

Let the law run its course

Party affiliation shouldn't mean immunity

WITHDRAWAL of criminal cases against ruling party members on political grounds, through lobbying with the home ministry, goes completely against the essence of law and can easily lead to corruption and the abuse of power. Since 2009, the government has reportedly withdrawn numerous cases against its party leaders and activists that were filed previously.

Ruling party leaders, ministers and lawmakers have been lobbying to have cases against them withdrawn, thus, putting the home ministry in difficulty. Although party members are trying to get cases against them revoked on the ground that they were filed because of political motivations, home ministry sources have said otherwise; that the majority of appeals received by the ministry have no valid grounds for withdrawal. Then why are criminal cases being withdrawn on political grounds?

Meanwhile, officials also said that some of the cases should be disposed of in court. One such case is against the Dhaka City Jubo Mahila League Organising Secretary and Barisal Jubo Mahila League leader for torturing and killing an eighteen-year-old girl who worked at the houses of the accused. This tendency on part of successive governments to have criminal cases against their own party members withdrawn immediately after taking office is detrimental to the rule of law and must be abolished.

And although it is possible that some of the cases against ruling party members were filed on political grounds, surely all of them were not. In the interest of upholding the law, the home ministry and the government should let the law run its course and not intervene in cases on political grounds to protect party members.

Sorry state of Mymensingh engineering college

Why this neglect of technical education?

IT is unfathomable that an engineering college that has been in operation since 2009 has neither permanent faculty nor requisite staff. Indeed, guest faculty and staff from other colleges on deputation run the college, which is greatly detrimental to offering standard education to its students. We see this sort of neglect across the board at different levels of our educational system where physical infrastructure often gets priority in planning. However, it seems that when it comes to planning and allocating human resources, there is often a mismatch. The college was envisaged originally to run three departments, viz. electrical and electronic engineering, civil engineering and computer engineering. The first two departments are in operation whilst the third never got off the ground.

Yet we find that when it comes to procurement, all requisite equipment, including a laboratory has been set up. All this naturally comes at a cost to the national exchequer but remains inoperable due to lack of personnel. So, for the past eight years, the college has not been able to open its doors to students in that department. The fact that guest faculty have to be hired in lieu of regular teachers, the onus of bearing their cost lands on the average student who pay an extra Tk. 3,100 every six months on top of the regular fees. If it is the intention of authorities to impart quality education, this anomaly has to be addressed immediately. There is no point in opening technical institutes if it is not staffed properly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Remembering a great scientist

Today is the 79th death anniversary of Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, the pioneer of radio invention.

Although Italian scientist Guglielmo Marconi is known for the accomplishment, Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose was the first scientist who discovered the 5 mm wavelength and the technique to send and receive it. He was also the first scientist to invent the instrument to detect plant growth and response to stimulation.

Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose invented the diode (Integrated Circuit IC) used in computers, the TV antenna and seven out of eleven major radio parts.

We request our Honorable Prime Minister to establish a science and technology university after the name of Sir J C Bose at his ancestral home at Rarikhal in Munshigonj. We pray for the eternal peace of his departed soul.

Md. Fazle Sobhan
Sir J C Bose Institution and College, Munshigonj

BPL should spread country-wide

The excitement of cricket continues to spread throughout the country as the 4th BPL starts this month. I'd like to draw attention on areas like Khulna, Sylhet, Narayanganj and Cox's Bazar, where the people also want to enjoy the BPL matches live from their towns

The security condition is now much better in Bangladesh. The venues outside Dhaka are ensuring facilities for organising the international matches. We hope that the BPL organising committee and BCB will arrange the matches in other venues all over the country for the next BPL.

Md. Rashedul Islam
On email

Eviction of Santals made constitutional commitments a mockery

SHAKHAWAT LITON

SANTALS are infinitely more respectable than UK's civilised enemy, the Russians, wrote English writer and social critic Charles Dickens around 160 years ago. In his article published in "Household Words", a magazine edited by him, Dickens lauded the humanity and sentiment of honour among Santals.

It is said that Santals use poisoned arrows in hunting, he wrote, but never against their foes. "If this be the case, and we hear nothing of the poisoned arrows in the recent conflicts, they are more respectable than our civilised enemy the Russians."

He wrote the article in 1956, following the year of the brutal crushing of the Santal Rebellion by British forces. Santals revolted against the British colonists in 1955. Though they could not succeed, the legend of the Santal Rebellion lives on as a turning point in Santal pride and identity.

They again took their weapons to liberate Bangladesh defeating the Pakistan army. In April 1971, a large number of Santals - men and women - surrounded the Rangpur Cantonment of the Pakistan army. Armed with bows and arrows, Santals attacked the soldiers. Their hatred of the cantonment was deep-rooted as many Santal women had been sexually assaulted by Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators.

British rule came to an end 70 years ago. Bangladesh emerged as an independent country through a bloody war of liberation forty-five years ago. Santals are citizens of an independent country. Constitutionally they are entitled to enjoy equal rights and protection like all other citizens of Bangladesh. They are entitled to the right to life, liberty and equal legal protection. According to one of its principle of state policies, it is a fundamental responsibility of Bangladesh to secure the basic necessities of life, including food clothing, shelter, education and medical care of its citizens

including the Santals.

It shall be also a fundamental responsibility of the State to work as a welfare state by securing to its citizens the right to social security. This means citizens will get assistance from the state in cases of undeserved want arising from unemployment, illness or disablement or suffered by widows or orphans or in old age or in other cases. With all these efforts, the state is supposed to emerge with a human face.

Alas! What the state machineries did with Santals in Gaibandha. According to the Article 7 of the Constitution, Santals

right to life and liberty, equal access to legal protection and protection from cruel, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment were denied through excessive actions by the local administration and police. The administration paid little heed to several Supreme Court verdicts that said slum dwellers could not be evicted without rehabilitation because of their right to life and liberty. The bold pronouncements by the apex court are also applicable for Santals.

Moreover, around a dozen international treaties and conventions ratified by Bangladesh have been ignored



COURTESY: HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT

along with other citizens are the owner of the all powers in the Republic. But the local administration and police used their own powers to torture and evict the Santals from their households.

Santals are no more respectable; whatever Charles Dickens said 160 years ago does not matter now. They were forcibly evicted from their households, leaving them to live lives under the open sky. Three were killed. Three injured Santals were handcuffed to their hospital beds. What can be more inhumane and degrading behaviour than this?

Their constitutional rights, including

in the inhumane eviction of Santals from their households without taking steps for their rehabilitation. The treaties and conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, speak for people's right to life and right to shelter.

Right to life does not connote merely a physical or animal existence. Right to life includes right to life with human dignity. According to decisions given by the Indian Supreme Court in some verdicts, right to life includes the right to legal aid, right to go abroad, right to reputation, right to shelter, right to privacy, right against sexual harassment, right to

education and right to a clean and healthy environment.

If any sensible person goes by the decisions of the Indian Supreme Court, s/he can understand how brutally Santals' right to life has been bulldozed. The constitutional pronouncement, which says that the Republic shall be a democracy, which guarantees human rights and freedom and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person, took a nosedive in Gaibandha. The State's welfare character and humane face were tainted by the incident.

Former chief Justice ABM Khairul Huq in the verdict on the Kalam and others versus Bangladesh and others case made powerful observations regarding the right to life. The verdict was in favour of right to life of slum dwellers.

"After all the slum dwellers, the poorest of the poor they may be, without any future dream for tomorrow, whose everyday ends with a saga of struggle with a bleak hope of survival tomorrow, but they are also citizens of this country, theoretically at least, with equal rights. Their fundamental rights may not be fully honoured because of the limitations on the party of the State but they should not be treated for any reason, as slaves or chattels, rather as equal human beings and they have got a right to be treated fairly and with dignity, otherwise all commitments made in the sacred Constitution of the People's Republic shall prove to be a mere mockery," said Justice Khairul Huq.

The words hold equally true and applicable for the poor Santals of Gaibandha. But the way they were degraded and tortured has, in the words of Justice Khairul Huq, made all commitments in the sacred constitution to be a mere mockery. Those who are responsible for the heinous task must be brought to book. The government should not hesitate to take stern actions against culprits regardless of their political affiliation.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

The saga of on-going Muslim persecution in Myanmar

M. ADIL KHAN

IN its November 14, 2016 issue the *Bangkok Post* reports, "Myanmar's Rakhine state was hit by fresh waves of violence over the weekend with more than 30 'insurgents' killed during two days of fighting, the military said, as proof emerged of atrocities against villagers." Another news outlet, *Myanmar Observer* has reported that Myanmar Army has rained rockets on Rohingya houses in Rakhine state. Killing scores, burning houses to ashes. When people started flee from their burning houses they were shot at, killing men, women and children.

Recently, London-based *The Guardian* reported that at the entrance to Thauantan village in Myanmar's Irrawaddy Delta a brand-new sign asserts, "No Muslims allowed to stay overnight. No Muslims allowed rent houses. No marriage with Muslims". *Al-Jazeera* also reported cases similar rise in systematic eviction, rape, loot and arson of Rohingyas (the Muslims of Myanmar's Rakhine State) by the military. *Bangkok Post* in another report highlights that soldiers in Shey Kya village in Rakhine State "raided their (Rohingya) homes, looted property and raped them at gun point." The UN envoy on human rights in Myanmar, confirmed "repeated allegations of arbitrary arrests as well as extrajudicial killings occurring within the context of the security operations conducted by the authorities in search of the alleged attackers".

These incidences indicate a clear pattern of ethnic cleansing. But the Myanmar Government neither denies nor confirms these acts of violence against Muslims in Myanmar. Instead it claims that some of the army actions are responses to '400 strong rebel actions' of Rohingyas. But this claim of 'armed resistance with foreign support' is yet to be verified by any credible source, nor has the Myanmar government named the "foreign" sponsor of Rohingya "insurgency."

Saddest part is this that while this is going on, the Nobel Laureate Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, once the West's poster-picture of freedom and democracy and once herself a victim of state persecution, and who now heads the Myanmar government has stayed away from saying or doing much. This is baffling especially not just because that as a Peace Nobel Laureate she ought to have stood for human rights but that as the head the current Myanmar government she is morally bound and administratively enabled to do something about it. Instead, she has chosen to remain deafeningly silent or worse, appallingly, evasive of the Muslim plight in her country. What is also quite tragic is that in recent times when a handful of conscientious Myanmar

citizens condemned and protested in Yangon against these well-organised acts of persecution of Muslims, Aung San Suu Kyi's police baton-charged the protesters for 'disturbing public order' - a cliché often used to mask institutional suppression of freedom of people.

Aung San Suu Kyi is indifferent to this protracted tragedy in Myanmar mainly because she is but a captive of both dead conscious and naked opportunism for she fears that any show of favour to Myanmar Muslims could easily risk her own position of comfort

jeopardy its anti-China containment chain that it believes it has laid by befriending an army that is known for its shrewdness and also its blatant human rights abuses. Principles are the first casualty of opportunism.

Closer to the theatre of tragedy, Bangladesh, Myanmar's oppressed Muslims' closest Muslim neighbour is also noticeably depressingly mute to the plights of its compatriots across the border and this may be due to its government's policy framework that is utterly self-seeking and thus ethically incongruous and this is sad.

for its members are too busy killing and demonising each other - their own Muslims.

UN, the only body that can and has been raising its concerns from time to time is but a prisoner of its structural limitations that enables it to report but not regulate.

In a situation where institutions and individuals that matter have failed the Myanmar's Muslims, the only hope is conscientious people of the world who are not in millions but in billions that have the power to give voice to the



A burning Rohingya house in Myanmar destroyed by army rocket fire.

and glory that she currently enjoys and at the same time, many also argue that she also supports Military's policy of disenfranchisement of Muslims in general and Rohingyas in particular.

The World in general and West in particular are also not doing anything differently, for they are shackled by naked opportunism. In the emerging scenario of imperialist geopolitics the West has cosied up to the Myanmar government in their China containment strategy and therefore, the last thing they would do is condemn the Myanmar government (more precisely, its army) and put in

At an individual level and from his haloed position Bangladesh's Nobel Peace Laureate, Professor Muhammad Yunus, who happens also to be ethnically, religiously and even spoken dialect-wise closest to the Rohingyas could easily bring the issue to the attention of the international community or at least to his Nobel Peace colleague, Aung San Suu Kyi to address, but has also chosen to look the other way for he is but a prisoner of fear.

The world body of Muslims, the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) simply has neither the gall nor the moral standing to do much about the issue either

oppressed. They, therefore, must unite and protest in the strongest of terms, internationally and within their own countries through their senators, congressmen, parliamentarians whoever and get their governments to raise the issue of Myanmar's Muslim persecution with Myanmar government loudly for if they don't and choose to remain either silent or "neutral" they, by the words of Desmond Tutu, "have chosen the side of the oppressor!"

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