

An overreaction

Release the journalist

A journalist was arrested and another one sued under the much-criticised law, Digital Security Act, in Khulna for their reports based on information collected from official source. This stands in stark contrast to the repeated promise by the government that journalists wouldn't be targeted by the law.

During election, particularly on the day of voting, there is a clutter of information and a volume of statistics every moment, and it's not unusual that errors may occur while handling the information. Errors are corrected as soon as they are detected. Journalists, too, make errors that are inadvertent. In this particular case, the error occurred at source, meaning the election officials. Why is it so that the journalists were automatically held responsible for what happened and the matter treated as a crime?

The error in question is a minor one that could easily be corrected or even retracted. Therefore, that the government officials have resorted to a draconian law to punish two journalists for an allegedly erroneous report whose source were the electoral officers is disturbing. The heavy-handed and overreaction betrays a complete lack of understanding as to how journalism works. The actions, moreover, seemed to be more about infusing fear rather than meting out justice. We resent the way the journalist was treated as if he was a dangerous criminal.

This particular situation has created more misgivings, in the minds of the media in particular. It puts the government in a negative light, which is unwarranted. We, therefore, urge the government to take measures to withdraw the case and look at the matter for what it really was: a simple act of error.

We are happy to know that the journalist was released on bail in the evening. However, he should not have been arrested in the first place.

Forex reserves get help from remittances

Crackdown on informal channels bearing fruit

REMITTANCE inflow has recorded a sharp rise in the last fiscal which rose to a record USD 15.53 billion (and increase of USD 2 billion from 2017) could not have come at a better time, especially since the country has been facing a decline in its foreign exchange (Forex) reserves. This increase has been made possible primarily due to increased monitoring by the central bank (BB) which has taken measures to crackdown on informal channels like *hundi* that had traditionally been used by our workers abroad to send money home. The fact that banks have introduced higher commissions for remitters to repatriate money using the legal financial system has also helped beef up inward remittances.

As the country moves forward with its many development and commercial projects, there have been increased payments made in foreign exchange for a host of imports, which have left the banks scrambling for dollars. While BB has regularly been injecting Forex into the market to stabilise it, experts believe that the increased monitoring on money laundering (especially for inward remittance) should be an ongoing one.

We have millions of expatriate workers and if they can remit their hard-earned money through formal channels (which must be made competitive in terms of financial charges), then the economy will be greatly benefitted. Although it is difficult to estimate precisely how many billions of dollars flow into Bangladesh as undeclared remittance, every effort must be made by authorities to shut down illegal channels since inward remittance remains one of the main drivers of the country's economic growth.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Don't smoke in public

Everyone is well aware of the fact that smoking is seriously detrimental to one's health. As per the instruction of the World Health Organisation, the government has made it mandatory for all cigarette manufacturers to tag the warning sign which says that "smoking is detrimental to health" on cigarette packets.

Scientists are in consensus that smoking increases the risk of many acute diseases such as cancer, heart disease, liver damage and bronchitis. These diseases are very expensive to treat.

Even those around a smoker are susceptible to being harmed. In addition, for many non-smokers, it's an extremely discomforting experience to have someone smoking around—especially in public transport. Considering this, the government has banned smoking in public places.

However, due to the lack of enforcement, the rules are barely adhered to. We often find people smoking in public, causing discomfort to others. We cannot expect law enforcers alone to curb this practice wholly. Smokers themselves should realise how their conduct affects others and refrain from causing harm to non-smoking people, especially children.

Zillur Rahaman, By e-mail



Sheikh Hasina's fourth term And expectations that come with it

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

IT is the huge gaps in the numbers of votes polled by the winners and the losers in the 11th national election that apparently unveiled a "controlled and patterned" nature of the process of polls.

A foreign media commentator wondered why any "control" was exercised over BNP activists since the announcement of election schedule in September last. In his opinion, the ruling coalition or *Mahajote* contestants would have won by a handsome margin without keeping BNP workers at bay anyway! More so when the BNP was waffling and unprepared!

In fact, a hundred BNP candidates' deposits have been forfeited as they couldn't even secure one-tenth of their adversaries' tally. In BNP's last election debacle when they had around 30 seats, deposits of only 10 contestants were forfeited.

But I have a commonsensical point to flag about the veracity of "fairness" or otherwise of the polls. The question that invariably crosses the mind is whether it was physically possible for one man or a group of observers to be simultaneously present in more than 40,000 polling

centres and be reporting their impressions! So it fundamentally devolves on the institutions—the EC, presiding officers, other polling officers and law enforcement personnel—to maintain and enforce the integrity of the election proceedings. They are empowered, trained and equipped to be doing so.

As for others—for all practical purposes—there would have been snapshot views to be joined in a narrative that obviously fell short of portraying a whole picture.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after casting her vote at Dhaka City College centre on December 30, 2018.

FILE PHOTO

All this underscore the imperative need for inquest into complaints which in the first place should have been formally lodged with the presiding officers in writing along with proof, to begin with. This is part of the post-election follow-up at the election tribunal with legal remedies available higher up.

That said, Sheikh Hasina's claim to re-election was solidly and invincibly based on her successful holding of the trial of Bangabandhu's assassins and that of Pakistani collaborators charged with the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Most of them have

been convicted and punished. Also the trial of the assassination of four national leaders—Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam, Captain Mansur Ali and Syed Kamaruzzaman—has been in progress. It has to be brought to a conclusion. This cannot be lost on anybody that in the ultimate analysis without Sheikh Hasina the stride we have made in resurrecting the Liberation War values in tangible terms would have been a far cry. There is more to be done; clearly with her at the helm, the younger generations would be imbued with love for the motherland

anchored in the war of independence. Human resource will have to be built up for its own sake to reap demographic dividends. We are in a race with time; we have a window of maybe one and a half decades to haul up the dividends home. To make democracy work, we need a functional parliament, an area where we have been found increasingly wanting in spite of successive elections. As for the just-concluded election, no viable opposition has been thrown up, only a medley of disjointed voices. There is therefore a suggestion for encouraging constructive discourse, even dissent within and outside of parliament. May

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SM MEHEDI AHSAN

BANGLADESH has performed significantly well in attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) compared to many other countries in the world. But over the last couple of decades, the country has undergone rapid and massive urbanisation—where currently 37 percent of the total population live in urban areas of which one third (around 2.4 crore) of people live in the squalor of slums, and this figure is expected to increase to around 4.5 crore by 2030.

In pursuit of upholding the progress made to attain the MDGs to be sustained for SDGs as well, SDG 11 highlights the importance of making cities and human

changes. In Bangladesh, the rate of growth in urban areas is at a staggering value of four percent annually, which happens to be more than 2.5 times the rate of growth in the rural areas. One outcome of this is that rural-to-urban migration is taking place at a higher rate which is further aggregated by climate change—both slow-onset events like increasing temperature and sea level rise, salinity intrusion as well as sudden onset events like cyclones and storm surges. The global scientific community has said that due to climate change, the frequency and intensity of extreme events increase.

Deniers can raise doubt about the facts related to climate change and even question the correlation between climate change and disaster risks. But the harsh

prioritise and think of ways to work on rural development or rural poverty reduction. In Bangladesh, there are many who have negative views about urban development as well as urban poverty reduction because they believe that urban development is a competitor to rural development; it is believed that village-to-city migration is an impedance towards development and should be reversed along with the thought that slum improvement and urban poverty reduction programmes will be acting to pull more people to the cities.

Several past governments initiated numerous programmes aiming to pull back the urban poor to their rural origin. But in reality, the situation of urban poverty remains unchanged and even



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settlements inclusive, safe and resilient. In order to deal with the challenges of urban poverty, Bangladesh has to fulfil other major goals including SDG 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10 and 13 that focus on other pertinent issues such as hunger, health, education, employment opportunities and others in the urban areas which essentially indicate that there is an innate connection between all SDGs in pursuing sustainable and inclusive urbanisation of the country.

Urbanisation is identified as both a cause and a consequence of economic growth. The concept of urbanisation has been identified to be as such that it is an irreversible and robust process that is interlinked with socio-economic

reality is that we cannot be ignorant of the aftermaths of the extreme events—like hundreds and thousands of people being affected by river erosions, which is an annual occurrence, causing heavy losses and forcing people to migrate to urban areas. Considering this, it can be projected that the number of the urban poor will soon exceed the number of the rural poor. Poverty anywhere in Bangladesh will be a major threat and obstacle in achieving the SDGs. Thus, it is overwhelmingly clear that special attention is required to address the concerns of urban poverty.

A major proportion of the population is still spread around in the rural areas of Bangladesh and there is no reason not to

their numbers have been constantly been on the rise. The urban planning and service providing authorities usually treat the slum population as illegal occupants of the city and, as a result, the poor urban settlements often remain invisible and even their basic needs remain unfulfilled.

We can observe in the status quo that several urban poverty reduction projects and programmes have already been implemented by a few of the government agencies and several NGOs with financing from both government and development partners since the mid-1980s. Major lessons learnt from these projects are that for developing and implementing any urban poverty

we lend our voice in amending Article 70 to allow for any individual ruling party MP to express his opinion freely on an issue as long as it is rational, progressive and amounts to value addition to the parliamentary discourse?

Article 70 on vacation of seat or resignation etc. states: "1) A person elected as MP at an election at which he was nominated as a candidate by a political party shall vacate his seat, if he resigns from that party or votes in parliament against the party.

Explanation—if a member of parliament - a) being present in parliament abstains from voting or - b) absents himself from any sitting of parliament, ignoring direction of the party which nominated him at the election as a candidate not to do so, he shall be deemed to have voted against the party."

Article 70 has been independently made in the Constitution as an anti-defection law or in other sense all the conditions of Article 70 have been designed to prevent floor-crossing (or group forming).

Several amendments made to the original Article in the 1972 Constitution to render it cast-in stone will have to be hewn to create an aperture for critiquing government policy.

The parliamentary standing committees could be another avenue. The incumbent prime minister had introduced their heading by MPs including opposition members of parliament. Yet, the standing committees' role needs further strengthening beyond the mere advisory one. Perhaps we could empower the important committees along the lines of the US Congress or the British House of Commons.

On a positive note 22 female MPs, two of them new (will) have taken oath as lawmakers. Of them 19 are from the ruling Awami League. They add on invaluable to the women MPs on reserved quota.

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reduction programme, the urban poor themselves should be put in the driving seat. The evidence shows that the urban poor are in fact active and creative; they are dynamic agents of change and it has been observed that wherever they have been empowered to carry out a task, they have proven their ability to identify, prioritise and plan to solve issues on their own, by valiantly participating in the execution and steering of measures for their own improvements. The new generation of urban poverty reduction initiatives should be built on the basis of the lessons learnt, should focus more on security of land tenure and housing solutions and not be isolated from pathways to sustainable urbanisation.

Efficient urban poverty reduction does not only require the clear understanding of the multidimensionality and comprehensiveness of urban poverty, but also the complexities of the urban system. Achieving the goal of urban poverty reduction requires effective urban planning and management practice that is properly equipped and provides decisive powers over the allocation of funds. Otherwise, sustainable and inclusive urbanisation will remain a dream and will never materialise.

Achieving the SDGs requires the taking of responsibility by everyone and thus SDG 17 is exclusively formulated to emphasise that there should be strong collaboration and partnership between parties. Thus different political parties, government agencies, academics etc. should focus on this to bring about meaningful change that would help reduce urban poverty.

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