Not doing so means putting more precious lives at risk.

Community clinics in crisis

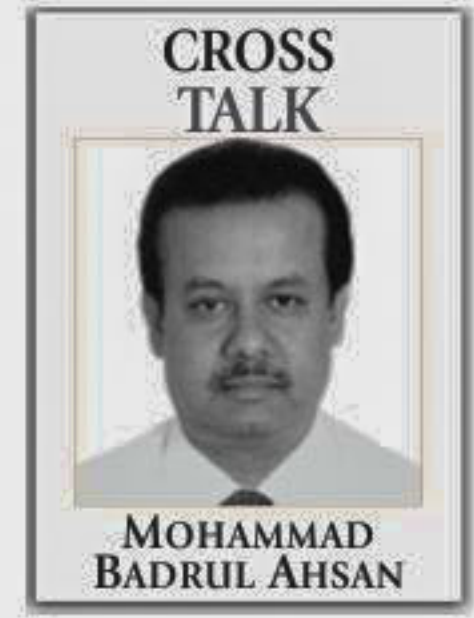
Give them enough resources

ALMOST all of the 51 community clinics in Gaibandha Sadar upazila, with no physicians, supportive staff and medicine, have become a microcosm of the broken healthcare system of the country. According to a report published in this newspaper, some of them lack even basic amenities like electricity and water.

That's no way to run a healthcare facility. Why has the authority stopped supplying essential drugs to patients who are now told to buy medicine from the market? Why have the employees not been regularised under the revenue budget? How can the government expect them to show up at work if they are not paid enough to make a living?

The idea of the community clinics across the country, established by the government in 2009, was to bring health care to the doorstep of people. To a great extent, they did the job by contributing significantly to the improvement of the overall antenatal and postnatal care family planning and nutritional services, providing treatment for diarrhoea, pneumonia and other childhood infections and counseling on the consequences of early marriage.

It is difficult to understand the logic behind setting up such people-friendly health complexes around the country and then not monitoring and following up their performances. A number of things need to be done to revive the community clinics that are often the only place where people in remote areas can get some kind of healthcare. Doctors must be trained to work in rural areas. And the government should offer incentives to those who do.



CROSS TALK
It's understood if you have two families and hold two jobs, but not if you express two beliefs in one conversation. Split personality applies to people who see it to their convenience to carry two passports, because dual citizenship is loyalty equivalent of that pernicious phenomenon in psychology. Like a hesitant mind wavers between two convictions, loyalty of a dual citizen wavers between two countries.

It's a pity when that loyalty goes back and forth, as people leave their motherland and come back after exhausting options in their adopted countries. Many come back for the simple reason that old age is more comfortable amongst friends and families. The accomplished ones return out of gratitude to give something back to their countries of birth. Then there are those who have the prospector's nose for gold. They return not so much for the love of their "motherland" but for the hope to find fresh opportunities.

Dual citizenship is thus not an entirely innocent interest. And more than not, it's also an elitist thing. The

whole concept swirls around a particular group of people who would like to have options so that they can keep the best of both worlds open. It's an affront to the preponderant majority of people who live and die in their own countries. The dual citizens are effectively two timers, people who use two countries for the pleasure of their selfish living.

If it's dishonest to say two things in one breath, how is it any better to live one life in two countries? I am not talking about diplomats, aid workers, multinational executives and businessmen who hop countries under the compulsions of career prospects and business dealings. Students living in other countries to acquire knowledge or people who go abroad to receive trainings don't come under this culpable category either. Neither do all those wage earners, who work abroad and remit foreign exchanges to support their families.

But what about those, who once renounced the citizenship of their motherland, and took up permanent residency or citizenship in another country? For example, immigrants must take an oath to become naturalised US citizens that says, in part, "I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty, of

whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen." How can we trust anybody who once abandoned this country for better life elsewhere if that person now wishes to come back because the grass looks greener on this side?

Thus dual citizenship challenges the notion that citizenship is an expression of national loyalty. India has separated citizenship from nationality. It denies the idea of dual citizenship and Section 9(1) of the Citizenship Act 1955 provides that any citizen of India, who, by naturalisation or registration acquires the citizenship of another country, shall cease to be an Indian citizen. Any person of Indian origin, who has taken up citizenship abroad, can take up benefits of the Overseas Citizens of India scheme. The scheme gives that person the same travel and residence privileges like other Indians, but he or she isn't allowed to vote and take up jobs in the government sector.

The US sanction of dual citizenship has its conditions. Its law states that a US national, whether by birth or naturalisation, shall lose his nationality by voting in a political election in a foreign country. One exception so far has been made for a US citizen who had voted in an election in Israel.

Bangladesh has also introduced dual citizenship for persons of Bangladeshi origin who are living in the US, UK,

Australia, Canada and European countries as citizens. As recently as February 1 this year, the Cabinet meeting cleared a proposal for a new law to expand the scope of dual citizenship. The cabinet secretary confirmed that the draft law says any Bangladeshi who pledges allegiance to a foreign state 'directly or indirectly' will lose their citizenship.

In reality, Bangladeshis owing allegiance to foreign countries have allegedly headed government, sat in parliament, enjoyed cabinet positions, adorned the highest court and worked in many other key government posts in this country. And, frankly speaking, not one of them could prove so far that they have added value to our national life. Instead, they exploited our sentiments to their own advantage and some of these snowbirds went back where they came from.

Thus the idea of dual citizenship is highly biased. It brings more privilege to the privileged, its purpose going against the hopes and dreams of common people. The martyrs died for this country, their blood, sweat and tears making its soil fertile with pride. That pride is badly hurt when the deserters of this country are free to return as if they had never left.

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Suu Kyi for party president or foreign minister?

NEHGINPAO KIPGEN

THE February 17th meeting was the third between Aung San Suu Kyi and military commander-in-chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing since the National League for Democracy (NLD)'s electoral victory in November last year.

The meeting came in the wake of the extension of the term of the military chief and his deputy for another five years against existing regulations that require the army chief to retire at the age of 60, which Hlaing reaches this year.

Moreover, Chapter VII of the Constitution states that "the President shall appoint the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services with the proposal and approval of the National Defense and Security Council (NDSC)." Min Aung Hlaing is neither approved by the NDSC nor appointed by the president who is yet to be named.

One important development after the three-rounds of talks is that the much-hyped possible amendment of Article 59(f) has since been abandoned. While the military chief has said that doing so would be unconstitutional, Suu Kyi has said that she would not try to amend the Constitution for at least two years.

Although the NLD has not yet confirmed the names of the president and a vice-president, there are some media reports that Suu Kyi would take the job of foreign minister.

The big question is whether Suu Kyi will lead a ministry, which would become part of the powerful body NDSC, or remain as NLD party president.

Chapter V of the Constitution states that the NDSC would be formed by 11 members - the president, the two vice-presidents, speakers of both houses of the Parliament, commander-in-chief and deputy commander-in-chief of the defence services, defence minister, foreign minister, home minister and border affairs minister.

Despite NLD's overwhelming majority in both houses of the Parliament, the current Constitution gives the military an upper hand over the civilian government. Of the 11-member council, six members would



PHOTO: AFP

be from the military establishment. Only five of them - the president, one vice-president, speakers of both houses of the Parliament and the foreign minister - would be from the civilian government.

Among others, NDSC, which is the highest decision-making body, will have the authority to declare national emergency for the military to take charge of all branches of the government - executive, judiciary and legislative.

If Aung San Suu Kyi were to become the foreign minister, she would have to abandon her party presidency. But

NDSC would provide her a platform to interact closely with the military leadership and any critical issues arising out of such meetings.

As foreign minister, she would be leading the most important ministry under the civilian government. Also as the top diplomat of the country, her position would allow her to engage in the day-to-day diplomatic businesses.

However, it would be awkward for a foreign minister to rule from above the president, which Suu Kyi unequivocally has said that she would.

On the other hand, if she were to

remain party president, she would indirectly be able to oversee the government, similar to what Sonia Gandhi did during the Indian National Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government in neighbouring India.

Mrs. Gandhi refused to become the prime minister but exercised enormous power and influence as president of the Indian National Congress and chairperson of the UPA.

Should she choose to remain as party president, NLD's overwhelming majority in both houses of the Parliament coupled with Suu Kyi's popularity and the respect she earns within the NLD hierarchy would perhaps see lesser internal conflicts.

As Suu Kyi has said that she would not try to amend the Constitution at least for the next two years, this could give her better political leverage to execute her "above president" role more efficiently and effectively.

By now, we all should understand that the military is unwilling to give up power basically for two reasons - the lingering fear that they could be prosecuted for the crimes they had committed during military rule and because of the ongoing fragile peace process with the country's ethnic armed groups. Whether one agrees or not, Myanmar's military considers itself as the guardian and protector of the state.

Regardless of whichever role Suu Kyi chooses to play, I think abandoning constitutional amendment at this juncture is good for the country's political transition. Otherwise, NLD would have made huge sacrifices, including the chief ministers of Rakhine, Shan and Kachin states, as well as the Yangon region.

As the people of Myanmar from different ethnic and religious backgrounds showed their trust and hope on Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD party, it is imperative that they are not betrayed.

The writer, PhD, is Assistant Professor at the Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University, and Director of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies. He is the author of three books on Myanmar, including the forthcoming *Myanmar: A Political History* available from Oxford University Press.

COMMENTS

"Eminent citizens again demand quicker trial" (March 2, 2016)

MG Mostafa Mamun

The killers and their masterminds didn't hesitate to kill an innocent boy like Taqi. Shame on them! And shame on the people who didn't try the criminals yet. We now live in such a strange country that if we speak the truth, we may be identified as 'anti-liberation force' or something else like that.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Let's take a hard look at ourselves

This is in response to Saikat Kumar Basu's letter titled "Apologise and compensate before advising" (February 22). When freedom of expression often gets designated as "sedition" in the autocracies and "democracies" of the Third World and the "anti-nationalist" gets promptly arrested or punished, how can he keep on lambasting the Western democracies? We should draw inspiration from the West so that we can appreciate the true meaning of freedom of expression, tolerance and democracy. Kajal Chatterjee Kolkata-114, India

Bangladesh's amazing win

- Our heartfelt thanks and congratulations to our cricketers for their outstanding performances in Asia Cup T20 against Sri Lanka and Pakistan.
- We are really proud and excited to see our country playing in the final. We hope and believe that they will continue to play like this.
- Jahanara Begum Dhaka



PHOTO: FROZ AHMED

A non-reliable Election Commission

- The filing of nomination has ended for the upcoming union parishad election and the first phase of elections in over 700 union parishads will be held on March 22.
- Political parties are busy campaigning, but to us it seems pointless because we can easily predict the result of the election. We do not expect a free and fair election from this Election Commission as we have seen enough of their performances. If they were capable of holding a credible election, then the country would not have been in such a mess. So, we are waiting to see another flawed election, a blow to democracy.
- Nur Jahan Chittagong