

## Can't be Condoned

ONE of it appeared to be incidental or accidental at Bijoyanagar during the half-day hartal on Tuesday. It was a clear case of the police coming mentally and physically ready to commit the excesses it did. This would seem corroborated by the widely reported haughty remarks of the Motijheel Thana OC that he even had 'orders' to shoot any journalist or picketer. We cannot regard this as a slip of tongue because here the question is not so much of whether a bullet was actually fired or not as that of a frame of mind at play.

We are so thoroughly outraged that we find no word strong enough to condemn the three specific incidents that took place on the day: (a) the scandalous, obnoxious and utterly obscene stripping of the saree of a lady opposition activist; (b) hell-bent onslaught on BNP MPs; and (c) the audacious assault of journalists on duty.

Those who committed these offences deserve absolutely no mercy because they have stained and undermined rudimentary democratic norms and constitutional rights. Why did the police obstruct and attack the BNP demonstrators? They were taking out a procession and marching peacefully. Even assuming that when they were stopped by the police there was a bomb blast, could the situation be not handled short of a heavy handed pounce that was made on women protesters and the BNP MPs? And what was the photojournalists' fault except that they were covering the incidents?

Basically the questions we would like to put to the government are: Is there a ban on processions? If not, then why should the police have prevented the opposition from taking out the procession through the route they wanted to. If the police were constrained to redirect the procession from 'sensitive' spot they could very well do so without resorting to violence.

The Home Minister has expressed his regrets over the incidents and not unsurprisingly a probe committee has been promptly formed to go into them. Hopefully, these are not palliative pacification measures, and they would stave off such a gross mishandling of political demonstrations in future including deterrent punishment meted out to the hyperactive offenders.

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## System at Fault

CHAIRMEN of the country's five education boards at their Tuesday's review meeting with the education ministry have revealed an ugly truth: influential people in the society and their hired hands, teachers and, in some cases, district administrations are abetting the examinees' resorting to unfair means in the ongoing Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations. Violence at different centres and huge number of expulsions on grounds of cheating have marred this year's exams from the very start. On completion of the fourth day of the HSC schedule, more than 15,000 students have been expelled under the five boards. Besides, there have been numerous incidents of violence, engineered by expelled students and their accomplices, turning some centres into battle-fields. That the education secretary has advised the deputy commissioners to seek BDR's help is a strong indication of how grave the situation has become.

It seems, however, that the solution to the problem, which has snowballed into a crisis, does not lie in such knee-jerk reactions. The education minister's prescription of engaging people courageous and determined to fight the evil in place of the ineffective and allegedly indifferent lot would not work, either. What holds the key, it appears, is a deeper look into the crisis and, as the meeting observed, a change in the examination and the education systems.

The meeting has come up with certain recommendations which, in our views, have touched the heart of the problem. The minister's directive for a change in question format should go a long way towards controlling the alarmingly increasing trend. We expect the government to give more thoughts on this and come up with remedial measures. The policy-planners must realise that the extant system is dysfunctional. Teachers are not helping either. Imperative at this point of time is formulation of an education system that, by eliminating scopes of resorting to unfair means, instills in the students the urge to learn and deliver.

## Scared WDB Officials

RULING party goons have allegedly terrorised Water Development Board officials and their families to flee Rajshahi Monday last for safety of their lives, according to reports published in The Daily Star. Till Tuesday they did not return to Rajshahi and nobody knows where they have gone. The situation at the Rajshahi Divisional Office of the WDB took a dangerous turn as persons belonging to the ruling party demanded the whole of the fifteen crore taka Rajshahi town protection embankment renovation work. It is also alleged that local AL leaders took an advance of Taka fifty lakh from the contractors for 'managing' the work for them having already contacted highly placed persons in Dhaka and Rajshahi to land the contracts'. Armed hoodlums not only ransacked the offices of WDB but manhandled senior officials also threatening them with dire consequences. Scrapping of the hitherto existing system of awarding work by lottery, irrespective of the high or low bidding, and reintroduction of the old system of lowest rate have been identified by some sources as the cause of trouble. The interested persons have been visiting the WDB offices as well as the residential colony and threatening the inmates there to get the work.

Whatever may be the reason, the action of some indisciplined persons has totally disrupted the normal working of an important public office. Local leaders of political parties and the contractors' association have strongly condemned the attacks on WDB officials. If party members indulge in such vandalism and prevent the officials from discharging their responsibilities how can the government function? We strongly decry this and urge upon the authorities concerned to restore peace and discipline in the WDB office and at the same time ensure safe return of the fugitive officials and their families to Rajshahi.

# Stalemate in Political Chess Game: What Next?

*Without undermining the importance of hartal as a highly effective political weapon, more emphasis now appears to have been laid on holding a string of peaceful meetings, long processions and road march, etc. as means of opposition's political movement.*

THE political climate has again vitiated itself and the situation is positively taking a dangerous turn heading towards the precipice. The ruling party and the opposition are poised in juxtaposition, clad in shining armour and dangerously confronting each other. The cool facade easily betrays the inherent suspicion, animosity, anger and even fear to the penetrating eyes of an incisive beholder. General public appear highly apprehensive for not being able to realise their dream of living in a sovereign land of peace and prosperity and of ordering their life in a democratic manner. The current political stalemate is the creation of their political leaders. The people appear disappointed at the failure of the latter to amicably resolve their differences and to encourage evolution of a democratic process. They are generally frustrated, sad and dismayed.

It is ironic but true that both the ruling party and the opposition claim that they want a dialogue with each other. Both sides made public statements on several occasions to that effect, but the much talked about dialogue never took place. Is it not ridiculous to read in the newspapers a headline, some time ago, that Minister Mohammad Nasim made a telephone call to BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who, on his turn, said the latter did not come out with a definite proposal for dialogue? Most of the newspapers,

which generally tow government line, highlighted the news of Nasim's making the telephone call, whereas the few journals generally supporting opposition parties drummed up Mannan Bhuiyan's assertion that no proposal had emanated from Nasim's talk. How disappointing, if not ludicrous, it is to perceive that we went to the river, hesitated, faltered and refused to cross before turning back. It has been typical of our current political culture.

What conclusion can one derive out of these claims and counter-claims? It may not be quite out of place to recount a story. Disraeli, a great orator, statesman and Prime Minister of England of the last century, faltered and faltered badly while delivering his maiden speech in the parliament. He started, I conceive, I conceive, I conceive — and he stopped. A lady in the audience hurled her frustration loudly. She said, when we conceive loudly, we produce a baby, but Disraeli conceived three times and produced nothing. Our Hon'ble Minister indeed made telephone calls to opposition leaders more than once but these bore no fruits. Does it imply that the Hon'ble Minister failed to do certain things which he, in fact, had really intended to do? No, it cannot be so. On the contrary, he is a very capable and skilful politician and an anchor pin of

his political party. He is able to do many and more things which ordinary politicians are not in a position to do. So, his half-hearted effort with the BNP leader appeared deliberate and, therefore, failed to produce the "desired" result.

An analysis of the above leaves one with no alternative than to suggest that the government is not really serious to

wanted to resolve the disputed issues. After all, it was emphasised, the government party, supplemented by its authority and machinery, has always been a stronger party of the day and, therefore, the primary responsibility of ensuring good governance and to take initiative in that matter devolve solely and squarely upon the government itself.



## Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

hold parleys with the opposition and to make an amicable settlement of the moot issues. On the other hand, one can also argue that the BNP Secretary General could have seized the opportunity of the Minister's telephone call and himself asked for a meeting. It was possible, but it did not happen. BNP advances the reason that they had already laid their cards on the table by way of making their 5-point demands and that it was the turn of the government party to respond to it in a reasonable manner, and surely not by rejecting all the demands summarily, if the latter really

As the government is able but appears unwilling to work for a solution of the current political issues, then what political motivation, one wonders, prompts them to adopt this adamant and uncompromising policy? There are interesting and manifold speculations on this subject. The one that has been gaining currency rapidly and firmly is that the government really does not want opposition participation in the coming elections — the Upazilla and Mayoral elections, which are now on the anvil. The government considers the holding of city council elections without

participation of opposition parties as a success and wants to go ahead with the holding of the ensuing elections in the same manner without opposition participation. In that way, they hope to steal a march on the opposition and enhance their chances for improvement in the next parliamentary election. Some even go so far as to speculate that the Awami League would, if possible, like to create conditions so as to require the opposition parties to boycott the parliament indefinitely, hold unilateral elections to fill up the vacant seats and easily gain two-thirds majority in the parliament. This would enable them to amend the constitution and rule the nation at ease for a time longer than expected.

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