

Vulnerability of minority communities

We are failing in our duty

If it is true that a nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable members, we are very far from it. From a report published by a group representing the minority communities, the Hindu-Boudhha-Christian Oikya Parishad, the picture we get of the state of the three communities in the country is reprehensible, to say the least. 24 people belonging to the minority communities have been murdered, 25 raped, and more than 1500 families affected, in 2015 alone.

What is a matter of concern is that it is evident from the said report, which is a collection of the accounts of minority persecution appearing in various newspapers, that they are not victims of the law and order state that prevails in the country. In fact their marginalised position in society has been exploited and they have been deliberately targeted as a consequence of that. These communities have been victimised for their property, and there have been cases of forced conversion too.

What is even more galling is that the main perpetrators, allegedly, are those that are linked with the powerful and the political quarters. And this is one of the reasons why the police are reluctant to take the complaints or the reports seriously.

Can we really call ourselves civilised if the minorities are made to suffer while the state fails to take action to ensure their safety and security?

We suggest that the government take immediate cognizance of the report and initiate urgent action to bring to book the perpetrators and make examples of them to restore the confidence of these communities.

Taqi's murder

Ensure justice

EVERYTHING about the Taqi murder case screams of injustice, an injustice that is beginning to question the credibility of the administration. Three long years have passed since the brutal murder of Tanwir Muhammad Taqi, an ace student, without investigators pressing charges in the case as yet, despite the huge attention it continues to receive from the media and the people across the country.

The road to justice has not only been long but fraught with danger all along for Taqi's family. Rafiur Rabbi, father of the slain teenager and renowned cultural activist is, reportedly, being hounded by associates of the accused belonging to a powerful quarter in the area. A prominent lawyer who has been advocating the trial of the killers had his office ransacked by a group of men allegedly working for the same people.

It gets worse. Investigators are now hinting at "some changes" in the draft of the investigation report that identified the nephew of a local MP and ten of his associates in the murder. Rafiur Rabbi, the father, had submitted a complaint to the SP of Narayanganj on March 18 in 2013, accusing a number of people including a local politician and his son.

The administration should not believe that a crime like this will just fade into history. The state is under legal obligation to provide the victim's family with security in the pursuit of truth and justice. Legal process must not be tampered with to dilute the merit of the case.

COMMENTS

"Darker ice causes Greenland to melt faster: study" (March 6, 2016)

Mehedi Morshed Shuvo

Storms have already become more intense because of global warming, leading to heavier rain. All of these factors lead to coastal erosion.

"Never about the role, always about the goal" (March 6, 2016)

Shahjahan Jamal

A very well-written article! "Captain Courageous" is a title befitting Mashrafe.

The invisible face of accountability



SHIFTING IMAGES

MILIA ALI

If any of you are looking for an optimistic and uplifting piece, please move on... this column will be one of despair! I grew up amongst people who lived simple lives, believed in certain precepts and made sacrifices for creating a better and fairer world. Alas, they have vanished like ether and have been replaced by users, boasters and shirkers, who pass the buck at every opportunity. Perhaps this is a universal phenomenon, but does that really matter to the ordinary folks in Bangladesh? They continue to struggle and face insurmountable challenges. The shining statistics about the nation's march toward a middle income country, the healthy foreign exchange reserves and the exponential growth of service sectors, hardly impact the daily grind and frustration experienced by the majority of the population. For, their basic rights are trampled upon at each step, their voices unheard and their aspirations dashed.

The malaise that seems to be affecting our society in multiple negative ways can be encapsulated in three poignant words: lack of accountability. Because people feel threatened by a system where honesty and admission of mistakes are penalised, they resort to mendacity, subterfuge and outright denial of responsibility! Permit me to reinforce my point with some concrete examples of poor accountability...

Many Dhaka city roads have been dug up to install new sewer lines. A necessary endeavour no doubt. However, the streets are blocked with gigantic pipes and idle machinery, creating major traffic snarls. What boggles the mind, however, is the lack of urgency in getting the work completed. There is no activity in sight. Why can't the contractors put forth extra effort and, like many other countries, also work night shifts causing minimum disruption? In a casual conversation with a bureaucrat, I was given a long-winded explanation: "... multiple Ministries are involved and a lot of coordination needed. It's not that easy etc." In summary, no one is responsible and there was no acknowledgement of the need for hasty action.

A second story relates to garbage management in Dhaka. The city corporation has created, in residential areas, temporary garbage dumping sites,

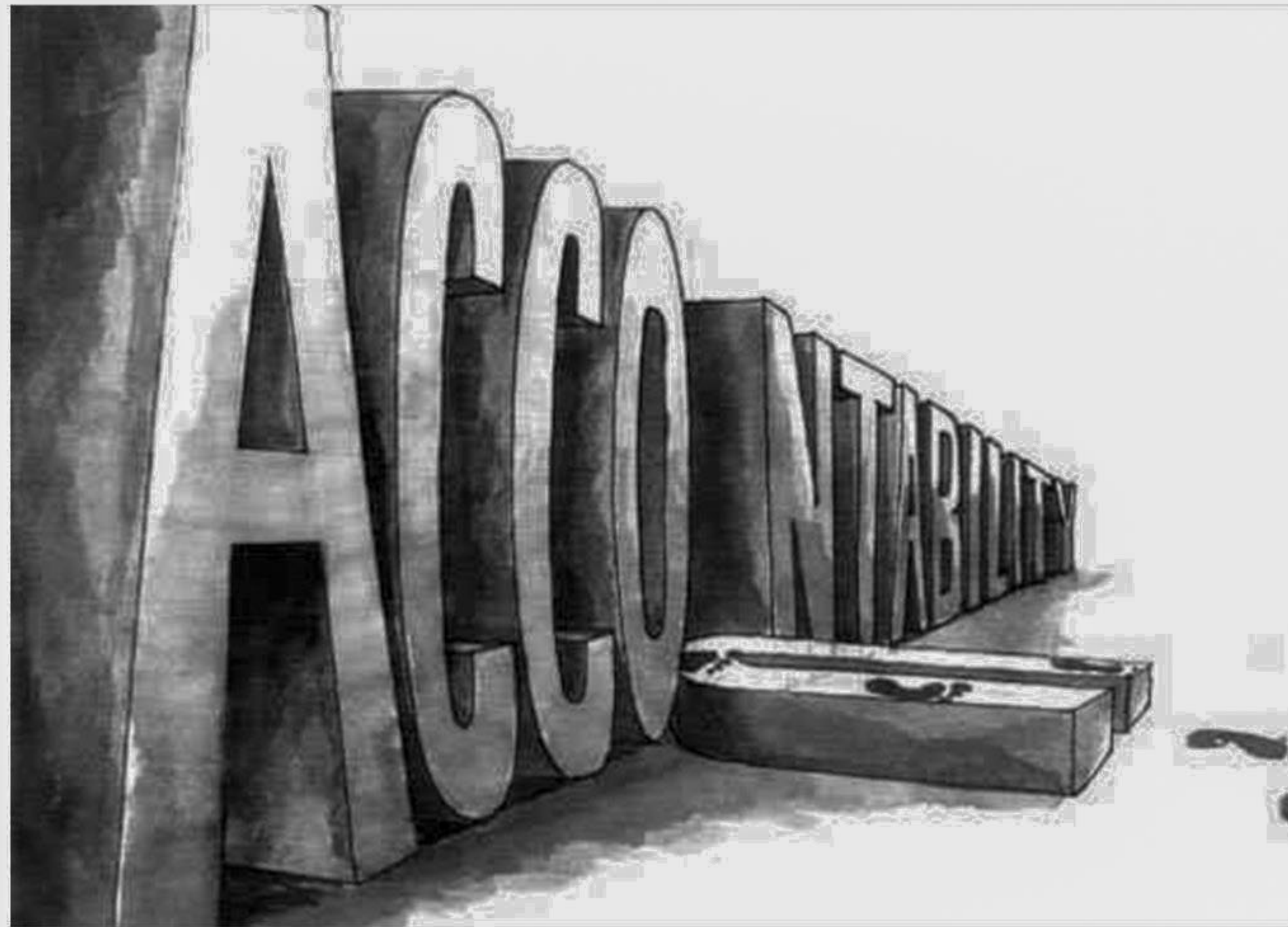
euphemistically called "collection points". These open garbage heaps not only make the streets impassable, but also serve as veritable sources of spreading disease. Confronted with one such dump staring at me in front of my apartment, I plucked the courage to call the "responsible officer" in the corporation. His perfunctory response was: "Where else should we collect the garbage - whichever street we use, the residents complain." He added cynically,

still beating). One can be philosophical about mortality and attribute it to destiny, but the interminable hurt and doubts keep arising from the "information black hole". Aren't the loved ones owed an explanation? Should there not be an investigation into the causes of fatality and someone held accountable? Isn't it important to draw lessons to avoid future negligence?

The sad truth is that right or wrong does not seem to matter anymore - the

means in a society that is desperately in need of an infusion of moral "hormones"? It has given people who believe that only "losers" admit mistakes a great moment of triumph. And they are gloating.

We have allowed our moral compass to dip to its lowest point through our insouciance. We pretend to be unconcerned by a social calamity because we are personally not affected. But in fact, we are all culpable, to some



"Find me a suitable empty space." The problem was thrown back at me - a taxpayer. The corporation was made out to be the aggrieved party harassed by residents! Can it not, at least, place a dumpster to avoid garbage strewn on the street, posing a major health hazard?

Perhaps, the most heart-wrenching incident happened to a dear cousin. She was admitted to a well-established hospital for an endoscopy - a walk-in procedure. Shockingly, she passed away after the procedure, probably due to hemorrhaging caused by an internal rupture (incompetence or negligence?). But we were made to understand that it was a case of cardiac arrest (ultimately it was, since no one dies with the heart

only thing that counts is what one will gain or lose. We live in a society where there is zero accountability, and seemingly infinite tolerance for violation of civil rights. No one owns up to his mistakes or learns from them. And why should they? When the editor of this newspaper, Mahfuz Anam, made an introspective statement about "independently unverified news" that was published during the 2007-8 caretaker government and admitted that it was an error in journalistic judgement, he was castigated, harassed and even charged with sedition. I will refrain from commenting on the specific cases filed against him since they are pending in the courts. But do we realise what this

degree, since we have failed to raise our voices. Let us admit: Each one of us is responsible for every crucial minute that is lost in mismanaged traffic, every epidemic that is spread because of unsanitary conditions created by inefficient garbage handling, every life that is lost due to medical malpractice and every innocent man who is harassed for assuming responsibility for his mistakes. We must not forget that we are all interconnected and exist in relation to each other. And it could be my child, my mother or my friend who is the next victim!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

Why we need a maritime policy

GHULAM SUHRAWARDI

BANGLADESH established the Marine Fisheries Academy in 1972. It is the only academy of its kind in all of South Asia. Now after 45 years of its establishment, what exactly has it achieved in the fishing industry and how much have we been able to use the graduates of the academy to take advantage of the bounties of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean?

Some of the relevant questions in this regard are:
1. Do we have a robust fishing fleet?
2. With a huge maritime boundary which is now internationally recognised, do we have enough security and large fishing vessels to employ all these graduates out of the Marine Fisheries Academy?
3. Who is harvesting the fishing bounties in the Bay of Bengal these days?
4. What are these graduates doing to apply their academic knowledge and practical training?

You may try to find these answers by surfing the net. Unfortunately, you won't find much information, because our fishing activity in the seas and oceans is miniscule.

The Bangladesh Marine Academy (BMA), formerly known as the Juldia Marine Academy, which changed its name few times thereafter, was established in 1962 on a sprawling 200 acre campus in Juldia, Chittagong.

Since inception, the BMA has produced over 3,000 professionals who excelled in sea careers worldwide, and remitted a lot of foreign currency home. The Marine Fisheries Academy produced 1,300 graduates and many ended up competing for the same jobs coveted by the BMA cadets. Only a few took up jobs in the fishing vessels plying the Bay of Bengal.

These two academies were established for two different purposes. The Fisheries Academy is operated by the Fisheries Ministry for the sole purpose of educating cadets to serve the expanding fishing fleets, whereas the BMA is under the Shipping Ministry and

has the sole purpose of gearing cadets toward a career in serving ocean going vessels.

With 200 nautical miles of exclusive economic zone, 18,813 sq. kms of waters comprising of territorial sea, and undeniable sovereign rights in the seabed extending as far as 354NM from the Chittagong coast in the bay, Bangladesh is assured of explorations for minerals, oil and gas, along with vast marine fisheries. It is time for us to build larger fishing vessels, including

Like many misdirected activities, the Fisheries Academy now trains cadets to serve ocean going merchant vessels as it is more lucrative than serving fishing vessels, thus nullifying the academy's original purpose.

the ones with processing and packing facilities. The fisheries graduates must be employed efficiently to extract these resources and care should be taken to not divert them to sailing on foreign ships.

Like many misdirected activities, the Fisheries Academy now trains cadets to serve ocean going merchant vessels as it is more lucrative than serving fishing vessels, thus nullifying the academy's original purpose. Additionally, the PM decreed the opening of

four more marine academies (in Barisal, Pabna, Rangpur and Sylhet) and a maritime university under the supervision of the Navy.

One wonders if there was a public discussion to analyse such massive expansion of training facilities while the job market in ocean going vessels have depleted ten-folds in the last few years. When the taxpayers' money is used to plan and build something, logically speaking, the public should be consulted for such an expense.

BMA cadets are struggling to seek employment in foreign flagged vessels as the Bangladesh shipping industry (for the purpose of sea employment) is almost non-existent. In the last couple of decades, the shipping industry has been destroyed by the maritime policies, which are counter-productive to development. We are no longer a maritime nation of any significance.

Against the backdrop of this depressing scenario, our sailors have become pariahs in the eyes of foreign ship owners for many reasons. Several countries have stringent visa requirements, which disallow Bangladeshi seamen to board or disembark vessels in their soil. All these factors combined have resulted in a bleak period for graduates of the Marine Academy.

In this recessionary employment scenario, we have added 20 private academies that sprouted in the backyards of fish markets or shopping malls, producing another 500 to 1000 cadets per year. Many of these private academies extract high tuition fees from students (as much as Tk. 20 lakh for two years of training), while providing substandard education. There is practically no supervision regarding the standard of their teaching or operations. Most of these permits were issued in the last five years.

So one wonders, do we have a maritime policy or are we proceeding in the uncharted ocean? What is the future of the historical Bangladesh Marine Academy?

The writer is the publisher of the South Asia Journal and author of Bangladesh Maritime History.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Bangabandhu's fiery March 7 speech

"Ebarer sangram/ amader muktir sangram, ebarer sangram/ swadhinatar sangram (Our struggle, this time, is the struggle for our freedom; our struggle, this time, is the struggle for our independence).

--Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

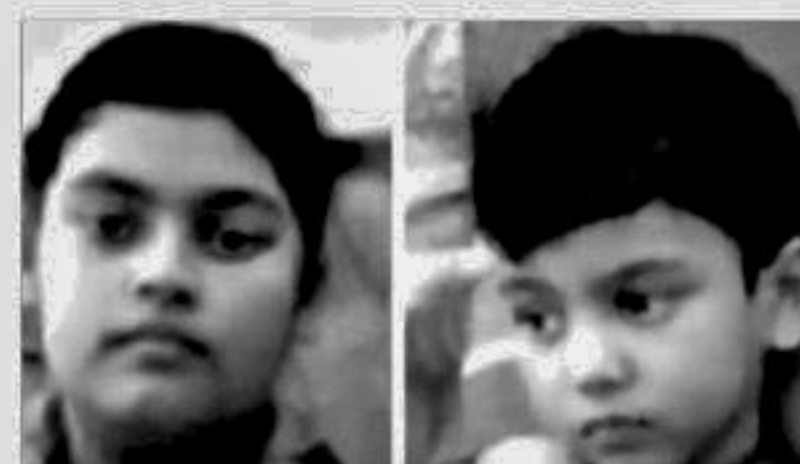
Bangabandhu's fiery speech of March 7, 1971, is one of the most inspirational speeches related to independence of a

country. It mobilised the then East Pakistanis to raise their voice against the West Pakistani junta's injustice and made them dream of an independent country. The great leader and his speeches are alive in the hearts of Bangladeshis and will always remain alive.

Sayek Ahmed Sajib
Department of English
University of Rajshahi

The killing of children

Child killing has become a common occurrence in our country. Children epitomise innocence, and such violence against them is unacceptable. In many cases, the law enforcers are unable to apprehend the perpetrators and punish them. As the perpetrators are not apprehended, the common people have lost faith in the ability of the law enforcers. They are living in a state



of constant fear.

We hope this killing spree will stop and every child will have a safe environment to live in.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

Absolute power corrupts absolutely

In the US, no person can hold the office of president for more than two terms. So there is no chance to hold the highest powerful position for a long time or lifetime as absolute power may corrupt a person absolutely. Article 50 (2) of Bangladesh constitution also contains the same provision: "No person shall hold office as President for more than two

terms, whether or not the terms are consecutive." It's a good provision but the thing is, in Bangladesh, the position of the president is largely ornamental, prime minister holds the real power. There is no bar in the constitution to hold the office as PM. We think there should be also a provision fixing the term of the office of the PM like the one for the president. If we can do this, our democracy will be stronger than now.
MD. Golam Azam
Gurudaspur, Natore