

# Requesting the SC to recall its 'request'

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 motion in any democracy as to the need for an informed public for a judicious function of democracy itself. Given the scholarship, judicial acumen and years of experience of our Supreme Court, we would like to believe that this "request" is NOT the product of our learned judiciary but more the product of the judicial bureaucracy, who like all bureaucracies everywhere else, wants to control freedom rather than see it flourish.

We say so because our judges have always been pro-freedom, pro-democracy and champions of freedom of speech and of the press.

The reason we say that this "request" couldn't have come from our Supreme Court judges is that the implication of the "request" is nothing short of death for court reporting. It will lead to shrouding of the judicial process and whatever goes on in the courts into the darkness of night forever depriving it of the "light" of public scrutiny.

One very serious distinction needs to be made at this point. The media never passes opinions or comments about ongoing cases. If it does, then that is wrong, and the offending news outlet should be appropriately reprimanded, warned and as a last resort punished-in that order.

But to "request" that we should not cover court proceedings or report on ongoing cases is asking us to shut our ears, close our eyes, seal our mouth about everything that goes on in our courts. How can that be part of democracy?

Let us look back on some historical cases that media covered and how it helped raise public awareness about justice. One of the landmark cases of our time, and one that we followed with the keenest of interest during our early university days, was the so-called Agartala Conspiracy Case against Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1968. Every detail of the trial was covered by the media, which primarily consisted of the press at that time. The radio and the TV being government-owned toed the official line. No details were spared, including the arguments of both the prosecution and the defendant, and the accounts of the witnesses who took the stand. As the case proceeded, its fraudulent nature became more and more exposed and finally General Ayub's regime had to withdraw the case under public pressure. Without media coverage the outcome of that historic case might have been completely reverse. Can anybody deny that the cause of justice was served by a free media reporting factually and objectively on the case? Never was a

word uttered about the proceedings not being allowed a play in the media. No "request" was ever heard from the judiciary about not covering the "ongoing case".

Closer to the present, the eagerly awaited and much hoped for trial of the war criminals, were covered by every media - both print and electronic - on a daily basis over months and years that the trial lasted. Every day because of the media coverage people came to know how our freedom-loving people suffered in the hands of these war criminals who committed such heinous crimes against us and against humanity.

Would the people of Bangladesh have ever gotten the details of their atrocities if the media hadn't covered the trial?

Take the recent case of Limon and how he was brutalised and shot in the leg by law enforcers who thought they were above the law. However belated and whatever justice that Limon received was due obviously to the role of the judges greatly assisted by the media's coverage of the case.

The case of Jaha Alam, who was falsely jailed for two years due to mistaken identity and the reluctance of the relevant authorities to accept their fault, received full public sympathy because the case and its trial was covered by the media. The public repulsion for the injustice done to him strengthened his claim for compensation.

The trial of Bangabandhu's killers is another case in point.

Our highly respected Chief Justice told the law reporters on 9th April 2019, "Write what you see but you should remain careful so that the dignity and the image of the judiciary is upheld." (It may not be out of place to let our readers know that our Hon'ble Chief Justice acted as a court reporter of a renowned national daily during his days as an advocate.)

As to upholding the "dignity and image" of the courts, we in the media couldn't agree more with the Chief Justice. But for the stray and rare instances in some not so mainstream media, none of us would ever do anything that would remotely harm the dignity of the judiciary. For we know, through our own experience, that without a highly respected and independent judiciary that protects and restores our rights, media freedom and people's rights in general would all be in serious jeopardy. It is the judiciary that protects us from all forms of abuse of power. It is to them that we turn for protection when our constitutional rights are violated. So, we in the media, are with the Chief Justice in doing everything possible to protect and promote the dignity of the

courts.

However, an important question that needs to be asked is what truly enhances the image and dignity of the judiciary - writing on its performance or keeping it above public scrutiny? This is an old question that has both its supporters and detractors. It is not our wish to enter into that argument here except to simply ask, what happens when the judiciary itself does things that are detrimental to its own image and dignity? Is it being suggested that we shouldn't report on it at all? Suppose we agree to censor ourselves, does it ensure that the judiciary's image and dignity is preserved? Unfortunately, it risks doing exactly the opposite. Without exposure of "misconduct" it is likely that no corrective measure will be taken, which in time will grow to engulf the whole judiciary. Soon enough the fault of a few, or even one, will grow to destroy public confidence in the whole system - public confidence being the very foundation on which this grand edifice stands.

In the very rare instance of a particular case dealing with the judiciary itself whose extensive coverage may lead to tarnishing of the image of the judiciary, request may be made to the media to exert restraint in covering it.

But a blanket "request" not to cover any ongoing case is not acceptable to the press nor is it desirable for the judiciary itself.

There are judges in every country of the world, and everywhere the judiciary is being given a special status and respect, and correctly so. However nowhere, and we repeat nowhere, is the press prevented from covering the day-to-day trial proceedings of the courts.

We repeat, the media should not pass judgment or comment on the proceedings of the court. But it must report on it, factually and completely. And not being allowed to do so brings into question the very foundation of justice which states all are equal in the eyes of the law.

Whatever may have been the motivation behind the "request", it was a misconceived one, and it is our firm belief that our highest judiciary will see the implication of what has been "requested" and as such recall it before it does serious damage to our judiciary and to the public confidence in it.

We are heartened by the law minister's clarification of the issue. However, it would be better for all concerned if the same comes from the Supreme Court as the notice came from its registrar.

We request the personal intervention of the Hon'ble Chief Justice in this matter.

# Fixing

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 concerned, the HC said. The HC bench of Justice Sheikh Hassan Arif and Justice Razik-Al-Jalil came up with the verdict after hearing 15 separate writ petitions filed by several freedom fighters challenging the legality of the circulars and gazette notifications.

Citing the example of one of the writ petitioners Bir Protik Shahidul Islam Lal, his lawyer Omar Sadat said Lal fought in the Liberation War at the age of 10 and was awarded Bir Protik by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The government has so far changed the definition of freedom fighters 10 times and their list six times since the country's independence. A scrutiny of the war heroes' list is currently underway.

The ministry of liberation war affairs issued a circular and gazette notification in November 2016 imposing the minimum age of freedom fighters at 13 on March 26, 1971.

Delivering the verdict yesterday, the HC said the definition of the freedom fighters was determined by the President's Order 94 of 1972. It can be changed only by the parliament, not by a circular or gazette.

The President's Order 94 of 1972 does not allow the government to fix or re-fix the age of the freedom fighters, the HC said.

Selina Akhter Chowdhury, Omar Sadat, ABM Altaf Hossain, Eunus Ali Akond, Ayesha Akhter, ARM Kamruzzaman Kakan and Shuvrajit Banerjee and several other lawyers appeared for the writ petitioners, while Deputy Attorney General Mokhesur Rahman represented the state.

After the HC delivered the verdict, Omar Sadat told reporters, "We placed all the laws before the court and the court delivered the verdict scrutinising everything. The constitution and Banga-bandhu's speeches said he [Bangabandhu] summoned everyone to take part in the Liberation War regardless of their age, religion and caste. There was no provision of age there."

# PM tweaks

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 From now on, State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak will oversee the ICT Division and Shawpan Bhattacharjee, previously state minister for LGRD, will head the Rural Development and Cooperatives Division as a state minister.

Hasina formed a 47-member cabinet on January 7 this year after the 11th parliamentary polls.

Her new council of ministers includes 24 ministers, 19 state ministers, and three deputy ministers.

She dropped 34 members from her previous cabinet, including AL heavyweights Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Mohammed Nasim, and Matia Chowdhury, to induct 27 new faces and four former ministers into the council of ministers.

AL insiders said the PM picked the new faces from districts that had no ministers for a long time.

# 65-day ban

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 in the district are at the risk of being out of work as fishing is their only source of income.

Abul Kalam, a fisherman of Alipur area in Kalapara, was worried over how he would provide to his six-member family during this period as he had no alternative earning source.

Ansar Uddin Mollah, president of fish traders' association in Alipur fish landing station, said we already observed various protest programmes demonstrated by the fishermen.

We also submitted a memorandum to the prime minister urging her to reconsider the implementation of the ordinance, he added.

Asked if the government has any rehabilitation plan for the fishermen, DFO Emadullah said, "We have sent a proposal to the higher authorities to bring these people under Vulnerable Group Feeding programme during the ban."

# AL leader

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 case was underway at Bandarban Sadar Police Station, said Sub-Inspector Md Ziaur Rahman. "Saipo is initiating the case against unidentified people."

Ching's body was sent to the Bandarban Sadar Hospital for autopsy, SI Ziaur said. "Police were trying to find out the motive behind the killing."

On May 8, two members of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti got killed in the same neighbourhood. A day later, another member of the association was abducted and is missing till date.

Police are yet to arrest anyone in connection with the incidents that have triggered panic in the area.

"Ching was a supporter of the Awami League and his murderers must be held without delay," said AL Bandarban unit Secretary Md Islam Baby.

# Jute workers

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 ministry last week.

The government is considering to pay the arrears of the workers through their bank accounts to reduce their hassles in receiving payments and avoid misappropriation by alleged "ghost workers" in the jute mills, said Mizanur Rahman, secretary at the ministry of ministry of textiles and jute.

Earlier, BJMC sought Tk 337 crore to clear the arrears and wages of its 32,740 workers and employees.

Meanwhile, Sramajibi O Shilpa Rakkha Andolan, a newly launched labour rights combine, yesterday demanded that the government clear all arrears of the state-run jute mill workers by 20th Ramadan (May 26).

The labour leaders made the demands through a memorandum to the BJMC office in Motijheel around 11:30am.

BJMC Secretary AKM Tareque received the memorandum.

Earlier in the day, different workers' forums demonstrated in front of the BJMC building.

Speaking at a rally, Manzurul Ahasan Khan, convener of the Sramajibi O Shilpa Rakkha Andolan, said, "The government is out to destroy the jute industry following the prescriptions of the World Bank and the IMF."

"Government has been implementing the privatisation process of state-owned jute mills by not allotting necessary funds, by not modernising the production technologies, and by nurturing corruption," alleged the convener of the platform.

Jolly Takukder, general secretary of Garments Workers' Trade Union Centre, said, "We have seen how the largest jute mill -- Adamjee Jute Mill -- was shut down. While Adamjee was declared shut down, at least eight new jute mills (private) were launched."

Meanwhile, jute mill workers in Khulna region yesterday announced that they would extend the duration of their ongoing road-railways blockade programmes from Wednesday.

They will enforce blockade for six hours (8:00am to 2:00pm) everyday instead of the three hours a day.

Jute mills workers' leaders made the decision at a meeting held at Khalishpur Jute Mills Workers' Union office.

Murad Hossain, president of Crescent Jute mill workers' association, announced the programme following the meeting.

The jute mill workers in Rajshahi, Dhaka, and Chattogram did not demonstrate yesterday. All workers were reported to have joined work.

Since March 29, workers of 25 state-owned jute mills have been demonstrating to realise their nine-point demand, including

implementation of a new pay scale and payment of all arrears. This means a production loss of about Tk 13 crore a week, according to BJMC officials.

# Twelve coach

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 Al-Baraka Paribahan were fined in Sayedabad.

Manjur said they fined Himachal Paribahan Tk 20,000 for overcharging and Himalay Paribahan Tk 10,000 in Sayedabad for not providing quality service.

He said they would conduct the drive for the next two to three days and would not allow any coach or bus operators to charge extra, an allegation rampant during Eid rush.

Mosharraf Hossain, general manager of Hanif Paribahan, said they put up the fare chart at every counter. The manager of the Darussalam counter was not at the counter when the raid was conducted.

"The fare chart might have been in the manager's room. However, they will be watchful so that such a thing does not recur," he said.

# UN peacekeeper killed in Mali

AFP, United Nations

A Nigerian peacekeeper was killed Saturday in an attack on the United Nations' stabilization mission in Mali, the UN said.

The victim "succumbed to his wounds following the armed attack by unidentified assailants" in Timbuktu, a statement said. A Nigerian peacekeeper was also injured.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "deeply saddened" by the assault, which he said could amount to a war crime.

In a separate incident Saturday, three Chadian peacekeepers were wounded when their mine-protected vehicle hit an improvised explosive device in Tessalit, in Mali's Kidal region.

The UN's MINUSMA mission was established in Mali after radical Islamist militias seized the north of the country in 2012. They were pushed back by French troops in 2013.

A peace agreement signed in 2015 by the Bamako government and armed groups was aimed at restoring stability. But the accord has failed to stop the violence.

Since their deployment in 2013, more than 190 peacekeepers have died in Mali, including nearly 120 killed by hostile action -- making MINUSMA the UN's deadliest peacekeeping operation, accounting for more than half of blue helmets killed globally in the past five years.

# Conning jobseekers

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 They are receiving more complaints now and analysing them, he added.

In the first complaint, Narayan Chandra Barman from Lalmonirhat said he paid Tk 2 lakh to Shahid Al Islam on April 9 for arranging a bank job for his younger brother.

In the name of a medical test, they charged him an additional Tk 10,000. Narayan got disillusioned only when he took his brother to the bank on April 13.

"When I asked for my money back, they handed me a cheque of Tk 1 lakh, on April 18. When I went to cash it out, the bank officials said there was no money in the said account," Narayan told this newspaper.

Narayan then filed a complaint with the DB on April 21. Another incident involves Nurul Islam, a medical college admission seeker from Khulna. He filed the second complaint on May 9.

Nurul said he paid Tk 5 lakh to the managing director in December last year. "A neighbour gave me the address about the service centre. After we contacted them, they gave us assurance and took the money," he told The Daily Star.

"When I demanded a refund, they

refused. Then I went to police."

According to DB officials, Shainur started the so-called service in the name of Mehjabin Properties Ltd in Mirpur DOHS area a year back. The monthly office rent was Tk 18,000, and he used to pay Tk 1 lakh in salaries to his employees.

In his business card, Shainur also identified himself as the marketing director of Shadhin TV Ltd and Khulna division secretary of the so-called "international human rights anticorruption crime investigation society".

During interrogation, Shainur told detectives that he failed to continue education after his higher secondary school certificate (HSC) exams. He was a rickshaw-puller a few years back, said DB Inspector Rahat, also investigating officer of the case.

Later, Shainur contacted an outsourcing company and found himself a cleaning job at a private bank. In the same way, he arranged jobs for some other people. A few days later, he opened his fraud business for easy money, according to DB officials.

DB Inspector Rahat said Shainur placed some brokers in remote areas, especially in the northern region and Khulna. The brokers used to collect

details and money from unwitting people, promising them jobs in Dhaka, he said.

"For the service, the broker would get a 30 percent cut," he said.

When the jobseekers reached Shainur's office, he would interview them himself. If anyone failed, he would charge Tk 10,000-20,000 as penalty and asked them to come back again after a few days, the DB official said, quoting the arrestees.

When the applicant came back and passed the "exam", Shainur asked them to go back home. Weeks later, he would prepare an appointment letter and send it by post to the candidate's house, said Inspector Rahat.

"We recovered dozens of appointment letters from Shainur's office. They carry signatures of secretaries and high officials. We found all of them to be fake," Ahsan Khan, additional deputy commissioner of DB police, told The Daily Star.

A case was filed against the five with Pallabi Police Station.

During interrogation, the arrestees gave some names, and detectives are looking for them. "We will submit the charge sheet after arresting the brokers," said Ahsan.

# Bio-glue

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 "No current existing clinical products can stop operative heart bleeding so quick and efficiently," lead researcher Hongwei Ouyang told the New Scientist magazine.

The light-activated glue repaired cuts in pig hearts and stopped them bleeding in less than 30 seconds, experiments showed. The researchers believe it could now be used on humans.

The glue is largely made from water and gelatin. After being activated with ultraviolet light it quickly seals and forms a rubbery, waterproof seal.

During experiments, scientists punctured holes in four pig hearts using a needle and then applied the glue to the wounds. After the wounds healed, the glue, which mimics soft human tissues, is naturally absorbed by the body so there is no need for stitches.

It is the first time medical glue has proved strong enough to withstand such high pressure.

Writing in the journal Nature, the scientists said it could be used in pressures "significantly higher" than in most clinical settings.

# Kushtia DC

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 (DC) Aslam Hossain, who told this reporter that he had been directly involved in the procurement process since last Wednesday.

"All steps have been taken so that original farmers can directly sell their paddy," the DC said.

"We need to emphasise on providing support to marginal farmers who are not able to store their products," he said, adding that he had instructed all concerned officials to communicate with the listed farmers so that there was no chance of brokers' infiltration.

Since he inaugurated the procurement on Wednesday, a total of 90 tonnes of paddy have so far been procured from six upazilas of the district.

He said a total of 1,024 tonnes of paddy would be procured from the en-tire district. The beneficiaries will be the 2,440 listed farmers with an option of selling not more than three tonnes each. It was in line with the government's decision of procuring 1.5 lakh tonnes of paddy from farmers across the country this Boro season.

DC Aslam admitted that "it is very little amount" they were procuring considering the cultivation of a projected 145,000 tonnes of Boro paddy on

35,315 hectares of land this year by nearly 2,200 farmers in the district.

"But it will help ease the ongoing unstable price situation of paddy," he added.

Speaking to The Daily Star, the designated upazila agriculture and food officials of the district said they were in contact with the listed farmers and also giving necessary instructions like drying the paddy properly so that the amount of moisture in the paddy was maintained for storing pur-poses.

"We are telling the farmers to dry the paddy properly before taking it to our warehouses," said Manwar Hossain, the district's food controller.

He said this paddy would be kept at the warehouses for at least one month.

"Local administration and local public representatives are helping in this regard," he added.

Asked about the fund for the procurement of rice, Manwar said the mon-ey had already been allocated by food ministry to all government banks in favour of the food offices.

He also said the farmers can withdraw their money by depositing the cheques in their bank accounts in any government bank.