

Ami Bangladesher dalal

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AFTER the latest round of protests, a friend called: "I see, now you've started writing for that dalal paper."
"Dalal paper, which one?"
"Daily Star, they are dalal for the Americans."
"Americans? But didn't you used to say they were dalal for army?"
"Yes, but then they became dalal for students, by printing photos of protests."
"But they can't be dalal for both?"
"Of course they can, that is part of

the sukkhmo karchupi. And before that they were dalal of Yunus. It's all part of the master plan."
"But isn't it possible they are calling it as they see it?"
"Honeyed words will get you nowhere. We are coming back, and we will get all you chinnito dalals."
Here we go again ... At a business seminar, one speaker talked about the need for stronger business ties with India. I knew right away that he was being pegged as an India dalal. Silently, I was relieved that I was not seated anywhere near him. Dalal by

association!
There is a long, tortured history of dalal accusations in Bangladesh politics. All the way back to the SENTO Treaty, which Suhrawardy signed with Mujib's support, making Mujib the Pro-Markin dalal to many on the Left. Later he became an Arab dalal for reaching out to the OIC, or Pakistan dalal for the 1973 general amnesty).
Moscow dalal, Peking dalal, Delhi dalal, Washington dalal. The coups and counter-coups of the

1970s were all alleged to be one country's dalal against another. In that turbulent age, Bangladesh (actually Dhaka) was awash with people that were branded as dalals. India, Russia, China, America, CIA, KGB -- if the allegations were cent-percent true, there were hundreds if not thousands of freelance dalals running around. I hope the agencies got value for their money.
In the early 1980s, feminists and left activists were resistant to the idea of working for NGOs, because no one wanted to become NGO

dalal. And now? Things change, nothing stays the same. Purity is hard to hold on to, at some point everyone faces realpolitik.
The dalal theory of political analysis is not over yet. Only the players have changed. China isn't a bad guy any more. During the BNP-Jamaat government, there was noise about a newly opened Taiwanese trade office in Dhaka. A day later, under pressure, the government revoked the announcement. But no one talked about China dalals. It's not as sexy -- the only twin spectres that get the

blood boiling is India and America.
The problem with the dalal hyper-model is that it destroys the space for any policy debate and healthy disagreement over economic or foreign policy. Trade, investment, multinationals, treaties, negotiations, rights -- everything is filtered through that prism. The dominant elephant in the room is our tortured relation with India -- no one dares even approach this topic for fear of losing their precious credibility. Instead of debating (and even demolishing) an argument, your opponent only has to slyly

attach "dalal" to the debate. That dirty word is enough, your base is gone. Like the age old "Islam gelo" argument, a hint and a breath and a whisper are enough.
A few stray words praising clean candidates -- bam, civil society'r dalal! Asian Highway? Gas policy? India'r dalal! Islamist groups? America'r dalal!
We are in volatile waters, and many more flash points may emerge. We don't really know what the next few months (or year) will bring, but we do know that we're at a junction. Either headed to something positive,

or about to go over the cliff. We very urgently need to carve out a space where we can debate things without a cloud of character assassination via the "dalal" tag.
Can we all get to the space of reasonable policy debate, without getting slandered with the dalal tags. Can't we consider ourselves Bangladesh'er dalal?
[Dalal, n. a stooge, lackey, go-between. Usually in the pay of a "foreign power"]

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Let good sense prevail in all quarters

NIAZ AHMED KHAN
WE observe with grave concern the incidents surrounding the recent arrest of senior university professors at the Dhaka and Rajshahi Universities. Our concerns are best expressed in the form of a few questions that have been dogging us ever since these ugly incidents: Was it absolutely necessary to get into these respectable teachers' residences in the middle of the night? Wouldn't it have been more decent to summon them through respective university authorities for the purpose of any investigation of allegations against them?
Newspapers tell us that the police have so far lodged some 35 cases -- targeting a staggering

82000 unnamed people -- over the recent incidents at the Dhaka University and their aftermath.
We, of course, note with some relief and appreciation the fact that there is an honest and sensible head of police (the current IGP) now. There have also been some reform efforts within the police lately, and some brilliant students have joined the service (as ASPs) in the recent years.
However, is the IGP's personal integrity, together with the reform attempts and induction of fresh blood into the service, good enough to protect ordinary citizens like us from the "police excess" that has historically been the hallmark of the police? Hand on heart, we do want to see our police living up to

their stated motto, i.e. acting as true "friends of the citizens," and we have our best wishes towards that end.
Meanwhile, who can give us explanation and elucidation on the distinction between "critique of the government actions" and "anti-state behaviour?"
Although I feel rather uncomfortable bringing in personal points, it may be relevant here to note that I have had the honour of teaching at the postgraduate level over 200 (both retired and currently serving) military officers (ranging between the ranks of Captain or equivalent and Brigadier General/equivalent) in the course of the last decade in various universities and military schools.

Based on my close affiliation with these enlightened individuals, and other experiences of interactions with the armed forces, I am convinced that there are very sensible officials in our military forces. As a proud teacher, can I now realistically expect and hope to see the wisdom and judiciousness reflected in the actions of the concerned law enforcing agencies in matters surrounding the DU events and their aftermath?
The Dhaka University authority - especially the honourable acting vice-chancellor -- has done a good job by immediately taking up the matter with the honourable chief adviser. The Dhaka University Teachers' Association, led by its honourable president and vice-

president, has also expressed its "deep concern" over the arrest and remand of its respectable members in no ambiguous terms.
We are told that the honourable chief adviser has conveyed his assurance that there will be no harassment of members of the university community. We just hope that the law enforcing agencies will now act on, and adhere to, the spirit of the honourable chief adviser's commitment and words.
No patriotic citizen can deny the need for unearthing and containing any plot or conspiracy to disrupt peace and order in the country. We want to be fully cooperative and supportive of any effort by the law agencies or the university authorities in this regard. If anyone is

proven guilty of hatching such a plot against the country, we aspire to be amongst the first to condemn him.
At the moment, however, we feel that the way in which these senior academics have been dealt with is inappropriate -- to say the least. As a member of the university family, I feel that this has created much discomfort and anxiety in the minds of members -- both students and teachers alike -- of our family.
To be candid, as I write this piece, I cannot avoid noticing a creepy feeling of uncertainty and discomfort within my mind about what's in store for us. During some two decades of my career, I have deliberately avoided every single "group" or "political" activity, and

have taken no particular interest in national party politics. However, my "apolitical" career is not enough to give me the peace of mind that I desperately need today.
In the final analysis, let us all be reminded of an old fact of which we are often oblivious: public universities are national institutions and assets. The Dhaka University is as much my university as it is the university of the honourable chief adviser, the chiefs of military staff, the IGP, or any other conscious citizen of the country. We all have a common stake in protecting this national institution.
The government has done a

commendable job of promptly lifting up the curfew, and we now keenly await opening of our universities. We all have a role to play in bringing back normalcy in the academia. The law enforcing agencies must respect the sanctity of these highest seats of learning by acting more judiciously, and we -- the members of the university family -- must reciprocate by helping the government in any reasonable effort towards reconciliation and pacification. Let good sense prevail in all quarters.

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Mass psychogenic illness -- The social role

ZULFIQUER AHMED AMIN
LIKE the way "stage fright" can cause nausea, shortness of breath, headache, dizziness, a racing heart, a stomach-ache or diarrhea, our body can react strongly to other stressful situations. Outbreaks of mass psychogenic illness show us how stress and other people's feelings and behavior can affect the way we feel.
In July, the whole nation observed how a so far unfamiliar disease has wracked the nation with panic. On July 11, 21 students of Aliabad Islamia High School and College, Narsingdi, suddenly developed convulsions, but recovered within 30 minutes. The same thing happened on July 14, when 28 more students experienced the illness.
Subsequently, it spread to Ashulia, Narayanganj, Rupganj, Magura, Bagherhat, Satkhira, Gazipur, Natore, Barisal, Jhalokathi, Jhenidah, Khagrachari, Faridpur and Chapainabaganj, making the whole nation stupefied. Since July, the total number of cases, as reported countrywide, is 550 (Xinhua, August 2). Experts opine that it is "mass psychogenic ill-

ness" (MPI), not a new event in Bangladesh but so far it had remained overlooked and unnoticed in our vast backward community.
Mass psychogenic illness occurs when groups of people (such as a class in a school or workers in an office) start feeling sick at the same time, even though there is no physical or environmental reason. MPI has occurred for hundreds of years, all around the world and in many different social settings.
Less recorded, but probably a lot more common than we realize. There is collective human behaviour, which produces different kinds of activities and phenomena (Kerekhoff, 1968). These include crowd or mob behaviour, panics, crazes and fads. These types of behaviour often occur under stress or when the ordered reality of a culture or group is disrupted (Conner, 1989).
Mass hysteria illnesses have been found throughout history (Sirois 1982). Hippocrates in 400 BC introduced the Greek term "hysteria," meaning illness caused by a wondering womb. During the middle ages, outbreaks of mass psychogenic episodes, called the St. Vitus's dance, were common.

The twitching accompanying this illness was considered a curse due to sinfulness. Later, in early colonial America, illness among young girls in Salem was attributed to witches' curses (Pennebaker, 1982). Twentieth century examples of this phenomenon have been generally found in factories, workplaces, and schools.
Outbreaks of mass psychogenic illness usually start with an environmental "trigger." The environmental trigger can be a bad smell, a sound, a suspicious-looking substance, or something else that makes people in a group believe they have been exposed to a danger. After the triggering event, many of them begin to experience signs of sickness at the same time.
Mass psychogenic illness is characterized by symptoms occurring among a group of persons with shared beliefs regarding those symptoms, that suggest organic illness but have no identifiable environmental cause and little clinical or laboratory evidence of disease.
They can spread rapidly through apparent visual transmission, and may be aggravated by a prominent emergency or media response, but are frequently resolved after patients

are separated from each other and removed from the environment in which the outbreak began.
Children and adolescents are frequently affected (Boss, 1997), and the phenomenon commonly involves groups under stress (Philen et al, 1989). Females are often disproportionately affected (Boss, 1997). From 1973 to 1993, one half of the reported outbreaks of psychogenic illness occurred in schools, followed by factories (29%), towns and villages (10%), families and other institutions.
Predominant symptoms
MPI manifests itself with the occurrence of headache (67%), dizziness (46%), nausea (41%), abdominal pain (39%), fatigue (30%), convulsion (23%), sore throat (19%), difficult breathing (13%), watery/itching eyes (12%), chest pain (11%), trouble in thinking (10%), vomiting (10%), tingling/numbness (10%), anxiety (8%), diarrhoea (7%), trouble with vision (7%), rash (4%), loss of consciousness (4%) and itching (3%) (Source: Timothy FJ, 2006).
Common characteristics of MPI
Often exposure to an environmental trigger (e.g. odour, rumour,

emergency response) precedes MPI. Those at risk are females, adolescents and children, and patients with psychological or physiological stress. The causes may be boredom, or perceived boredom, a felt lack of emotional or social support, victims often knowing each other or moving in the same friendship circles; the symptoms spread by "line-of-sight" transmission (i.e. seeing or hearing of another ill person causes the symptoms).
MPI has unique characteristics; the symptoms spread and dissipate rapidly, they are associated with minimal physical or laboratory findings, no environmental changes in scientific tests may recur with return to the environment of the initial outbreak, but they may escalate with vigorous or prolonged emergency or media response, and the victims may experience shortness of breathing and syncope (Grundy SM, 1997).
Events of mass psychogenic illness in the past
Biting and dancing manias that spread throughout parts of Europe between 13th and 17th century.

- In 1981, in a school in Montreal, Canada, 500 students aged 13-14 years fainted.
- In 1983, in the West bank of Gaza, more than 900 people, mostly schoolgirls, lost consciousness following a rumor of gas poisoning.
- In 1988, in a military school in USA, 375 were evacuated for medical emergency because of MPI.
- In 1991, 26 girls in a school in Iran developed psychomotor syndrome.
- In 1996, in a large fish-packing plant in New Brunswick, Canada, 208 people were affected by MPI.
- In September 1998, almost 800 young people in Jordan had suffered from mass psychogenic illness following tetanus-diphtheria toxoid vaccination.
- In November 1998 in UK, a teacher noticed a gasoline-like smell in her classroom, and she along with 80 students and 19 staff members developed MPI.
- On December 18 2001, 234 children at a primary school in Ca Mau City in Vietnam received the cholera vaccine and 97 were affected by MPI.

- In 2003, a 31-member family displayed mass hysteria in East Delhi, India.
- In April 2007, 600 girls in a Mexican boarding school suffered collective hysteria.

Recommended approach to patients with MPI

- Attempt to separate persons with illness associated with the outbreak.
- Promptly perform physical examination and basic laboratory testing to exclude other causes.
- Monitor and provide oxygen as necessary.
- Minimise unnecessary exposure to medical procedures or other potential anxiety-stimulating situations.
- Notify public health authority.
- Promptly communicate the results of the laboratory and environmental testing.
- While maintaining confidentiality, propagate the message that cases are improving.
- Acknowledge that the symptoms experienced by the patients are real.
- Explain potential contribution of anxiety to the patient's syn-

- drome.
- Reassure the patients.
- Encourage the media to show the real scenario, not to create panic.
- Create social awareness.

In a previous era, spirits and demons oppressed us. Although they have been replaced by our contemporary concern about the fear of invisible viruses, chemicals, toxins, the fears of social origin remain the same. Mass Psychogenic Illness is a social disorder, the outcome of deprivation, social norms and taboos, faulty child-rearing practices, rigid religious and cultural beliefs which manifest themselves as psychogenic expressions which can only be dealt with by appropriate social behaviour, media campaign and mass awareness, to prevent further onslaught on our society.
(I gratefully acknowledge the valuable suggestions of my friend Dr Abdullah Al Mamun, Head, Department of Psychiatry, DMCH).
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Party with Islamist roots set to modernize Turkey

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THE election of Abdullah Gül as president of Turkey -- a foregone conclusion since the landslide victory of Prime Minister Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in July -- marks a turning point in the country's history. If allowed to carry on the mandate with which the party won 46.5 percent of the vote in July elections, the AKP could further democratize the country, bringing about economic liberalization and international integration.
But if the AKP victory -- and the entry of a first lady wearing a headscarf -- is interpreted by Europe and the US as marking the rise of an Islamist government, this could contribute to reactionary nationalism in Turkey.
The first multiparty general elections in Turkey were conducted in 1946 through an "open cast, secret tally" system, resulting in the victory of the Kemalist People's Republican Party (CHP). Since the country's first free and fair elections conducted in 1950, however, the CHP never returned to the status of absolute majority. Almost all elections in which it came in first place followed a military intervention.

Under normal democratic conditions, the Turkish public brings to power liberal-conservative parties that favor strong integration with the West: the Democratic Party in the 1950s, the Justice Party in the 1960s, the Motherland Party in the 1980s and finally, during the last four years, the AKP. Through liberal economic reforms, these governments allowed social and economic mobilization of their grassroots, thus undermining the classical, bureaucratic model of modernization.
On July 22, the overwhelming majority of Turkish people voted along this general trend. By renewing the mandate of the AKP, Turkish voters confirmed the party's liberal-internationalist outlook and rejected isolationist tendencies. They rebuffed the authoritarian practice of secularism and continuing pressure of the military in politics designed to secure strict adherence to Kemalist goals.
Contributing to the election results was the futile attempt of the military and judicial bureaucracy to block election of Gül as president, allegedly because he failed to meet standards of secularism as defined by chief of staff General Yasar Büyükanýt as

"secularism in essence not in discourse."
Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called early elections in response to the Constitutional Court's April decision to interrupt the presidential election process through a new constitutional interpretation -- and the results signaled Gül's massive popularity.
In contrast to the outgoing president, Ahmet N. Sezer, a staunch defender of Kemalism, Gül has an internationalist outlook, demonstrated by his tenure as foreign minister under the first AKP government. He is also a practicing Muslim, whose wife wears a headscarf, the reason why some suggest that his election undermines Turkish secularism.
Since the 28 February process, the Kemalist bureaucratic establishment has intensified attempts to de-Islamify the public sphere by banning the headscarf in universities and government offices.
In a society where reportedly more than half of women don some head covering, such authoritarian secularism is out of touch. These and other limitations forced the newly rising religious middle and upper middle class to seek alternatives for social mobi-

lization. The newly emerging religious middle class internalized globalization and the idea of EU membership in their attempt to escape an authoritarian state.
This phenomenon is most visible in economically-booming central Anatolian towns -- notably Gül's hometown Kayseri, Konya and Kahramanmaraş where the AKP garnered nearly 70 percent of the vote. Despite the general rise in nationalism in the country -- as indicated by the electoral success of the Nationalist Action Party -- they experienced socio-economic transformation, thanks to export-oriented economic development. Hence, by no coincidence, these cities supported an internationally-oriented, pro-market party.
In contrast, isolationist and nationalist parties increased their percentages in coastal cities where Turks and Kurdish immigrants endure chronic unemployment and related social problems.
Only once before in the history of Turkish democracy did the ruling party increase its number of votes in two consecutive elections. Inasmuch as the primary policy agenda of the first AKP government, 2002-07, was the implementation of EU member-

ship, it would be fair to assert that Turkish voters reaffirmed the party's pro-EU agenda. Despite bureaucratic hurdles, the government implemented the necessary reforms, as demanded by Brussels, which led to membership negotiations in 2005.
Since then, the membership process has slowed to a crawl, in the context of strong European public reactions to the idea of Turkish membership that may benefit right-wing political parties. This reduced Turkish optimism, paving the way for rising nationalism and ultra-nationalism.
Yet with the 47-percent share of votes that AKP received during the last elections, in contrast to 34 percent in 2002, Turkish voters send a clear message to Europe. A majority of Turkish people express desire for greater global integration and EU membership.
Out of the three parties that crossed the electoral threshold of 10 percent, AKP most eagerly defended the country's full integration with global and European institutions, despite being labeled as "Islamist" by the secularist political establishment and the media. The party rejects any

agenda of Islamization of Turkish politics and also garnered support of non-Muslim minorities such as the Greek Orthodox community.
The primary reason the Kemalists label the party as such is individual lifestyle choices of party leaders rather than any specific policy. In practical terms, the headscarf issue has emerged as sufficient condition for being considered an Islamist in Turkish secularist discourse and represents an ideological fault line.
Maintenance of the AKP liberal and integrationist outlook depends upon a favorable response from Europe. Yet approaches of many major European governments, most particularly France and Germany, leave little room for optimism for successful completion of Turkey's EU-membership process.
French President Sarkozy as well as German Chancellor Merkel oppose Turkey's full membership, instead offering Turkey a "privileged partnership," an arrangement in which Turks would wash the dishes after others finish eating their cake. Such conditional responses may

compel the AKP government to fine-tune its stance on the membership drive to combat accusations from nationalists that the EU reforms are concessions to external pressures.
EU membership is critical of Turkey's relationship with the US, and for this reason the US remains supportive. Ironically, the general anti-Western mood stirring in Turkey is a product of American foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly US occupation of Iraq. Recent Pew opinion-poll data report that more Turks dislike the US than Palestinians do. Only 9 percent of Turks hold a favorable view about their most significant Nato ally, cited as their most admired country in 2000.
The Turkish government must address the question of anti-Americanism, but this requires US cooperation. US refusal to cooperate with Turkey to address Kurdish rebel PKK camps in Northern Iraq contributes to the anti-Americanism.
On the other hand, many Turks bitterly remember US acquiescence of numerous military interventions in the history of Turkish

democracy and regard the Bush administration's lukewarm approach on recent democratization issues as an indication of American unpredictability.
Europe and the US must recognize that only a democratic Turkey can contribute to needed stability in the region, that the nation can seek its rightful place both in Europe and the Middle East.
They should recognize that reactionary nationalism and isolationist tendencies in Turkish politics are a direct outcome of its historically-rooted perception of being victimized by the West. This perception is widespread even among the most Western-looking Turkish elites deemed as secularists.
Turkey drifting away from the West is not to the West's advantage and clearly not the desire of most Turks. With a liberal-internationalist government and presidency, Turkey's demand for European and global integration will be strong.
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