

## Attack on journalist Tipu Sultan

Shame on us for doing almost nothing

SHAME on the government, shame on the people and shame on the media. Journalist Tipu Sultan's plight is a disgrace for all of us. We have let him down in no uncertain terms.

Maimed in a near-fatal attack in Feni by a ruling party MP's goons nearly three months ago, he is now faced with the prospect of having to leave the city's National Orthopaedic Hospital, because, as the doctors said "nothing more can be done here." Not only has this young reporter suffered unimaginable brutality, but also he is now in danger of being thrown to the very wolves that attacked him in the first place.

After the attack on the UNB reporter, his assailants were allowed to roam the streets of Feni while he was fighting for his life in hospital. The local OC, whose links to the ruling party MP are an open secret, has refused since the first day to register even a complaint. If this is not astonishing, consider the fact that soon afterwards, the High Court intervened and directed Feni police to lodge an FIR. Following the HC ruling the OC accepted the complaint, but is doing nothing about it. A crime has been committed. At the very least, it is one of assault and at worst, it is attempted murder. What could be more of an outrage than this brazen defiance by the police? Whether the alleged assailants are guilty or not is a matter to be decided by the courts. But the very basic right of a victim being able to lodge a complaint with the police is being denied. There is not even a semblance of rule of law.

How can a government explain this blatant denial of a fundamental right, not to mention an attack on a member of the media? Where are the Prime Minister's assurances of "everybody is equal before the law." Do they cease to apply because a member of her own party is implicated?

It is disappointing that on its part, civil society has not been outraged and any pressure from it has been negligible. We in this newspaper accept the guilt that we have not done enough. Tipu Sultan's terrible experience has failed to mobilise a united and powerful media response. We would ask our fellow journalists, if we cannot unite on this issue, then what are we worthy of? If this case is not a threat to freedom of the press, what is? Have we become so politically divided that we cannot stand together for a fellow journalist and to protect the freedom that we all profess to believe in? If civil society and a disunited media do nothing while ruling party gangsters play havoc with a journalist's life, we lay ourselves open to a future when press freedom would become gravely jeopardised and the denial of fundamental rights would become commonplace.

## Message of Ashura

Let us be steadfast in our principles

ON this day some fourteen hundred years back, on the bank of the Euphrates, one of the darkest episodes in human history was enacted. In an act of cowardice and treachery, Yazid and his horde cordoned off the river to make sure Imam Hussain and his family didn't get any water to drink and die of thirst. The evil design proved a success, the grandson of Prophet Mohammed (SM) and his family embraced martyrdom and set a glorious precedent of principled stand. Whatever the consequences be, they showed, ideology must not be compromised. Beyond the grief over the deaths at Kerbala and the revulsion at the heartlessness of Yazid and his men, the tenth of Muharram, therefore, bears testimony to the essential victory of good over evil.

The day also puts in perspective two extremities of human character - unflappable resolve and determination on the question of belief and principle, and treachery and cowardice on the route to material gains. In this age of turmoil and tribulations, it is sometimes difficult to stick to what we believe in. At times, we compromise, believing there is no other option. Ashura reminds us that the only way is to stand firm in your principle and belief and brace for whatever consequence that come by.

## Political horsetrading portends uncertain future



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

URING the past few weeks hectic multi-modal developments in Bangladesh rendered political scenario more complex, knowledgeable observers greatly alert and the general public deeply concerned.

The episode relating to Ershad has taken a turn that made many of the political pundits chuckle under sleeves in their "deja vu" attitude -- as if saying, didn't I say that in the very beginning? That General Ershad would have no scruples to seek the best advantage for himself and his party in a game of fierce horsetrading as the parliamentary election approaches had been speculated by many with a degree of success. As soon as the Supreme Court ordered his release in February on payment of fines, the government held him again under the infamous Special Powers Act and sent him back to jail.

This action was, no doubt, taken

by the government in a cool and pre-meditated manner with a view to using the Ershad card for making a crack in the opposition Four-Party Alliance. This was evident when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in response to Ershad's reiteration of conducting opposition movement made caustic remarks challenging whether Ershad would be in the streets (Rajpath) or in prison (Rajghar). The naked manifestation of abuse of power by the govern-

strength already sapped by the faction led by Anwar Hossain Manju. Ershad is highly tempted to play the tune of the ruling party, especially for his personal benefit. In the process, he may remain oblivious of the miscalculation of securing better political advantage for his party members by splitting the 4-Party Alliance. One may, however, note that the role of the Jatiya Party as king-maker as was exercised in 1996 does no longer exist. Ershad's

mediate resignation of the government. Sheikh Hasina was in Madina Al-Munawara then. She also declared that the election would be held in early June. Prime Minister's declaration caused general people to have sigh of relief that after all the diagonally opposite twin were to meet finally. But the hopes were soon dashed to the grounds when the Prime Minister declared that she would resign only after 17 April, the date of formal declaration of inde-

will not have enough time, not to speak of the three months allowed by the Constitution, to undertake electoral and other reforms, putting up neutral officers acceptable to major political parties in positions having significant relevance to election duties, combing operations to recover illegal arms and so on and so forth. The objective of the Awami League is to retain administrative and other sinister control as well as to frustrate caretaker government's

to come to Parliament, demand election date and give an undertaking by rubbing nose on the ground (a highly derogatory colloquial expression) for not to call hartals any more in future. Sheikh Hasina's expressions were not only most unbecoming of a Prime Minister, these reminded those of garrulous illiterate village women folks. In the process, the date of election may recede as far as sometime in October next.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party is now deeply concerned at the game plans of the Awami League prior to the election and for winning the election by all possible means, fair and foul. Why does not the Awami League make a public demand that special efforts must be made by the caretaker government to recover illegal arms, to modify electoral rules and code of conduct, to stop harassment and repression of political opposition, to appoint only those officers acceptable to both the major political parties on election duties, and so on and so forth? If the Awami League succeeds in the election campaign, the contributions made for its success would also be both deep and intense. Let us await BNP's version of the scenario and the BNP's achievements in future on these issues.

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## CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

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ment to manipulate Ershad has been too vivid to escape anyone's attention.

The shifting of Ershad from prison cell to a comfortable suite in a hospital where he could virtually run his political office and the possibility of sending him abroad for so-called medical treatment has not hoodwinked people about the real intention of twisting and turning Ershad to play the political games of the ruling party. But a further split, however minor it may have been, of the Jatiya party by Nazimul Rahman Manzur would weaken Ershad's

Jatiya Party is much weaker now and is likely to secure less seats, in the event of fielding candidates independently. If Ershad really leaves the Alliance, the latter will not be stilled to death. Some BNP stalwarts may even call it a good riddance.

As for the Awami League handing over power to the caretaker government and fixing the date of election, the ball was set rolling by Begum Khaleda Zia, who after meeting the Hon'ble President in Bangabhaban on 7 March declared that the opposition would like the election to be held in May and demanded immediate

resignation of the government. Since she did not specify the date by which her resignation would be effected, technically she could drag it over till 13 July, the very last date of her legitimate tenure of office. Even if she resigned shortly after 17 April, which date is not sacrosanct, knowing her political mind, she will enjoy her constitutional authority of ruling for another fortnight before actually transferring power to the caretaker government. As the election has to be held before the onset of the rainy season, latest in early July, the new caretaker government

attempts to recover illegal arms and the minimum reforms needed to hold a free, fair and peaceful election.

Having seen the ruling party's game plan, the Leader of the Opposition set the deadline of 30 March for the government to resign failing which continuing hartals, initially for 60 hours beginning on 1 April, would be observed. The Prime Minister reacted sharply. She challenged no opposition movement would be able to budge them from power till the last date of 13 July. Her latest demand is for the Opposition

## President's role in parliamentary democracy

KHANDAKAR QUADRAT-UL ELAHI

DEMOCRACY has two systems of government presidential and parliamentary which are distinguished by several political and administrative attributes. However, in the context of our current political situation, the attribute that particularly important, concerns the status of the head of state and the head of government and their roles in the two systems.

In the presidential system, the same person plays the dual roles of the head of state and the head of government, while in the parliamentary system, two different persons play these roles. And the principles of democracy seem to be the most fundamental theoretical reasons for establishing this practice in the parliamentary democracies.

The democratic system of governance is founded on the perception of civil society, conceived in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe. The theory has been developed by assuming that the people form civil society through a voluntary social contract. This assumption makes the people the sovereign authority of state. The fundamental attributes of people's sovereignty are that it is both inalienable and indivisible. The reason, Rousseau says in his timeless *Social Contract*, is: "the General Will alone can direct the forces of the State agreeably to the end of its institution, which is the common good; for if the clashing of private interests has rendered the establishing of societies necessary, the agreement of the same interests has made such establishments possible." So, "sovereignty" being only the exercise of the General Will, can never alienate itself, and that the sovereign, which is only a collective

being, cannot be represented but itself: the power may be transmitted but not the Will."

Sovereignty is not divisible either, for the same reason it is not alienable: "For the will is general it is not; it is either the will of the whole people or only a part. In the first case, this declared will is an act of sovereignty and constitutes law; in the second, it is but a private will or an act of magistracy, and is at most a decree."

For governing the state, the people's sovereign authority must be delegated. In democracy, this delegation of sovereign authority takes place through general elec-

political duties include approving the bills passed in parliament, receiving heads of foreign missions, attending important seminars and ceremonies etc. The president's presence becomes hardly noticeable, when the country passes uneventfully. However, his or her role in running the country becomes absolutely obvious, when the country begins to experience critical events.

Our country is now passing through critical political events. Therefore, the president's active role has become both important and essential. The question that is being widely discussed is this: What type of role can the president play in this

political person. So, the question that we need to ask is whether these qualities of the president give him the ability to help resolve the current political crisis.

The president is a nonpolitical person, which means that he will assume the role of a private person as soon as he leaves the office. Thus, whatever contribution he might be able to make in the current political situation, will be of transitory nature. Since the problem is political, the solution will be enduring only if it is dealt with politically. Then any attempt by the president to cause a negotiated settlement might merely suppress the genuine

However, it can resign any time before that deadline. This resignation, however, entirely is a matter of the government's political choice. There is no authority in the country, which has the constitutional mandate to interfere with that choice.

Thus, the opposition's demand for the government's resignation is unconstitutional. In other words, the opposition's demand is a clear violation of the constitutional law.

Once the current government resigns, the power will go to the caretaker government, which will hold the general election within 90 days. Neither the government nor

endorse the constitution-violating activity of the opposition. In other words, it will encourage the 'might is right' politics that is causing all kinds of troubles in the country.

Honesty and political impartiality may not be good qualities for getting involved in political issues, but they are certainly the most desirable qualities for upholding the constitution. No matter how dreadful and undesirable the current situation may appear to be, the fact that Justice Shahabuddin is the president of the country makes the situation extremely important. He commands the respect and trust of the people. Since democracy is all about people, he has the full authority to execute people's verdict, which is to uphold the constitution.

The President's role in the current situation is to tell the nation that he will act according to the spirit and letters of the constitution and that he does not approve any kind of violence concerning the formation of the caretaker government and the holding of the upcoming general election.

If the president speaks, the world will listen to him, because he is an honest and honourable man. Honesty is a virtue whose power is beyond any measure.

We might not see Justice Shahabuddin in the public life after his tenure expires. However, he will take a permanent place in our national history. And his last lasting contribution might be to tell the nation that the law must be obeyed, no matter what we might think our problems are. Because, if we slip a bit from the law, all we will have, is lawlessness.

Khandakar Quadrat-ul Elahi, a former Associate Professor of the Bangladesh Agricultural University, now lives in Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

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tions. In the presidential system, people directly choose the president, for which the elected person becomes both the head of state and the head of government. In the parliamentary system, voters elect the members of parliament, who in turn choose the head of government. In other words, political parties choose the head of the government. This is the reason why the head of the government in parliamentary democracy cannot assume the role of the head of state. However, the state must have a head. The members of parliament solve this problem by choosing one.

Since sovereignty is inalienable, the choice made by the members of parliament cannot be interpreted as the choice of the people. Thus, the president assumes the role of the titular head of state. His or her national crisis? In this regard, an idea has become rather popular, which says that the president should mediate between the government and the opposition to resolve the current crisis. This idea, which seems quite sensible, demands careful consideration, for it might create more problems than solving any, if it does not prove to be politically right.

Why do we want and expect the president to mediate between the government and the opposition? During the BNP regime, Abdur Rahman Biswas was the president of the country. There was little expectation about Mr. Biswas's mediating role, although the political crisis was even greater at that time.

There seems to be two reasons: first, President Shahabuddin is an honest man and second, he is a non

political problems, which are causing this situation. Finally, honesty is not always a virtue in dealing with political environments.

The current situation has arisen, because our political parties do not respect the principles of democracy; nor they obey the constitution. In other words, our politicians are failing to perform their supposed duties; practice the principles of democracy and uphold constitution. Therefore, the true solution to the current situation is to help them realize their duties. This, in turn, means helping them to understand the rules of the game, which are unambiguously stated in the constitution.

According to the constitution, the current government has the mandate to rule till the 13<sup>th</sup> July.

### TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

## PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.

### Smoking their life away



PHOTO STAR

These two desperate-looking people are smoking marijuana in the open as if nothing is wrong in it. Drug addiction has become a serious social problem and it has spread among the rich as well as the poor. Addicts are prone to committing crimes and a tremendous burden to society. Strict laws should be enforced and social awareness should be raised to fight drug addiction.

## Political turmoil

I would like to thank Almas Zakiuddin for her article "Emperor's new clothes" and also thank you for the editorial "Vanishing morality in politics" (March 31) and "PM's surprising conditions" (April 1). But do the politicians pay heed to people's frustration? They don't. Do the politicians read these articles to enlighten themselves? The answer will again be in the negative.

On Friday night (March 30) I sat in front of the TV to listen to the Prime Minister's speech with a hope that she might talk sensibly and this would help solve the political crisis. But I was wrong! I had to switch off the TV because I did not want to hear our Prime Minister speaking in such an indecent manner not befitting to a Prime Minister. On the other hand, the Opposition Leader is also a disappointment, not by her language, but by her political immaturity. As a frustrated nation we can only pray to God to send us a leader who will be wise, properly educated and will have personality.

Y. Zaman  
Utara

## Kala-azar: Comprehensive management

Kala-azar, a parasitic disease, is fast spreading through Mymensingh district particularly in Trishal, Fulbaria, Bhaluka and Gaffargaon. Unfortunately, the appropriate

drugs for this disease are not available in most of the health centres. Even if the drugs are available, poor patients cannot afford to buy it.

Kala-azar is transmitted by the bite of sandfly. It is transmitted from animal to human being and vice versa. Though the authorities have taken initiative to tackle the disease, there hasn't been much progress. There are no efforts to treat the animal suffering from kalaazar. Treatment of human and animal cases, and behavioural modifications of human are the key issues that need to be addressed for effective eradication of the disease. It is implicitly necessary for a dynamic effort by the health experts in humans and livestock, as well as social scientists, to come forward to find ways to eradicate the disease. The authorities concerned should take immediate steps in this regard.

Md. Shafiqur Rahman  
Trishal, Mymensingh

## Politics for whom?

I wonder for whom the politicians are doing politics? Is it for the common people as it is supposed to be or is it for themselves? The answer is obvious from our present political state. We are, indeed, an unfortunate nation to have such selfish leaders who only care about themselves and not those who voted them to power.

Zaman Arifin  
Mirpur, Dhaka

## Hartal thoughts

I fully agree with Mahfuz Anam's commentary "Hartal thoughts for Khaleda Zia: Are we not prisoners in our own homes?" (April 2). It is a shame and disgrace for any country, where members of the Opposition carry out destructive activities in the name of democracy. People are weary of hartals and do not support the so-called leaders who are bent on destroying the common people. By setting fire to public and private vehicles, by killing people who defy the call for hartal, by hurling bombs, do the politicians think that they can win people's support? Do the opposition political parties think that the affected people are going to vote for them in the coming general election? I don't think so.

Why don't the opposition members test people's will? Let them call a hartal, but not send their activists into the streets. Let's see how many people pay heed to their call and keep their businesses or workplaces shut. If people support the call, they will not go to work. If they don't, they will carry on business as usual.

In 1971, the people of Bangladesh rose to fight an occupation army. I am afraid, if the opposition parties keep up with their tactics of destruction and intimidation, people will this time rise against their own politicians. The elections are only a few months away. My appeal to the opposition parties is to plan on outlining their election agenda and tell people how will they improve the country's economy, if they are elected, instead of resorting to destructive activities. Hope sanity

will prevail upon the politicians and for once they will take constructive decisions.

Waseem Khan  
Los Angeles, California, USA

## Aqua culture

This is in reference to the news item "Alien fishes causing depletion of local varieties, threatening ecology" (April 3). I must thank Mr. Shahab Khan for the news item. This is a timely cautionary note to the aqua culture practice in Bangladesh. There has been a range of research activities in the west on the negative impact of aqua culture on local fish stock and marine bio-diversity. But our experts seem to be oblivious to this. Fish farming typically involves enclosures of fish in a secure system under conditions in which they can thrive. The practice ranges from exclusion of predators and control of competitors to enhancement of food supply, to the provision of nutritional requirements. Farming carnivorous species requires fish inputs for feed that are two to five times greater in weight than other products. Wild or indigenous fish supplies are greatly reduced by many aqua culture systems through habitat modification, wild seed stock collection, water pollution and introduction of non-native species. Many aquatic flora and fauna are destroyed beyond regeneration through inputs of fish meal and fish oil in the farmed fish practice. This is what has been happening for several decades in Bangladesh. Aqua culture production is not, thus, a unique process to overcome protein deficiency in our country.

Dr. K. Maudood Elahi,  
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