



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

## For how long will our ministers mock our misfortunes?



SHAHANA HUDA RANJANA

Shahana Huda Ranjana is senior coordinator at Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF). Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

IT is quite understandable that the public would react to our foreign minister's claim that we are in "heaven" (compared to the citizens of other countries) when the entire world is going through a financial crisis. Especially since the price per dozen of eggs increased from Tk 130 to Tk 180 on the same day he made this comment, and the price per kg of chicken increased to Tk 200. At this point, people are visibly confused, wondering who exactly is in "heaven" and who must be burning in hell.

Whether they want to admit it or not, it is easy to see that the government is currently under immense pressure regarding a lot of issues. On the one hand, there is an election coming up. On the other hand, there is black money floating all around, accompanied by limitless corruption, uncontrollable markets, sky-high prices of fuel and essentials, an alarming increase in the price of dollars, and the chokehold of rising inflation. All of these combined have raised living costs by up to 50 percent, cornering and suffocating most people in Bangladesh.

Still, our ministers seem to have held on to their penchant for humour. What's devastating, however, is that their "humour" is based on people's sufferings. Just the other day, the LGED minister said, "I don't think we are in too bad a condition - everyone has clothes on their backs."

In response to this remark by the minister, a Rangpur-based farmer understandably inquired, "Do we have to walk around naked now in order to express just how bad our condition is?" This farmer has to buy seeds and fertilisers at higher prices as transportation costs have increased due to the higher price of diesel, made worse by the electricity and water crises and a lack of rain. He is struggling badly to sustain his family of six. Still, if we go by the minister's comment, and given that all of them have clothes and sandals to wear, are we to assume that this farmer's family is indeed well-off?

Meanwhile, our planning minister took the jokes about people's sufferings another step further. "No one has died yet as a result of the price hike; hopefully, no one will," were his exact words. Do people have to die in order to convey to the authorities the gravity of their situation? If the planning minister of the country is so oblivious to the awful crises that the people are having to deal with every day, then what exactly is he basing his plans on?

The honourable minister might have meant that people are not yet dying of hunger or a famine. But is he unaware that people can still be "dying" even before they turn into corpses? What about the death of dreams, and death due to the worsening standards of living? What about the mother who is

unable to feed her child three meals a day? What about the father who is increasingly drowning in debts as he tries to make ends meet? What about the families that are edging towards being homeless, unable to pay their rent on time? Surely, they know about "dying."

Does the government not know of the plight of lower- and middle-income groups? Did they not take it into consideration at all when they raised the fuel prices? Not only have they been utterly inconsiderate, but they seem to be mocking people's plight. The irresponsible remarks made by our ministers not only tarnish the government's image, but also create resentment among

and the suffering of citizens are all connected by a common thread.

Yet we, the general public, are the only ones being directly affected by these issues. And those who send all this money to the Swiss banks are the ones responsible for our perils. Other countries have asked for information related to their money being smuggled off to the Swiss bank, which they received, too.

However, our government says it has been unable to acquire the information. On the other hand, Swiss Ambassador in Dhaka Nathalie Chuard said Bangladesh had not asked for any specific information regarding the matter. Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen claimed Chuard's statement to be "false."

The question remains as to whether Bangladesh actually wants to know the details regarding money laundering or not. According to the Swiss central bank's annual report published in June this year, the amount of money deposited by Bangladeshis in their banks increased by 55 percent in 2021. Following this report, the High Court

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the citizens.

Amid the crisis, former minister and incumbent member of parliament Rashed Khan Menon said the government had swallowed poison by agreeing to the conditions of the IMF and increasing oil prices. But reality indicates that the poison has actually been swallowed by the people of the country. The government must provide explanations as to why we need the IMF loan, where and how the money will be invested, what the interest rates are, by when and how the government plans to repay the loan, and how much of its burden will fall on the citizens.

It seemed rather effortless for the Bangladesh Bank officials to say that the global financial crisis caused by the Russia-Ukraine war had affected the businesses of many borrowers, for which they had not been able to repay their loans. But that's not where the problem ends. Some of them have been delaying the repayment on purpose, while some intend not to pay up at all.

While the government high-ups were busy dismissing the common people's situation, we also got to know that Tk 650,000 crore had been smuggled out of the country in the last 10 years. But no government official has made any comments on this phenomenon, although the abnormal rate of money laundering, the highest record of defaulted loans,

finally posed the question of whether our government had actually sought information regarding money laundering.

"Money being laundered off to Swiss banks is nothing but an exaggeration," former Finance Minister AMA Muhih had said when he was asked about it. "I don't have a list of money launderers," the current finance minister said recently. Whom should we, the dwellers of "heaven," believe?

What does a common citizen have to do with phrases like GDP growth and deficit? They don't understand these complex, jargon-filled calculations. What they do understand is the hike in the prices of daily essentials. Their good days are coming to an end as price hikes will directly affect their disposable income.

Forget all the other countries. At least 27 people died while protesting against the fuel crisis and price hike in Sierra Leone, a poverty-afflicted country with a population of eight million. Meanwhile, 140 million of us - people from the lower and middle-income backgrounds - are sitting tight while bearing the brunt of price hike and inflation. We burn in hell, while trying to convince ourselves that we might actually be in "heaven."

To read the full article, please visit our website.

## Will the EC dialogues ever cease to be glorified tea parties?

Mohammad Al-Masum Molla is deputy chief reporter at The Daily Star.



MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

WHEN a political party in Bangladesh decides to have a dialogue with the Election Commission (EC), what do they expect? Do they want the commission to take their suggestions into account and act accordingly? Do they join these dialogues just to show people that they are active? Or is it because they want to have it on record that they made a suggestion to the election authority about how the elections should be administered?

In all honesty, the EC of yore (starting in 1991, barring the EC of 2006, until 2008) never really needed these dialogues. Firstly, because they (apart from the 2006 elections) had "non-partisan" ad hoc governments to back them. Secondly, national elections were pretty much a straightforward affair: the incumbent would step down and hand the ruling duties over to temporary/caretaker governments, who would hold the election via the EC.

However, things changed after the Awami League-led government abolished the caretaker government system in 2011 out of fear of a repetition of 1/11. Since then, all elections (both national and local) have been held under partisan administrations, and in the process, the Awami League, who is now in its 14th consecutive year in power, has managed to establish a seemingly unassailable monopoly over state power. As a result, every election since then has followed crises of varying magnitudes, with most of the frontline opposition parties predictably boycotting the elections.

In 2006, the BNP tried to do the same thing. They didn't abolish the caretaker government system, but tried to hold the parliamentary election with some manipulations, including a faulty voters' list. They tried to hold the election but could not, because the Awami League and other like-minded parties waged a serious and strategic protest (both on and off the streets) to create

enough pressure on the BNP to step down.

In fact, the Awami League has a glorious history - older than Bangladesh - of waging street movements to put pressure on governments and press home their demands. This means that their leadership and policymakers have the experience of enduring state-backed oppression to come out successful with street protests.

The BNP and its allies (especially Jamaat-e-Islami, most of whose top leaders have now been executed for 1971 war crimes) made a total mess out of it when they tried to take a leaf out of their arch-rival's book.

Just like the Awami League did in 2006, the BNP and its allies also tried to wage street protests in 2014 to prevent the Awami League from holding elections. However, the BNP

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leadership's lack of experience in holding peaceful street movements only led to uncontrollable violence on the streets and a massive loss of lives and properties.

So, it seems that most of the political parties in Bangladesh

basically want the Election Commission to fulfil their long-standing demand for a non-partisan, poll-time government, instead of taking the difficult route of building up a political movement to create pressure on the government.

Why do they really want the EC to do their "dirty" work? Is it because these parties don't have the same amounts of resources and political expertise as the Awami League to wage a serious street movement? Is it because they have seen how BNP's street protests have gone wrong and how the mistakes are now coming back to haunt them? Is that why these parties are not too keen about "wasting" scarce resources?

Given the experiences of the 2014 and 2018 elections, in which the BNP and its like-minded parties gave the Awami League a walkover, and the subordinate role that the then ECs played, it's funny that these political parties still hope that the EC would be able to fulfil their needs. Interestingly, the BNP seems to be quite sure that what the EC is doing through these dialogues is just "window dressing," and so they never take part in any of them.

What makes these dialogues and the participation of some parties even funnier is the fact that the Election Commission has literally no history of even officially disclosing the recommendations that they receive in these "dialogues," let alone implementing them.

Although the current EC is yet to unveil the recommendations from the recent dialogues, the word going round in Bangladesh's political circuit is that the parties (including Jatiya Party, a recent former ally of Awami League, now the main opposition in parliament) mainly asked the EC for two things: election under a non-partisan government, and no use of electronic voting machines (EVMs). So, why does the EC never publish these recommendations? There is one obvious answer to this question: the commission may feel that they have to make some kind of visible effort to address the concerns raised if they make the recommendations public. Recent history tells us that the EC does not have the power or the intention to do any such thing. Therefore, it seems that the EC dialogues with the country's political parties will continue to be glorified "tea parties," and every election will continue to be a political crisis for the foreseeable future.

**Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB)**  
TCB Bhaban, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka-1215  
[www.tcb.gov.bd](http://www.tcb.gov.bd)

**Commercial Section**

**Invitation for Re Tender (International) of 2,000 (±10%) M. Ton Onion**

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Commerce.
2	Agency	Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).
3	Procuring entity name	Chief Officer (Commercial), TCB, Dhaka.
4	Procuring entity code	Not applicable.
5	Procuring entity district	Dhaka.
6	Invitation for	Onion.
7	Invitation Ref. No.	26.05.0000.016.08.075.22.366
8	Date	14-08-2022.

**KEY INFORMATION**

9	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (OTM) (International).
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**FUNDING INFORMATION**

10	Budget and source of funds	TCB's own fund.
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**PARTICULAR INFORMATION**

11	Package No.	TCB/Imp-08/Onion/2022-23.	
12	Package name	Onion.	
13	Tender publication date	16-08-2022	
	Date	Time	
14	Tender documents last selling date and time	14-09-2022	17.00pm
15	Tender closing date and time	15-09-2022	12.00pm
16	Tender opening date and time	15/09/2022	12.15pm
17	Name & address of the office(s)	Address	
	-Selling tender document of each item can be purchased from the banks & offices as mentioned in right column	(1) Sonali Bank Ltd. Kawran Bazar Branch, TCB Bhaban, Dhaka. (2) Trust Bank Ltd. Kawran Bazar Branch, and (3) Accounts & Finance Division, TCB's Principal Office at Dhaka.	
	-Receiving tender document	In front of TCB's reception (2nd floor), TCB Bhaban, 1, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka.	
	-Opening tender document	Board Room, TCB.	

**INFORMATION FOR TENDERER**

18	Eligibility of tenderer	Bonafide suppliers. Details conditions will be mentioned in the Tender documents.			
19	Brief description goods	Import of 2,000 (±10%) (Two thousand Plus Minus Ten Percent) M. Tons Onion.			
20	Price of tender document	Price of onion tender document is Taka 3,000 (three thousand).			
21	Lot No.	Identification of lot	Location	Tender security amount (USD/BDT)	Shipment schedule
	1.	Onion	Offers are to be made on CFR (C) Chattogram (Previous name Chittagong) by Sea or Benapole/Bangla Hill/Darshana/Sonamasjid/Bhomra/Teknaf by rail/truck	Tender is to be submitted along with Tender Security amounting to: USD 12,650.00 (US Dollar Twelve Thousand Six Hundred Fifty) or BDT 12,00,000 (BDT Twelve Lac) only. in the form of Pay-Order/Bank Draft must be issued from any scheduled Bank of Bangladesh and Bank Guarantee from a foreign Bank must be endorsed by any local scheduled Bank. The successful tenderer is to submit 5% (Five percent) Performance Security in the similar form of Pay-Order/Bank Draft/Bank Guarantee.	Entire quantity of goods is to be shipped within 31/10/2022. (including L/C correction & grace period)

**PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS**

22	Name of official inviting tender	Md. Shekhabur Rahaman.
23	Designation of official inviting tender	Chief Officer (Commercial), TCB Kawran Bazar, Dhaka.
24	Address of official inviting tender	Principal Office, Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB), 1, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka.
25	Contact details of official inviting tender	Telephone No. 02-8180074 Fax No. 880-2-8180057 E-mail: <a href="mailto:tcb@tcb.gov.bd">tcb@tcb.gov.bd</a> , <a href="mailto:tcbimp@tcb.gov.bd">tcbimp@tcb.gov.bd</a>

**Special instructions:**

- Incomplete, conditional tender and alternative offer shall not be considered.
- The procuring entity reserves the right to accept any or reject any/all tenders partly or wholly without assigning any reason.
- Tenderer who was awarded the Notification of Awarded (NOA) earlier but could not submit Performance Security (PS) in due time, will not be eligible for the tender.
- Tenderer who's Performance Security (PS) was partially or totally forfeited earlier will not be eligible to participate in the tender.

**Md. Shekhabur Rahaman**  
Chief Officer (Commercial)

GD-1545