

Attack inside court premises

Why did the law enforcers not intervene sooner?

THE attack on Mahmudur Rahman, acting editor of a Bengali daily, inside the court premises in Kushtia, on July 22, is shocking and disturbing, to say the least. The attackers, allegedly members of the BCL, vandalised Rahman's car when he came out of the court house and got into the car. When he took shelter in a lawyer's room, the attackers burst into the room and assaulted him leaving his face and head bloodied. All this while, the law enforcers, responsible for keeping order within and outside the courtroom, remained silent bystanders.

Firstly, the person in question against whom a defamation case has been lodged went by the law and surrendered to the court and was granted bail. Yet he was attacked within the court premises. This in itself indicates that those who attacked him do not believe in the law or in the courts of the country. Rather, they have taken law into their own hands. How can this be acceptable in a democratic country?

Secondly, why did the law enforcers on duty allow such an attack to happen right in front of them? Are they so powerless that they do not dare to intervene when an obvious offense is taking place? We have seen the same stance of total indifference when quota reform activists were attacked by members of the BCL in recent weeks. The law enforcers are entrusted with the responsibility of stopping any kind of violence in the public domain. So why didn't they do their job?

In the case of the attack inside the court premises, we are not supporting any particular individual but emphasising the fact that this is an issue of protection of every citizen under law and upholding the law of the land and the honour of the courts. The government must intervene and put an end to this reprehensible practice by taking action against those responsible for the attack.

Monitor cattle fattening

Proper planning can make the difference this time

WITH Eid-ul-Azha around the corner, the Poribesh Bachao Andolon (Poba) has recently urged the government to monitor how cattle is being reared and fattened in the farms in the country. This is a timely call on the authorities, and given the health implications of the issue, a very serious one.

The organisation in its press release noted that unscrupulous traders and businessmen use harmful chemicals and medicine to fatten animals for sale ahead of the sacrificial Eid when the demand for livestock rises. That the practice is wrong ethically and poses significant risks to those who consume the meat is beyond question. In the past, too, we have reported about this widespread problem—bypassing the recommended diet for fattening cattle and using steroids and other drugs is a crime as it puts consumers at risk of serious diseases.

Given the profit margins involved, without proper monitoring, this problem cannot be stopped. If a team is allotted to each designated area for cattle sale and the sale of the particular drugs used is monitored, the problem can be easily controlled, if not outright stopped.

Other recommendations from the organisation included ensuring that the slaughter is carried out in designated areas and that cattle markets are not set up on playgrounds, parks, roadsides, etc. Designated places for sacrifice have been set up in the last few years as well, but due to lack of monitoring and strict enforcement, we see violations every year. With time yet till the Eid, the authorities should plan ahead to tackle these issues, and ensure that the day of sacrifice is one which does not put people's health at risk, and keeps our city clean.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Pedestrians have a responsibility too

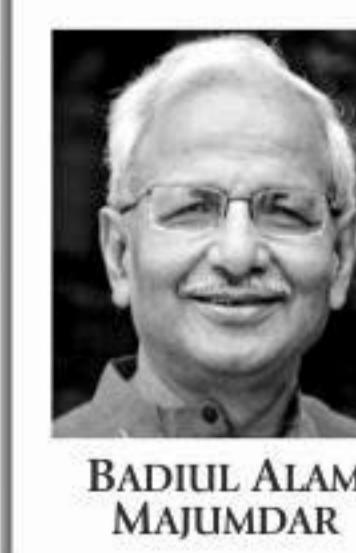
Of late, the number of road accidents has increased alarmingly, in Dhaka city in particular, and in the country as a whole. Mostly, the reason has been pointed out to be reckless driving by bus drivers with their faulty transports. However, putting the blame alone on bus drivers and their shabby vehicles would not be right. We, the pedestrians, are also equally responsible for this. Jaywalking, crossing roads without using zebra crossings, underpass or overbridge, talking over the cellphone while crossing roads, etc., by pedestrians are also contributing to road accidents. It has been observed that some motorbike riders under the various ride-sharing networks also drive their bikes recklessly. A fatal accident at Airport Road a few weeks back is an example of this.

Pedestrians and bike-users must rectify themselves and follow the safety rules of the traffic police. A little patience can save lives. We shouldn't just blindly follow everyone else, most of whom are regularly breaking traffic rules and regulations. We should concentrate on our own conduct and make safety a priority on the road.

Jawad-Ul Islam, by email



Why facing the voters is important for democracy



BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

THE year 2018 is one of elections. A total of five city corporation elections are to be held this year, of which elections in Khulna and Gazipur have already been held. Elections in Sylhet, Barisal and Rajshahi will take place on July 30. These local elections are important as they are likely to have an influence on the upcoming national election at the end of the year.

SHUJAN: Citizens for Good Governance has initiated important interventions, including arranging press conferences and using social media and cultural teams to carry out publicity campaigns. These campaigns are intended to remind the Election Commission, the government, including the bureaucracy and the law enforcement agencies, election officials, media and the civil society, of their obligations to hold free, fair and credible elections. The campaign is also designed to create voter awareness and motivate them to vote for clean candidates.

More importantly, we have created comparative statements based on the disclosures made by candidates in the affidavits and distributed them to the media and also the voters to help them make informed decisions. Incidentally, because of these relentless efforts, the voters have become aware of their right to know about the antecedents of candidates, including their education, profession, income, criminal records, tax payments, and assets and liabilities of themselves and their dependents.

One of the most significant election-related initiatives of SHUJAN has been to arrange "face-the-candidate forums," allowing the candidates to share the reasons for their contesting the election and what they would do if elected. These innovative events also allowed the voters to directly face the candidates and ask them questions.

A unique feature of this forum is that it has allowed candidates to sign a declaration committing to free, fair and

peaceful elections and to stay away from vote-buying and violence. Their commitments also included eradication of corruption and cronyism from the city corporations and facing the voters every year to account for their income and wealth. In addition, in these events, voters took a pledge to vote for clean candidates and promote peaceful elections.

SHUJAN has been arranging face-the-candidate forums since 2005. During the ninth parliament elections, held in 2008, we arranged such events in 87 constituencies. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of voters participated in these events, contributing to participatory democracy in our country.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Similar innovative events have been held during recent city corporation elections as well as for ones that are going to be held soon. In recent local elections, we have also arranged similar programmes for ward councillors. Again, thousands of voters have been attending these events, which are giving them an opportunity to know more about their candidates and make informed decisions.

The present cycle of city corporation elections began in Narayanganj, held on December 22, 2016, followed by Rangpur elections on December 21, 2017. More recently, elections in Khulna and Gazipur were held on May 15 and June 26, 2018 respectively. There were

face-the-candidate forums for mayoral candidates in all of those elections. Those elections were free, fair and credible, and the ruling party mayoral candidates, it must be noted, lost in both cities.

In recently held elections in Khulna and Gazipur, the ruling party candidates won (*The Daily Star*, July 17, 2018). In both elections, the winners participated in our face-the-candidate forums. However, after the successful implementation of the "Khulna model" of elections in both of those cities, we have observed a kind of reluctance on the part of mayoral candidates nominated by the ruling party to participate in these forums.

without them anyway. Some voters even raised the question whether they were afraid of facing the voters.

We were surprised by the reactions of the voters. The ruling Awami League is the party which provided leadership during our War of Liberation. They also came to power with a landslide victory in a free, fair and peaceful election in 2008. It is hard to believe that after ten years in power, they would be afraid to face the voters!

There are, however, valid reasons for many voters to be frustrated. During the present regime, we have made significant strides on the economic front. The trials of war crimes and Bangabandhu killing are practically over. Yet the commitments made in the "Dinbodoler Sanad"—the election manifesto announced by Awami League prior to the 2008 parliament elections—have remained largely unfulfilled. "Dinbodoler Sanad" included, among others, a commitment to "a truly participatory and tolerant democratic system where social justice, women's rights, equality of opportunity, rule of law, human rights, good governance and pollution-free environment will be ensured. A secular, progressive and liberal welfare state will be created in the process." It also made a commitment to take effective measures against corruption and disparity. According to many observers, the losses suffered by the Awami League in all five city corporation elections in 2013 could be attributed to its failure to implement the "Dinbodoler Sanad".

In the election manifesto declared before the one-sided elections of 2014, Awami League made democracy, good governance and decentralisation its top priorities, which again it failed to implement. Thus, the discomfort of the ruling party candidates in facing the voters is understandable. More importantly, after perfecting the Khulna model of a controlled election in Gazipur, characterised by excesses of the law enforcement agencies and the inaction of the Election Commission, facing the voters will be even more difficult for the ruling party candidates.

Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar is Secretary, SHUJAN: Citizens for Good Governance.

Now is the time for global action on disability

ALISON BLAKE CMG, JANE EDMONDSON, and BARBARA WICKHAM OBE

ON July 24, 2018, the UK government hosts the Global Disability Summit in partnership with the government of Kenya and the International Disability Alliance. Bangladesh is joining more than twenty-six other countries in signing a Charter for Change, and committing to transform the lives of people with disabilities.

Most of us will have witnessed the joy and achievements of the paralympians in the Rio 2016 and London in 2012, and the Invictus Games for wounded soldiers or injured armed forces personnel. And closer to home in Dhaka, no-one who saw it will forget the spell-binding performances by deaf and disabled Bangladeshi actors in "A Different Romeo and Juliet."

These events allow the world to witness what people can achieve when the barriers facing those with disabilities are taken down, when disability is seen as an opportunity rather than a threat, and what matters is what people can do, not what they can't.

But for many, particularly in the developing world, the barriers stand high and condemn people with physical and mental disabilities to lives where they struggle to achieve their potential, condemning those who are unlucky, and those who do not have the support they need, to hardship, poverty and isolation.

The World Bank and the World Health Organization estimate that 15 percent of the world's population—about one billion people—have a disability. And 80 percent of these people live in developing countries. On average, people with disabilities are poorer, and suffer more discrimination, exclusion and violence than the rest of the population. Women and girls with disabilities often face double discrimination due to long-standing gender inequalities, and higher risk of physical and sexual violence.

What is more, we all lose when people with disabilities are excluded. A World Bank study on Bangladesh estimated the cost of excluding people with disabilities and their carers from schooling and employment at USD 1.2 billion annually, or 1.7 percent of gross domestic product. The Bangladesh Household Income and Expenditure

Survey (HIES) of 2016 estimated that almost seven percent of the population are disabled in some form.

The data exists but needs to be better used to give a clear picture of the needs and priorities of people with disabilities. We need information on the lived experience of disability, and how this affects social inclusion and access to services, such as health and education, and to employment. It should not be a matter of luck whether people with disabilities receive the support and services they need.

The situation is challenging but we have all seen the hope, joy and success

The Charter for Change commits signatories to ensuring the rights, freedoms, dignity and inclusion of people with disabilities. It acknowledges important progress in the decade since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. But the Charter commits us to do more, to strive for real change and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for people with disabilities.

There is a real opportunity for Bangladesh to make a difference, with its strong disability legislation: the signature and ratification of the United Nations

society organisations. We also welcome the government's commitment to a comprehensive disability survey, which we believe will generate vital information to ensure the plan works and improves people's lives.

For the UK, we are bringing fresh energy to our work in Bangladesh to support people with disabilities, to enable them to reach their true potential, helping them and the whole country prosper. In our UKAid programmes and the British Council's cultural work, we listen to and prioritise people living with disabilities, helping to tackle poverty, skills building and jobs, education, health and justice. In



A scene from the drama "A Different Romeo and Juliet" which was performed by a differently-abled cast.

that is possible when the barriers are swept away. So #NowIsTheTime.

Today at the Global Disability

Summit, the UK's Secretary of State for International Development, the Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, along with the government of Kenya and the International Disability Alliance are championing the removal of those barriers. The summit brings together global leaders and technology companies to tackle the barriers that prevent people with disabilities in the world's poorest countries from reaching their full potential.

We welcome the government of Bangladesh's commitment to launch a new National Plan of Action, currently at the final stage of approval. This will lay out key actions to implement the law. We applaud that the plan has been drafted in consultation with disabled people's organisations as well as civil

our diplomacy and advocacy, we champion inclusion and empowerment and the rights and needs of people with disabilities, stressing their contributions, economic and social, to society.

Now is the time to act. Now is our opportunity. The British government is committed to working hand in hand with Bangladesh to deliver rights, freedoms, dignity and inclusion for all people with disabilities.

Alison Blake CMG is British High Commissioner to Bangladesh. Jane Edmondson is Head of DFID-Bangladesh. Barbara Wickham OBE is Country Director, British Council Bangladesh.