AGE OF INNOCENCE

CARTOON: SYED RASHAD IMAM TANMOY

NEWS DISCOURSE SURROUNDING A STUDENTS' MOVEMENT

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"They should have taken our demands seriously, but they didn't," Imran Ahmed, a protesting student, told Al Jazeera on August 3, the fifth day of mass student protests demanding safe roads.

This frustration was widely felt throughout the protesting student body, often labelled as *komol moti kishor-koshori* (naïve teenagers) by adults in power and in mainstream news channels. Many policymakers did not take them seriously at first, refusing to go down to the protests and hear them out. In several news channels, however, cabinet members did discuss the students—and it is interesting to observe how talk show hosts and policymakers chose to talk about these events developing throughout the week.

Earlier in the movement, when students were pressing onto their nine-point demand ensuring road safety, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, preferred using the term *amar chhatro bondhura* (my student friends) to refer to the protestors. His choice of words was gentle and approachable, hinting at possibilities of some sort of friendly alliance between the students and the minister who received majority of the backlash from the students for dismissively laughing at the tragedy of the student deaths. Yet his address did not suggest a complete acknowledgment of the student protestors as his equal—it resonated with the commonly used *chotto bondhura* (little friends), which contains a coaxing tone rather than genuine willingness to welcome dialogue. This sort of coaxing is usually applied when communicating to an audience significantly naïve, like in a magic show, or in Mustafa Monowar's children's programmes on BTV. Therefore, it is apparent that from the very beginning of the movement, politicians and news channels were speaking about the protestors as if they were infants.

The seeming infantilisation led to further assumptions being imposed on a very legitimate protest. Cabinet ministers and even television hosts adopted a rhetoric that the protests rose from an emotional standpoint, a result of childish wilfulness. While several ministers expressed solidarity with the cause, they still refused to engage in dialogue with the teenagers. Upon being questioned as to why during Ekattor TV's

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