

Elites hogging political power

Experts say; businessmen MPs call the shots

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Elites are capturing the country's democratic institutions for their own business interests, reducing space for the poor and the marginalised to speak up for themselves.

"The problem of countries like Bangladesh is that we are witnessing not just inequalities in income and social disparity, but we are basically seeing how elites are really appropriating political power. This is manifested in the composition of parliament," Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan said at a programme yesterday.

He also said the main source of income of the majorities of the parliamentarians was business.

Prof Rehman was speaking at a dialogue on "What type of democratic practices are suitable for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)". The programme was organised by the CPD at Gardenia Hall in the capital's Gulshan.

Democratic institutions have become "subject to elite capture", he said, adding, "Not just here, it is [happening] in many countries in other regions, including Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa".

The problem is people with resources get elected and then they use the public mandate as an instrument for their businesses, instead of using the political power for implementing the SDGs.

Their primary mission tends to be private accumulation, or in fact, building up resources in support of particular parties, he added.

His comments came during the dialogue between participants.

The participants said Bangladesh suffers from democracy deficits and that SDGs could not be achieved without ensuring peoples' participation, civil, and political rights and rule of law.

They said issues of public interests are now least discussed and debated in parliament, which should not be the case.

Lawmaker Rashed Khan Menon said the main theme of the SDGs is nobody should be left behind.

"But if we look at the [proposed] budget placed in parliament and the discussions on it, we will find that many of the people are left behind," he said.

"The parliament that we have, I would like to say, does not discuss real issues. The issues about the poor people," said Menon, president of Workers Party of Bangladesh.

He cited a Dhaka University research that said parliament, on an average, SEE PAGE 8 COL 2

Killer sought

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Prashad Shaha in a genocidal attack.

Mahbubur Rahman, 69, a Razakar of Tangail's Mirzapur, was found guilty in all three charges and given the death penalty in all charges of act of genocide in which 60 Hindu men were killed.

"It is a grave shame indeed that the accused and his accomplices including his father Wadud Moulana [now dead] and brother Mannan [now dead] being Bengali, instead of acting to safeguard the defenseless civilians including a noble person like RP Shaha opted to join the criminal enterprise intending to facilitate and participate in wiping them out in a brutal manner, with genocidal intent," the tribunal said.

The tribunal, however, said, "The barbaric annihilation of RP Shaha could not bring his dogma and pious thought to an end."

Convict Mahbubur was the son of Abdul Wadud alias Wadud Moulana, the chairman of Mirzapur Peace Committee, an anti-liberation organisation. He and his brother Abdul Mannan were involved in Razakar Bahini, an auxiliary force of the Pakistan army in 1971, according to the investigators.

Tribunal Chairman Justice Md Shahinur Islam and members Justice Amir Hossain and Justice Md Abu Ahmed Jamadar read out the summary of the 235-page verdict in the presence of Mahbubur, a Jamaat-e-Islami follower, RP Shaha's family members, the prosecution, investigator and defence teams, and journalists.

After the verdict, Srimati Shaha, widow of victim Bhabani Prashad, said, "We have been waiting 48 years for this day. We are happy that we got justice even after 48 years."

Rajiv Prasad Shaha, grandson of RP Shaha, said, "We have been passing days with a pain. We feel much relieved today."

Prosecutor Rana Dasgupta said they were happy as they could prove all the three charges.

However, state-appointed defence counsel Gazi MH Tamim said his clients did not get justice and would file an appeal with the Supreme Court.

According to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, a war crimes convict can file an appeal with the Supreme Court within 30 days from the date of the verdict delivery.

With the latest judgement, the war crimes tribunals have so far delivered 38 verdicts against 88 people. Of them, 62 have been sentenced to death.

OFFENCES AND PUNISHMENT

According to the first charge, Mahbubur, along with father, brother and local Razakars and Pakistan army men, raided "Kumudini Complex" in

Mirzapur on May 7, 1971, to look for RP Shaha.

As they did not find him, they humiliated doctors, nurses, teachers, students and employees there. They then attacked Hindu-dominated villages -- Baimhati, Andhara and Sarishadair -- and killed 33 Hindu men there.

The second charge says Mahbubur, along with local Razakars and Pakistan army men, raided RP Shaha's home in Khanpur of Narayanganj the same day.

From there, they abducted five people -- RP Shaha, his son, and three others -- and took them to Adamjee Burma Eastern Oil Depot. Since then, they could not be traced.

Mahbubur and his father, along with Razakars, picked up 24 Hindus from different villages in Mirzapur on May 15. Mahbubur later handed over the abductees to the Pakistan army who killed 22 of them after torture, the third charge read.

The tribunal awarded the death penalty to Mahbubur in three charges. The sentences would naturally be merged, the tribunal added.

"All the three attacks, as arraigned in three charges framed, involve the killing of numerous civilians of Mirzapur on account of their membership in Hindu religious group," the tribunal said.

"The events of massacre constituting the offence of genocide for which the accused has been found guilty is a minute portrayal of the horrific planned and designed genocide committed in the territory of Bangladesh in 1971."

DELAY IN TRIAL

About the defence's point of "delayed prosecution", the tribunal said, "The nation experienced that the military regimes in power after the brutal assassination of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975, did not care to respond to the cry of victims and sufferers of mass atrocities committed in 1971."

"Thus, the Act of 1973 [International Crimes (Tribunals) Act-1973] remained dormant for decades. The nation felt pained and helpless. It could not even raise its voice due to nature of state power existing at that time."

"The military regimes, which were gravely contradictory to the norms of recognised human rights, prolific governance, democracy and the rule of law, affected the society and the nation as well."

Besides, there is no limitation in bringing criminal prosecution, particularly when it relates to "international crimes" committed in violation of international humanitarian law and the laws of war, the tribunal added.



President Abdul Hamid, along with Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, hands over an award to Jharna Dhara Chowdhury for her lifelong contribution to social work, at the newspaper's 25th anniversary celebrations in 2016. An eminent Gandhian activist, Jharna Dhara passed away yesterday at the capital's Square Hospital. FILE PHOTO

Jharna Dhara no more

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complications, according to hospital sources. She was 81.

Jharna received the prestigious Padma Shri award (2013), Begum Rokeya Padak (2013), Gandhi Seva Puraskar (2010), Ekushey Padak (2015) and Jamnalal Bajaj Award (1998) for her outstanding contribution for the society.

The Daily Star awarded Jharna Dhara Chowdhury in 2016 to honour her lifelong devotion and commitment to the growth of Bangladesh.

An eminent social activist and secretary of the Gandhi Ashram Trust in Jayga, Noakhali, Bangladesh, Jharna Dhara Chowdhury was born on October 15, 1938 at Lakshmipur.

When she was eight, communal riots broke out between Muslims and Hindus, which forced her and her family to flee to Assam in India. Her house was burnt to ashes and many of her relatives were killed.

Though she came back to her village after the violence subsided, the communal riot left a deep scar in her

heart.

The brutality of the riots shocked Mahatma Gandhi too, which led him to rush to the region and go barefoot around villages for about four months preaching the ideals of communal harmony and non-violence until the clashes finally came to an end.

Moved by Indian independence leader Gandhi's principles, Jharna decided to follow his footsteps.

Although she never met Gandhi, her life was a saga of incessant experiments with the values that Mahatma stood for, and of assiduously following his philosophy.

In line with Gandhian belief that basic education is crucial in order to lift people out of poverty, she and her sister started a school for under-privileged children. She was 17 at the time.

Although they did not have prior experience or proper qualifications to run a school, their initiative was met with an overwhelming response. As they had no money to run the school, they would fast twice a week to save

some money to buy books and other items for the children.

But the school had to be closed down within a few years, after which Jharna became a full-time social worker.

She had lived and worked in Dhaka, Chattogram, Cumilla and many other parts of the country. Like many Gandhian followers, she stayed single to focus fully on her work.

In 1990, Jharna took over the responsibility of running the Gandhi Ashram Trust in Jayga, Noakhali.

It has become a centre for various activities, including training programmes for rural women to boost their income, free education for poor children and schemes for poverty alleviation.

The Ashram works steadfastly to maintain peace and harmony between different communities.

Meanwhile, President of Bangladesh Puja Uddjapon Parishad Milon Kanti Dutta and General Secretary Nirmal Kumar Chattarjee mourned her death.

Key accused used to stalk Rifat's wife

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arrested three in connection with the Rifat murder case. The three are Chandan, Hasan and Najmul Ahasan.

OC Abir said Najmul was not on the list of the 12 accused in the case filed by Rifat's father Dulal Sharif. Police detained him after examining a video clip of the incident.

Around 10:30am on Wednesday, Nayan and Farajee attacked 25-year-old Rifat, an internet service provider, with sharp weapons in front of Barguna Government College when Rifat and his wife Ayesha were leaving the college premises.

A video clip of the barbaric attack, probably captured on a mobile phone, went viral on social media, touching off a firestorm of public outrage with many condemning the bystanders for not coming forward to save Rifat. Ayesha alone desperately tried to save her husband from the attackers in vain.

The clip showed that the duo were hacking Rifat indiscriminately as Ayesha was trying to hold back one of the attackers.

Fatally injured Rifat was taken to Barishal Sher-E-Bangla Medical College Hospital (BSMCH) where doctors declared him dead at 3:30pm.

The doctors found at least eight stab marks in different parts of his body.

"The patient died from profuse bleeding," said Dr Jamil Hossain, one of the three members of the team that carried out autopsy on the victim.

Rifat was buried at his family graveyard at Boro Lobongola village in Burirchar union yesterday.

Talking to The Daily Star at her home in Barguna, Ayesha said, "He [Nayan] used to threaten me with dire consequences if I refused to go on



outing with him or take photographs with him. Sometimes, he would jump onto my rickshaw..."

As the frequency of his stalking increased, she informed the matter to her family members. They then married her off to Rifat two months ago.

"I was very happy. Rifat loved me a lot and so did I. We could not even think of living without each other," she mentioned.

But Nayan did not stop stalking her even after she married Rifat. She told her husband about it. "But I don't know whether something happened between the two [Nayan and Rifat] after that," she said.

When Ayesha and Rifat were leaving the college premises on Wednesday morning, Nayan and his men suddenly attacked Rifat. "I tried my best to save Rifat but all to no avail."

The attackers first grabbed Rifat as soon as she and her husband came out of the college. They started beating him. After a while, some of them left the scene and returned with sharp weapons. At one stage, one of the attackers named Nishan grabbed Rifat. Then Nayan and Farajee started hacking him, Ayesha said.

"I screamed for help, but no one came forward."

Seeking the prime minister's intervention in ensuring justice, she said, "I want justice. I want capital punishment for Nayan."

Jaism, a cousin of the victim, said Nayan and Rifat were classmates and passed SSC examinations from Barguna Government Zilla School in 2011. But their friendship was strained after Ayesha married Rifat.

"The murder was pre-planned," he alleged.

Monjurul Islam, a close friend of Rifat, said Nayan got furious at Ayesha's marriage to Rifat.

Nayan often stalked Ayesha on her way to college. He even posted some photos on his Facebook page recently. As Rifat protested the matter, Nayan got angry, said Monjurul.

Rifat's mother Daisy Begum sought justice, demanding capital punishment for all the attackers.

"My son was innocent and they killed him brutally. I want justice," she said after Rifat's body reached their Barguna house around 3:30pm from the BSMCH.

Rifat's namaj-e-janeza was held at a local mosque after Asr prayers.

SP Maruf said they were trying to arrest the other accused.

"We have set up several check posts at different points in the district so that they cannot escape," he said.

Deputy Inspector General of Police Shafiqul Islam said the spot was under CCTV coverage, and that they identified the attackers. "We hope all the accused will be arrested soon."

Meanwhile, students of Barguna Government College formed a human chain in front of the college yesterday, protesting the killing.

Locals blocked Barguna Sadar road for an hour from 1:00pm, demanding arrest of the killers.

Ex-health official, his wife sued for amassing Tk 284cr illegally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Suspended Directorate General of Health Services employees Abzal Hossain and his wife Rubina Khanam deposited about Tk 284 crore to different banks in the name of their business organisations.

The couple also withdrew the money from the banks through deception, the Anti-Corruption Commission has found.

ACC Deputy Director Toufique Islam yesterday filed two separate cases against the duo.

The ACC in January wrote a letter to the superintendent of police of Special Branch to make sure that the couple could not flee the country.

According to yesterday's case statements, Rubina founded Rahman Trade International and apparel store Rupa Fashion. In the name of the businesses, the couple opened several

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'HEADPHONE WALKERS'

535 killed by Dhaka trains since 2010

Say rail police

AFP, Dhaka

A total of 535 people have been killed since 2010 after being hit by trains while wearing headphones on tracks in and around the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, police said yesterday.

The mostly unfenced railways of the South Asian country of 165 million people are notoriously dangerous, with around 1,000 fatal accidents or suicides every year.

But police said in recent years "headphone walkers" have become a new menace as people walk on tracks listening to music or talking on mobile phones using earphones.

"Walking on railway tracks and putting on headphones is banned in the country. Still a lot of people ignore the ban and are killed by trains," Dhaka rail police chief Yeasin Faroque Mozumder told AFP.

Fatalities hit a record high in 2014 when 109 people died. Numbers have declined since thanks to an awareness campaign, but police said 54 people were still killed in this way last year.

Morshed Alam, the deputy railway police chief, said they have held awareness rallies and processions, distributing leaflets and warning people with loudhailers.

"But people still walk on the tracks as if they were unaware of fatal consequences," he said.

Hundreds of thousands of slum dwellers also live on land next to railway tracks in shacks made of tarpaulin and bamboo. Many makeshift food stalls are also dangerously close.

Alam said it is "impossible" to secure the tracks unless people cooperate with them.

According to police, nearly 6,000 people died in railway accidents and suicides on the country's 2,800-kilometres (1,730-mile) rail network in the last six and a half years.

In neighbouring India, home to one of the world's largest rail networks, some 25,000 people lose lives due to accidents and suicides on railways every year. There are however no specific figures on people killed while using headphones.

2 teachers held for raping 20 students

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Rab yesterday detained two high school teachers for their alleged involvement in rape of more than 20 female students of their school in Narayanganj Sadar.

The duo -- Ariful Islam, 30, assistant teacher of Oxford High School, and Rafiqul Islam Zulfikar, 55, headmaster of the same school -- were detained on the campus premises of the school.

Ariful had been teaching English and Mathematics at the school for last eight years. During the time, he had repeatedly raped more than 20 female students, mostly by blackmailing them with obscene images, alleged locals.

The occurrence came into the limelight as a ninth grader of the school complained to her family members that Ariful had been sexually harassing her for last couple of years. Hearing the allegation, agitating locals, along with complainant's father, went to the school and found objectionable pictures of female students in Ariful's mobile phone.

Alep Uddin, senior assistant director of Rab-11, said they went to the school on information that Ariful and Rafiqul were being beaten up by agitating locals. The law enforcers then detained the duo and took them into custody.

Ariful was detained on charge of rape and Rafiqul for assisting Ariful by keeping mum on the issue, the Rab official added.

Shaheen Sha Parvez, officer-in-charge of Siddhirganj Police Station, said the duo accepted their crimes in primary interrogation.

A case would soon be filed against the culprits, he added.



Family members of Ranada Prasad Shaha with their lawyers on the premises of the capital's International Crime Tribunal-1 yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

AFP, Lagos

Nigerian troops have thwarted a Boko Haram attack on a military formation in the volatile northeast, killing dozens of jihadists, the army said yesterday.

Fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in seven gun trucks and motorcycles stormed the base at Goniri, Yobe state on Wednesday evening, army spokesman Sagir Musa said in a statement.

The ambush "resulted in the annihilation of dozens of terrorists", while many fled with injuries, he said.

Five gun trucks, weapons and

rounds of ammunition were recovered from the jihadists, while their motorcycles were destroyed.

Musa did not say if the military lost soldiers in the encounter.

IS-affiliated Boko Haram has launched series of attacks on military bases and government targets in the northeast, leaving scores of troops dead.

In a related development, the Nigerian airforce said yesterday it had destroyed ISWAP formations at Kollaram, in nearby Borno state.

Wednesday's attack "was executed following series of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance

(ISR) missions, that showed the presence of a significant number of ISWAP fighters in buildings under trees spread across the settlement," it added.

Boko Haram's decade-long insurgency has killed 27,000 people and displaced about two million in Nigeria.

The rebellion has continued despite repeated government claims of progress.

The violence has also spilled over into neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon, prompting a regional military coalition to defeat the hardline jihadist group.