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We applaud the PM’s timely decision

Resignation can only be the beginning of Murad’s reprimand

We applaud the prime minister’s decision to ask State Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murad Hassan to resign from the cabinet for his offensive and derogatory remarks towards women. In a country where resignations of public officials—no matter the offences they commit—are a rarity, this swift action goes a long way towards demonstrating the prime minister’s commitment to upholding the rights of women and challenging misogyny even when it generates from her own party and cabinet.

Not only did Murad use sexist, racist and belligerent language unbefitting a public official against Khaleda Zia and her granddaughter in an interview and publicly humiliate a model during an event, he went so far as to threaten sexual violence against an actress when she refused to respond to his unwanted advances. He even warned her that he would use law enforcement officials against her. The fact that a cabinet member would misuse his power—and that of the state—so blatantly to intimidate a woman is appalling and unacceptable, to say the least, and calls into serious question the morality and sense of responsibility of those entrusted with running the country.

It is clear from the video and audio clips that have surfaced on social media that Murad’s immorality and misogyny were not isolated incidents. It begs the question: how many more women did he threaten, and how far did he actually go with them? How many times and to what extent did he misuse state machineries? We can all agree that his actions were repulsive, but more importantly, were they also criminal? Did he commit crimes against women, confident that he would get away with it because of his post?

Though timely and in itself a big step towards holding MPs and cabinet members accountable for their actions, resignation can only be the beginning of his castigation. There needs to be serious investigation into the accusations of his misuse of power to harass, humiliate and attempt to rape women, and exemplary action must be taken against him to send a clear message to all concerned that such revolting behaviour will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Call drop continues to be an annoyance

Give the users their money’s worth

ALTHOUGH users in Bangladesh cough out more per minute of talk on mobile phones than users in other countries of the region, the service, we feel, can be much better than what it is at present. People continue to be dogged by frequent disruptions in communications—technically known as call drop, without being adequately compensated. Although the volume of call drop has halved from the last fiscal year, in the 12 months up to June this year, users experienced disruptions of 52.59 crore talk-time minutes, according to a recent report of a committee formed by the BTRC to assess the quality of telecom services and the call drop issue. That translates to nearly 4.5 crore calls per month or nearly 40 lakh calls per day.

While there are both technical and systemic reasons for this, the most obvious is the fact that the number of towers does not meet the requirements of the increasing number of mobile and internet users in the country. Reportedly, very few new towers have been built in the last two years despite the fact that the number of mobile users has increased by about 20 million in the last couple of years. To compound the matter, the telecom operators use radio frequency for transmission and link instead of fibre optic cables, which are a far better vector for the purpose. In this regard, we believe the BTRC has a role to play by rescinding its order of 2011 preventing the use of fibre optic cables.

Call drops can be a nuisance. Anyone who has suffered it—and most of us have—will vouch that it is more than annoying, particularly during an emergency. Conversely, the service providers are not living up to their commitment to compensate the users fully for service disruption. They are, reportedly, giving back only 15 to 30 percent of the loss incurred by a user, a gross breach of the BTRC directive which stipulates that the users must be compensated in equal amount of the loss they incur. In another violation of the directive, only on-net call drops (on the same network) have been compensated, whereas off-net call drops (on other networks) have been ignored. The surprising aspect of the matter is that none of the major service providers possess up-to-date data on call drops. That is why it is not possible to determine exactly whether the rate of call drop is within the internationally accepted two percent.

The current situation admits of no excuse. The technical glitches must be removed. The regulatory provisions must be implemented stringently and oversight must be maintained strictly, and spectrum hoarding penalised. That is the only way to ensure that the users get their money’s worth.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Prevent another pandemic wave at all costs

Viruses constantly change through mutation. It was only a matter of time before another mutated, more contagious variant of the coronavirus came out—and as far as we are aware, Omicron is one such variant.

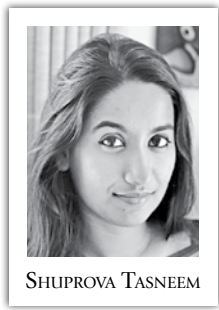
The world has already greatly suffered because of the coronavirus pandemic. And just when everyone was starting to feel optimistic that the worst was behind us, the new variant started to spread across the world.

Our government should ensure that this new variant does not create havoc in our country. To prevent another pandemic wave, we must all maintain social distancing and follow the health guidelines such as mask wearing, etc.

Fatema Rupa, Khulna University

Murad’s mind-numbing misogyny

Is forced resignation enough punishment for a member of cabinet who issues rape threats?



STATE Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murad Hassan has been made to resign from his post, at the specific instructions of the prime minister of Bangladesh, and women across the country who have been following the recent developments in this regard have breathed a collective sigh of relief. We are grateful to the PM for her swift and decisive actions, demonstrating that there is no place in her cabinet for members who make such vile and misogynistic comments in public spaces and brazenly display a total lack of respect for women, without even a second thought to what the consequences may be.

For anyone not clued into the recent controversy, a quick recap. The first video of the ex-minister that was widely circulated on social media, about six days ago, consisted of him hosting an event where he calls a model onto stage and goes on to comment on her “zero figure”. His failed attempts to be witty are met with scattered laughter and the woman in question becomes increasingly uncomfortable, at one point visibly recoiling as he advances towards her—not the sort of behaviour that anyone would expect from a member of cabinet, but also not the sort of behaviour that we expected one to get fired for, because men in this country have done so much worse.

The second video surfaced a day later, where he brings up the granddaughter of the leader of BNP and calls her a slut, among other things, and also questions the paternity of the opposition leader’s son. (These might not be the sort of words one expects to read in a reputed newspaper. Then again, they are also not words that one expects to hear from the mouth of a cabinet member). His comments become more and more vile, while the interview host, who runs a Facebook page called NahidRains Pictures, eggs him on and sniggers at every disgusting comment—although he has now done a full 360 and changed his tune, even going so far as to congratulate the government for

not tolerating Murad’s “arrogance and obscenity”. At one point, Murad brags about how obscene he really can be, saying if he gets started, he can make your eardrums burst with his language. A strange sort of brag from a member of parliament.

As expected, the country’s feminist organisations immediately took a stand and condemned Murad’s comments. In their press release, Naripokkho asked, “how can a public representative and a member of cabinet not only make such misogynistic and racist comments, but also take pride in them?” And although we fully shared in their astonishment, many of us did wonder—would this

in Murad’s coffin was the release of a phone conversation with two film actors, the contents of which are impossible to repeat here, except to clarify that what he said, without a doubt, counts as a threat of sexual violence. As this voice clip made the rounds from Monday, criticism of this controversial public figure increased and spread like wildfire as we all continued to discuss—how can this not move party leaders to act? Will this finally spell the end for Murad Hassan?

Once again, we applaud the government for setting our fears to rest. In this instance, we must personally commend the prime minister, since

there is “no question” of him issuing an apology. This is not only after he had been found making vulgar and sexist personal comments about the opposition leader and her family, using the sort of language and rhetoric that has no place in the political spaces of any decent society, regardless of how charged and competitive those spaces may be. This is after he had been caught threatening to abduct an actress after she had refused his advances, by employing members of the law enforcement and intelligence agencies. This is a public representative, whose job is to work for the people of this country—threatening to use the forces who are there to protect the same people he is meant to work for, in order to drag a woman to his bed to be raped. This is a member of parliament, claiming that he is able to abuse his power to the extent of using the arms of the country’s justice system to commit a violent crime against a citizen of this country.

Will this same man be allowed to stand up in parliament and speak for us? What does this tell us about the leaders of this country, and about the sanctity of our legislative assembly? Does that mean more men like Murad will be allowed to represent us, or worse, that they already do? And if that is the case, if we really have policymakers who are willing to sit in the same house with men like Murad—who are okay with political representatives who cannot even treat women as human beings, let alone treat them with respect—how can we ever expect to achieve our rights as equal citizens of this country?

I would also like to point out that while Murad Hassan was making violent and misogynistic comments online, he was doing so with the pictures of the prime minister and the Father of the Nation in the background. We must remember that he is not only a representative of the government, but of a party whose roots go back to the very creation of this country. At a time when Bangladesh is celebrating Bangabandhu’s birth centenary and the 50th anniversary of liberation, what does this say about us as a nation if a man like Murad continues to be a member of Bangabandhu’s party?

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ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

be enough to land him in trouble? In a country where an MP can stand up in parliament, in the very seat of our democracy, and argue that scanty clothes and too much liberation is the reason behind women being raped—where a judge can imply that rape victims who consent to drinking, dancing and partying are also consenting to being raped—would a state minister be reprimanded for his offensive and misogynistic comments? Or would this be laughed off and accepted as one of those “boys will be boys” (read: men will be toxic and misogynistic with impunity) situations?

It is now clear that the final nail

the initial comment from the Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, of how Murad’s views were “personal” and did not represent the party or the government, filled us with dismay. Yet, only a few hours later, after a conversation with the PM, he disclosed to reporters that Murad Hassan has been asked to resign from the cabinet.

However, we feel compelled to ask, especially given the initial lack of outrage from the only party representative commenting on the issue—is this enough punishment for Murad Hassan? When criticism of his comments began to mount, Murad’s first reaction to the press was that

COP26: Deepening chasms between reality and expectations

LAMIA MOHSIN

AS the world’s biggest conference on climate change drew to an end last month in Glasgow, we cannot but help look back at what was said and heard. For Bangladesh and all other climate vulnerable countries, COP26 carried a lot of significance, keeping in mind its national and regional interests.

Over the past decades, Bangladesh’s tryst with extreme climatic events have continued to increase in terms of intensity and frequency, proven by the regular experiences of floods, cyclones, storm-surges, and droughts. Moreover, the recently published sixth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has sent out a clarion call for the world, citing that “tipping points”



Over the past decades, Bangladesh’s tryst with extreme climatic events have continued to increase in terms of intensity and frequency. PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

in the form of consequences of climate change, such as melting ice sheets, rising seas, loss of species, and acidic oceans, will be irreversible. The findings of the report are far from hope-inducing, and are being considered as a stern warning for global leaders who need to take meaningful actions to keep global temperatures from rising well below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Priorities for Bangladesh

For Bangladesh, COP26 was of utmost importance this year. The four key climate agendas advocated by Bangladesh included the following: i) Countries that are playing the biggest role in carbon emissions need to formulate and implement a specific ambitious plan

in the form of National Determined Contribution (NDC); ii) To reduce the damage caused by climate change, the developed countries must set up a pledged fund of USD 1 billion annually and allocate half of it for adaptation and mitigation; iii) Developed countries need to extend a helping hand to the most vulnerable countries by providing clean and green technology at affordable prices while considering the development needs of Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) countries; and iv) The issue of financial and materialistic climate induced loss and damage must be addressed, including sharing of global responsibilities for migrants displaced by rising sea levels, rising salinity, river erosion, floods, and droughts.

COP26 shaped a few successful

This year, the US, Japan, Norway, Sweden and others announced new climate finance pledges, but the USD 100 billion goal is still elusive and likely won’t be met until 2022 or 2023.

fund—two million pounds—a sign that many thought could pave the way for more nations to join in. Developing nations argued, at the very least, a COP26 agreement to establish a fund, or “facility” in UN jargon, with details to be worked out in the years to come. But during negotiations, the idea ran into a brick wall. Wealthier countries, including the US, didn’t support it. Instead, a final compromise was agreed that discussions, named the “Glasgow dialogue”, will begin between nations about how loss and damage funding might work.

Fossil fuels

World leaders have met 26 times since the 1990s to hash out complex climate agreements. While COP delegates have called for increased use of cleaner energy sources, they’ve shied away from explicitly calling on the world to stop using fossil fuels. Oil-and-coal-producing countries like Saudi Arabia and Australia have historically objected to any mention of phasing them out. This has been one of the biggest failures of this year’s COP26, as the legacy of coal-fired emission continues.

Yet, despite contributing to just 0.47 percent of global emissions, Bangladesh has taken a commendable decision to cancel 10 coal-fired power plant projects worth USD 12 billion of foreign investment. To the utter disappointment of climate vulnerable countries, in the final draft of the Glasgow Pact, the language was tweaked to reference phasing out “unabated” coal power and “inefficient” subsidies. That opened the door for some coal power to remain, if its emissions are captured before reaching the atmosphere.

Climate finance

Twelve years ago, wealthier countries like

the US promised to provide USD 100 billion in “climate finance”—funding to help vulnerable nations reduce their emissions with renewable energy, cleaner transportation, and other projects. By 2020, richer nations pledged to provide that amount annually through both government and the private sector, but so far, have fallen short of that goal. In 2019, countries hit about USD 80 billion in climate finance. Much of that funding came in the form of loans, instead of grants, which developing countries say further strains their climate efforts as they struggle to repay them.

This year, the US, Japan, Norway, Sweden and others announced new climate finance pledges, but the USD 100 billion goal is still elusive and likely won’t be met until 2022 or 2023. A UN report estimates that funding for climate adaptation should be five to 10 times greater than what’s being spent now.

The young and bold

At COP26 this year, although most countries pledged to keep the hope of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius alive, aggregately, the pledges will not reduce emissions fast enough to keep the world within the crucial limit by 2100, as agreed during the Paris climate talks. Instead, the world would be on track for 1.8 degrees Celsius of warming, according to an analysis from the International Energy Agency.

Young climate leaders came together in Glasgow with negotiators, officials and ministers from across the world, demanding for them to take urgent action needed to limit global temperature rise. While politicians and leaders chose to deliver rhetorical pledges, they took to the podiums, stages and streets to voice their concerns on how governments must come together to prevent catastrophic impacts of climate change within our lifetimes. Events across COP26 thus focused on harnessing the expertise of young people and putting their views directly to the negotiators and officials working to agree on global action on climate change.

For Bangladesh, the need for capacity building, empowerment and inclusion of youth voices in climate action, knowledge creation and diplomacy are sine qua non. We must invest in the youth of today, so that they can continue the fight for climate justice. The onus is on them, but not to mention, equally on us.

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