

## Stop This Ominous Trend

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Our correspondent reported looting of 35 shops at Siddirganj, about 10 kilometres east of Dhaka, the other day and the inaction of the police despite filing of three cases against alleged culprits by the aggrieved party. Not only that, the thana had the temerity to refuse filing of the cases until the complainant had spoken to the Home Minister. Naturally the defendant accused the thana administration of favouring the 'terrorists'.

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These are all but ominous signs for the ruling party and the government. It has been observed that in many cases the ruling party activists themselves created law and order situation and put the administration in utter shame and the party in embarrassment. While the victims of vandalism and terrorism do not get proper police support and protection at their time of distress without the help of the top brasses and influential political leaders or ministers, identified hoodlums and wanted criminals seem to get adequate police escort in their attempt to 'hijack' a bank. What was the police posse doing at the UCBL on Thursday when an alleged murderer and his hired goons were forcibly taking control of the bank? How could the police claim that the accused was absconding when he was talking to the press at a local hotel where he was staying?

The Home Minister and his police owe an explanation to the nation. This ominous trend has to be reversed for the sake of the society.

## Departure of a Loyalist

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It has been for quite sometime that Siddiqui and the AL chief are at odds. What actually lay at the root of their parting of ways still remains shrouded in mystery. Sheikh Hasina's disdainful remarks about him, though characteristic of her, were suddenly far more venomous than usual. Calling him 'mad' and a 'goat' was unusual even for her standard. Siddiqui, on his part, has done nothing to clarify as to the reasons for his parting of ways with the party of which he has been an ardent supporter. His remarks about the present AL leadership being illegal appears more contrived than real. Question naturally arises as to why he has suddenly awakened to this fact of illegality after so many years, and that also after Sheikh Hasina started to put the squeeze on him. His resignation letter also does not properly explain the reasons for his action except rehashing points that he already made in recent past.

What are the likely impacts on the ruling party of his departure? Sheikh Hasina is likely to tighten her grip on all other possible dissident voices in her party. We are also likely to witness a fresh propaganda offensive against Siddiqui which may include more official harassment against his supporters, which may only make Siddiqui a hero and as such increase his public appeal. AL will make a fatal mistake to underestimate Siddiqui's ability to organise his support base. Whether he will be able to provide any alternative political leadership is something we will have to wait and see. But with him around, and freed from the AL noose, politics will not be the same again.

## Chittagong Benighted

DISRUPTION of power supply has become a familiar phenomenon in recent times. While the country's extant generation system has long been running in deficit thereby forcing frequent load-shedding in its major cities and the suburbs, mishaps on the transmission network have been infuriatingly regular.

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There is no denying the fact that the country's power sector is beset with multifarious problems. While issues related to pilferage, illegal connection, bill default, systems loss have been intensely laboured, maintenance of generation and distribution mechanism has not quite been highlighted although, in recent times, almost all incidences of power failure have had something to do with poor maintenance. Collapse of a tower of 132 KV Ashuganj-Kishoreganj transmission line into the Brahmaputra near Bhairab is not an instance of too distant a past, nor is the snapping of a high-tension 33 KV power line by the crane of a barge or the crumbling down of a power tower in Narayanganj. On each occasion, it was a varying degree of negligence on the maintenance front. This time, too, it was no different. According to reports, attempt at power transmission through a faulty feeder line led to the fire that wrought havoc at the power sub-station.

While urging the power people to immediately restore supply to the affected areas, we would expect them to treat the incident as a reminder to shore up the maintenance front.

TURKEY is painfully waking up from the worst disaster of the century. She is rising from the rubble left by a devastating earthquake, that has flattened a long northern populous belt, the Marmara region, known as heart of industrial Turkey.

It happened at 3.02, a.m. on August 18. The Richter scale from the seismic centre in Colorado, USA, showed 7.8. It was way above what the Richter scale in Turkey was showing, which was in the neighbourhood of 6.8 at the most. The blow has been so massive and devastating that the entire Turkish nation is still reeling under its impact. All the Turkish TV channels have been showing pictures non-stop 24 hours of dazed victims, flattened houses, billowing smoke and the rubble strewn over a very large area. Search operation is still continuing and the death toll rapidly rising. It has now exceeded 18,000 and the number of wounded more than 40,000. Fatalities are apprehended to rise to at least 45,000.

It all began with a violent shake and huge buildings swayed like toys. Survivors quickly took refuge in nearby gardens, lawns, streets, cars, away from the buildings. Cars were brought out from the garages and were driven aimlessly through the streets causing traffic jam. As you drive

later succeeded by Istanbul, there are giant textile firms which export to the US and Europe.

The epicentre of the earthquake is the town of Izmit, which is exactly 100 kilometres north-east of Istanbul. Turkey's largest naval base at Gokcek on the Sea of Marmara was also severely hit by the tremor which transformed it into a mass grave for hundreds of officers and soldiers stationed there.

Tv pictures showing raw af-

ter the quake struck. Thousands of unrecovered bodies are still rotting under the debris, their overpowering stench heavily felt in the air.

The rescue effort has been hampered by the collapse of vital bridges, poor weather conditions, and a major fire which erupted at Turkey's largest petroleum refinery in Izmit, that threatened to engulf entire towns within its vicinity in flames. Lack of coordination between government agencies involved in the relief effort has

been a problem too as well as the insufficient number of rescue equipment such as back hoes, bulldozers and cranes. In the early days following the quake, thousands of people used their bare hands to sift through the rubble for signs of their loved ones.

The Turkish authorities have moved quickly to face the situation. President Suleyman Demirel was seen walking through the ruins of devastated town, seeking to comfort survivors. "The state will heal the wounds of this disaster," he pledged repeatedly. Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit has also toured the struck areas numerous times, vowing to rebuild homes for the tens of thousands left homeless by the earthquake.

Yet such is the scale of the disaster that the Turkish state alone is in no position to provide full relief on its own. The spirited Turkish people have demonstrated once again just how enterprising they can be by organising relief efforts at their own initiative. The public response to the disaster has been overwhelming with literally tens of thousands of Turks rushing to the aid of their fellow citizens. They carried

some dailies of August 20, which contains, inter alia, government's contemplation about the use of some of the railway land recovered in recent eviction drive, by implementing projects like constructing a two-way rail track on Dhaka-Narayanganj route, a third rail track for facilitating Dhaka-Tongi commuter services, extension of Tejgaon rail yard etc. The ideas would have sold well to the people had the government touched the slum-dwellers after doing at least base works for their rehabilitation.

The charge that the slums have served as hide-outs of the criminals, terrorists, drug traders is not far from being profoundly true. Some of the slum-dwellers must have close links with them. But their percentage cannot be that big. In fact an overwhelmingly vast majority of slum inhabitants are engrossed in dawn-to-dusk manual labour and do not have any time or taste to be involved with those criminal activities. They are found to have ranged thickly all over the country. The government seems absorbed in a dream of slum-free metropolis. But what about clearing of the slums beyond the capital? Do they not have the same identity, in the eyes of the government, as dens of terrorists and criminals? If the government draws up rehabilitation policy and programme for the slum-dwellers it should as well encompass their other urban and rural counterparts too. Pumping all blood into the head is no sign of a healthy physique.

Poverty is at the root of many evils including breeding of slums. All governments of Bangladesh have cried themselves hoarse over alleviating poverty. The NGOs have professed to be valiant partners of government in this mission. But the object remains as elusive as ever. While the government and opposition battled over if GDP is 5.5 per cent or less in cool conference rooms, a poor pushcart driven by a slum-longed for a fifth trip of his loaded cart under the scorching sun to conquer a square meal. Alas! now he may have none of the trip and meal. The other day he fell under government's eviction guillotine.

The government has come up with a handout, published in

## OPINION

### Transhipment and Politics

Abul Mohsin

The ruling party calls it 'transhipment', the BNP says it is nothing but 'transit/corridor' should we say what non-sense? Even before anything of the sort took the shape of an agreement the opposition parties led by BNP foisted a 30-hour hartal on the hapless people. What will it do when there is actually an agreement to that effect?

Without ascertaining its economic aspect, it is foolhardy to denounce the proposal on the imaginary ground that it would compromise with our sovereignty. Sovereignty is not such a flimsy thing that it would end with the passage of 50 or 100 trucks a day through Bangladesh territory. Had it been so, then Bangladesh should have opposed the proposed network of Asian highway through its territory which would be useless if we do not allow others' vehicles to use the highway.

Former BNP Finance Minister says Bangladesh should look for regional trade agreement rather than bilateral one. Well, it all depends on what is beneficial to us in the near future. If other countries of the SAARC area accept it, then certainly a regional trade and transit pact can come into being. But obviously the present state of Indo-Pak relationship is such that it would be years before friendly relationship is restored between the two countries.

It may be pointed out here that some time ago Pakistan entered into a regional block of its own with the central Asian countries without involving any SAARC countries including Bangladesh. So why should we waste our opportunities for no benefit to us?

In the papers people constantly complain about our adverse balance of payment with India. But the question is, most of the imports from that country are done by the private sector people and why are they doing it? Certainly because it is to their advantage to do so!

Bangladesh cannot achieve parity in export and import trade with India because we do not produce goods in such large quantities which have great demand in India. If we had done so, then there would have been at least smuggling of such goods to India if officially they were reluctant to buy those.

India's technological base is much better than ours and their

# The Great Earthquake

*It is evident that it will take Turkey a long time to fully recover from this massive blow, both in emotional and economic terms. As one survivor put it, "It was like 100 atomic bombs crashing over our heads."*

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MD. Waseem Alam  
Patikpur, Mymensingh

Service delivery quality control

Sir, What Dr. Andaleeb (Penn. U) says in his commentary on the Quality Challenge (DS Aug 3) is correct. The local practitioners in the local medical service sector, both public and private, are not unaware of these basic professional guidelines, and the professional knowledge and experience is not generally sub-standard.

What is problematic is the creation and maintenance of good service practices in underdeveloped countries, because the average standard of the whole team has to be above the acceptance level for competition, as the patients expect the next level of efficient service; otherwise opt to go elsewhere. It is more than the gap between the demand and supply curve. The mushrooming of the private clinic does not necessarily mean a competitive improvement of the quality of service.

This gap is also due to the culture of the local environment, as practiced and accepted.

Sir, Sensing the job market of English knowing people is comparatively better than that of other subjects in the gamut of general education, the government and non-government colleges under National University have started a race in opening honours courses in English and the NU permits to do so without too much of thinking. Due to the lack of library facility and good teachers, coupled with political chaos, the students embrace a golden opportunity to copy en masse in the examination halls and thus come out hundreds of English graduates and masters degree holders without deep knowledge of the subject and put extra pressure in the job market.

Though some teachers have the ability to teach in terms of quality, yet their number is limited and they are not clustered in a particular college rather scattered in different colleges.

National University was established to ease the burden of general universities; to spread education and to maintain the quality of education, not to increase the quantity only. The present educational arena of our country experiences the lowest standard of education due to 'en masse' copy in the public examinations, commercialization of education and lenient attitude of the authorities.

Undoubtedly it's a grave concern and the intellectuals of the country must come forward with their reasonable and possible solutions; otherwise the nation is going to be drowned in the ocean of darkness very soon.

MD. Masum Billah  
Lecturer, RAJUK Utara Model College,  
Dhaka 1230

Quality education

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