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FOUNDER/EDITOR
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Jail Killing Day

A dark day in our history

THE nation mourns the brutal killings of Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, Captain (Rtd.) Mansur Ali and AHM Qamaruzzaman this day forty-two years ago. It is an infamy that added the second blot in our history following the killing of the Father of the Nation along with almost all the close members of his family on August 15.

It was a very well-planned move to deprive the nation of the leadership that they were capable of providing the people of Bangladesh in the absence of Bangabandhu. As his trusted lieutenants, they had skillfully steered the Liberation War towards the final conclusion in 1971. But that was not to be. We recall with gratitude the extraordinary service they provided the nation during the very seminal stages of our independence.

Their killings were a double blow for us, and the nation has suffered for a considerable period the odious consequences of politics of killing and murder that was initiated on the fateful day of August 15, 1975. We thank the Sheikh Hasina government for initiating the legal process to bring the killers of the 1975 tragedies to justice.

However, some of the killers remain at large. And we hope that the government would do everything to bring them back from wherever they are ensconced in and make them face the punishment they have been awarded by the court. Only then will the wheel of justice complete its full circle, and only then can we as a nation feel completely absolved of the guilt that we have been carrying.

We join the nation in mourning the death of the four national leaders and pray for the departed souls.

HC observation on Bishwajit murder

The rich and powerful should behave more responsibly

IN the full text of its verdict on the Bishwajit Das murder case, the High Court offered an unflattering reflection on the current trends in student politics as well as the criminal justice system. The verdict lends credence to concerns expressed by independent analysts and academics about the state of affairs in both sectors, which the rich and the powerful want to use to their advantage, and the fact that they can get away with doing that makes us worry about their future.

The fact is, the political elites are using a section of the youth to extend their power and stifle opposition in the country's highest seats of learning. This stands in sharp contrast to the glorious history of student politics on this land, which ironically also provides the pretext for the continuation of what passes as student politics today. We fully agree with the court's observation that this cannot go on, and the responsibility to make sure that it does not, lies with the nation leaders, both in power and opposition, who should rid student politics of unethical influence and help the general students live their life unencumbered by any outside influence.

The rich and the powerful, the court says, also enjoy a type of impunity and seek to compromise the integrity of the criminal justice system, meaning they can influence the outcome of an investigation in the event of a crime. No one should have that kind of influence. We think the criminal justice system should be purged of corruption and political influence so that the criminals can be held accountable for their action. The integrity of the justice system must at all times be upheld, no matter what the cost.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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We need more women in the workforce

The Daily Star published on October 29 a wonderful news item headlined "Women take helm of Kishoreganj haors," which reported that eight of 13 UNOs in the district are women. They have contributed to curbing the hardship of the local people and gained appreciation from all walks of life. This is undoubtedly good news.

Despite the fact that women outnumber men at the university level, their presence is barely felt in the country's job sector. The reality is such that many women find it difficult to take up a job or start their own business. A large number of women often get married after having completed higher studies due to social pressure. Thus, the unemployment rate of educated women is higher than that of men.

Hopefully, the story of these eight women UNOs will inspire many women to build a career in their respective fields. Their participation in the workforce will contribute to their own empowerment and strengthen the national economy as well.

M Suman, Dhaka University

The centenary of October Revolution

This year marks the centenary of the October Revolution. Modern welfare states in the West cannot deny the contributions of the ideology to their own social security policies like universal health coverage and unemployment benefits. In fact, a welfare state that ensures freedom of an individual and at the same time guarantees his or her social security is an outcome of the synthesis of capitalism and socialism.

Sujit De, Kolkata

Airports and our flight of fancy



BADIUZZAMAN BAY

BANGLADESH seems to be in two minds when it comes to sorting out its priorities with regard to airports. On the one hand, there is the lucrative prospect of having new airports. The country is exploring paths to greater financial inclusion, and new airports, at least theoretically, can drive regional development by creating new jobs, attracting foreign investment, boosting tourism, and providing local businesses with a direct access to the global market.

There is, then, the challenge of managing the existing airports. Airport and airline management is a tricky job. The managers have to live up to the expectations of an ever-watchful clientele that would accept nothing less than a hassle-free travel and transportation experience.

Currently, according to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, there are three international airports: Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (Dhaka), Shah Amanat International Airport (Chittagong), and Osmani International Airport (Sylhet). Add to that the five domestic airports, including Cox's Bazar Airport, Shah Makhdum Airport (Rajshahi), Jessore Airport, Saidpur Airport, and Barisal Airport.

Soon we may have several more airports that are either under construction or in the planning phase. Last week, it was reported that the prime minister would soon announce the site for the proposed Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib International Airport, a pet project of the current administration that has been in the works for quite some time and billed as the country's largest international airport. Apparently, "big" and "large" are the new catchwords in the race for development. The government has no intention of falling behind in this race.

So, between our visionary leap to new airports and the practical task of overhauling the poorly functioning airports that now exist, which one should take precedence? Is there a way to reconcile our priorities, or should we sacrifice one in favour of the other?

If client feedback is any indication, our airports, despite attracting greater passenger numbers than ever before, are in dire need of an overhaul in terms of the marketing, financial, operational and other factors associated with airport management. No wonder none of them have ever reported profits, which is only reasonable given their consistent poor

performances.

Take Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport for example, the country's premier airport. HSI has been frequently ranked among the worst airports in Asia. In 2014, air travel website sleepinginairports.net ranked it as the ninth worst airport in the region. Fast forward to 2016, it still occupies the same spot, although several airports previously placed in the list were able to lift them out of it by that time.

The site ranks airports based on their cleanliness, food quality, immigration/security, facilities, customer service, comfort, and "sleepability". Its Dhaka Airport Guide paints a bleak picture of what to expect from this airport: "This is an old, small-time,

What's so fundamentally wrong with our airport management system that nothing good ever comes out of it?

Part of the reason why we have a ministry that combines civil aviation with tourism is their mutual dependence, or to put it differently, their connection to each other. Airports, among other things, play an important role in increasing inbound tourism. But those critical reviews and reports that swamp the internet can be very damaging for tourism in Bangladesh, and may even have a more lasting impact on our economy than we can imagine.

According to a recent estimate by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Bangladesh has been losing more than USD 1 billion worth of apparel business every year due

his observation of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in a single word: "disaster." (Prothom Alo, March 19, 2017)

Commercial interests aside, there is a groundswell of feeling that our airports are equally, irrevocably hostile to the general travellers/visitors who must navigate their way through a labyrinth of impediments to get in or out of an airport. The list of impediments that they have to face is so staggering that Bangladesh can now legitimately claim to be an expert on how to turn airports into hell and vice versa.

The fact is, an airport is not just about a bunch of structures and flying vehicles. It is much more—a gateway to a country, just like a gateway to any place of residence. You can form an opinion



An airport is not just about a bunch of structures and flying vehicles. It is much more—a gateway to a country. PHOTO: STAR

chaotic airport. Airport procedures are typically disorganised and inefficient. It seems like there are a lot of security guards, but the security is weak or non-existent."

It adds: "Many travellers have reported that airport staff and security have asked for handouts, bribes, etc., and some felt verbally harassed. Travellers overall report filthy and poorly maintained restrooms. Facilities are outdated and not up to international standards."

The site's 2017 survey of the worst Asian airports is yet to come out, but nothing has changed in the past year to convince us that the Dhaka airport will fare better this time around. Why is it that other countries were able to improve their performance and we couldn't?

to the inefficiency of airport authorities, as their delayed release of samples "irks the Western retailers."

The retailers, said BGMEA President Siddiqur Rahman, send garment samples to the Bangladeshi manufacturers through expensive air shipments and they expect quick execution of the work orders. "But the manufacturers do not get the samples from the airport timely," he said, adding that the samples from the airports are supposed to be received within 24 hours but it takes more than 10 days. (The Daily Star, June 25, 2017)

A less measured response came from Syed Nasim Manzur, the former president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who during a conference earlier this year summed up

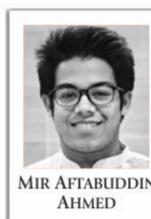
about those who live inside just by looking at how well or poorly the gateway is made and kept. It will be in our own interest to keep our country's gateway clean and beautiful and welcoming to the visitors.

Correcting all that is wrong with our current airports is not an easy task, nor is it going to be acceptable to everyone involved with the system, but it's a necessary task. And someone needs to start cleaning up this mess. But building new airport only to let it function within the same decaying, corruption-ridden system will be akin to killing its prospects even before its formation.

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Engaging the youth in electoral process

Why we need it now more than ever



MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

AS Bangladesh gears up for what may very well turn out to be the most crucial political exercise in its history, questions have arisen about the level of youth participation in

electoral politics. The Election Commission has recently concluded a series of successful talks with leading political parties, civil society members and external public policy stakeholders. Whilst the active engagement of the Election Commission with the two leading political parties has indeed created a zone for indirect dialogue between the Awami League and the BNP, the KM Nurul Huda-led Commission has so far refrained from appropriately marketing the upcoming parliamentary elections to the growing youth population of the country.

One hopes that in a country which has a median age of 26.9 years, the highest constitutional authority in regard to the electoral process takes measures to ensure a wider interest, and subsequently a wider participation rate amongst young people, so as to encourage them to perform their civic responsibility during the upcoming election.

Statistics do not show a complete picture of key events or issues. However, they are indicative of trends in the socio-political atmosphere of the country. The last full-fledged active engagement of the civilian population in electoral politics was during the 2008 Parliamentary Elections, which brought the incumbent Awami League to power. Bangladesh witnessed a high turnout of 87.16 percent in the 2008 elections.

Bangladesh defines a young adult as a person in the age group of 18–35 as per the National Youth Policy of 2003, which leads to the empirical notion that over 50 percent of citizens are representative of young people in the country. Of those registered as voters in 2008, a high proportion did indeed partake in the constitutional process. However, the problem is seemingly

broader. The 2008 Parliamentary Elections saw the Awami League promote a brand of progressive electoral promises centred around issues of enhancing communications technology, investing in education and broadening the developmental capacity of the country. This, whilst attracting a large proportion of young people to the polls, did not necessarily lead to the optimal registration of the younger population as voters, especially in the 18–25 age group.

Keeping aside the politics of the 2014 Parliamentary Elections, the state was

whilst reducing any and all interest of students and young professionals from taking an active role during elections. This scenario still stands today.

Barring the disenfranchisement of the youth from politics due to a lack of interest, the question remains in regard to what the government, the opposition or the Election Commission has done to increase election-related youth awareness. Have they taken their opinions whilst formulating policies? Have youth-level platforms or organisations been consulted outside the



Alleged Chhatra League activists beat up a youth in front of the DU central mosque in 2013. A violent brand of student politics has reduced any and all interest of students and young professionals from taking an active role in electoral processes. PHOTO: STAR

unable to attract higher voter registration or participation for the public, let alone the younger population. Whilst the BNP and the Awami League fought over a constitutional mechanism for the polls, they seemed to have forgotten the voters amidst their ideological clashes. As such, in 2015, the Election Commission reported their increasing concerns pertaining to the participation of the youth in electoral processes. For one, the brand of politics practised by our leading parties has kept student politics in the vicinity of the respective organisations,

purview of the Chhatra League and the Chatra Dal? If national stakeholders are unable to engage the younger crowd in discussions about what the future of this country should be, starting from its constitutional practices to political culture, then to expect the youth to seek an active interest in domestic politics is unrealistic. It is more likely for the younger population in Bangladesh to know about the policies and pledges of candidates in an American election, then to know who their respective members of parliament are. This needs to be

addressed.

Furthermore, there are broader questions relating to the youth in the upcoming elections. An estimated 25 percent of the 15–29 age group in Bangladesh are neither in education nor employed in any formal economic activity. Of this age group, an estimated 11 percent of citizens remain unemployed. If anything, the upcoming election is more crucial for the younger population than it is for the Awami League or the BNP. Their futures remain at stake. And in order for them to have a say in this process, and select credible candidates to represent them in parliament, this age group needs to be allowed the opportunity to express their opinions to the highest authorities of the land. As such, whilst it is impractical to expect our leading parties to collaborate or introduce bipartisan youth-level discussions in regard to developing their respective manifestos, it is advisable for the Election Commission to reach out to this demographic as they have done with political parties and other stakeholders. The onus remains on the KM Nurul Huda-led Commission to take the initiative of enhancing youth participation in the upcoming polls with the assistance of the political actors.

Fundamentally, Bangladesh remains at a crossroads with its own legacy. If the future of this country is to be entrusted into the hands of the younger generation, then one cannot simply restrict that to the current crop of young politicians. All nation states which have successfully developed progressive and inclusive democracies, have large-scale state-level youth forums, platforms and bipartisan groups which enhance the interest of the youth population in politics. Until and unless we realise this and initiate a process of achieving such, Bangladeshi politics will be limited to evaluating the rivalry between the two leading parties or determining whether the chief justice overstepped his legal reach, completely ignoring what the public, and more crucially, what the youth, think about these issues.

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