

## Facing the challenge

Let us put politics and our emotions aside and decide what we must do by way of rebuilding and restructuring BDR so that tomorrow we can emerge as a nation much stronger and more united than before. We have to take some hard decisions now without any delay.

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

**B**DR mutiny and its trail of atrocities committed by the mutineers will continue to haunt the nation for a long time to come. We were struck by a cataclysm, the like of which had never seen before.

BDR troops at Pilkhana mutinied, rounded up all officers who had assembled at the Darbar Hall, killed almost all of them including the commander, dumped their dead bodies in the sewer and in mass graves, looted officers' family quarters and then took to heels under the cover of darkness at night.

There is tell-tale evidence of officers having been tortured and their bodies burnt. The sheer scale of barbarism resorted to by the frenzied mutineers is simply mind-boggling. The mutineers have not only denigrated themselves as soldiers of a paramilitary force, but have put the entire force to shame.

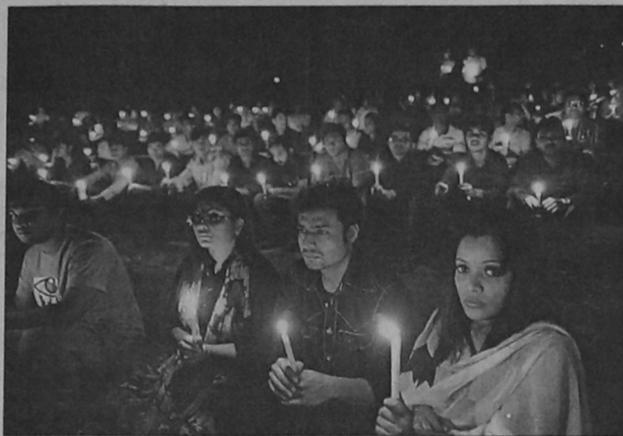
As I write this piece on the seventh day after the mutiny, the search is still going on to retrieve missing dead bodies. We must seriously ponder over what had gone amiss for which we had to pay so dearly and what we must do lest such

horror and tragedy do not visit us again.

Let us put politics and our emotions aside and decide what we must do by way of rebuilding and restructuring BDR so that tomorrow we can emerge as a nation much stronger and more united than before. We have to take some hard decisions now without any delay. What we decide and do today will shape and define our nationhood tomorrow.

There is no doubt that there was total command failure from the rifle battalion commander right up to the DG BDR. Officers were completely alienated from the BDR troops. It is difficult to believe that this alienation or estrangement took place in one day.

It is true that BDR troops never welcomed army officers as their commander. Their anti-army and anti-army-officer attitude dates back to pre-independence days in EPR where they were commanded predominantly not only by non-Bengali Pakistan army officers but also by retired non-Bengali junior commissioned officers (JCOs) and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from Pakistan army. EPR troops who were 100 percent Bengalis were badly treated by these non-Bengali officers,



Praying, and hoping for a solution.

JCOs, and NCOs.

But the anti-army officer feelings among the BDR troops as a whole have never been so pronounced and deep-seated that BDR troops would stage a mutiny and go on a mass officer killing spree like what they have done.

It is likely that their latent anti-army officer feelings have been whipped up by some vested interests who would like to see, on the one hand, an emaciated and weak army, and on the other hand, a highly demoralised army seething with discontent -- a perfect scenario to destabilise the political situation in a third world country like ours.

Thanks to enlightened and patriotic army leadership and very mature and astute political handling by the government it seems we have weathered the situation this time.

There might have been some outside elements involved in the BDR mutiny as some initial observations suggest. This may or may not be true. But what is true and irrefutable is the fact that it was our own BDR troops who carried this macabre act of killing, loot and arson on that day.

Some 7,000 troops, including those who came from various sectors outside Dhaka, had assembled at Pilkhana on

the occasion of BDR Week, an annual festivity. Supposing some 1,000 troops took part in the killing, loot and arson, what was the role played by the remainder 6,000 troops?

If the majority of troops had opposed the killing, the mutiny was bound to have failed. That the mutiny went ahead as planned and there was none who could warn the BDR chief or any other officer about the mutiny surely suggests some culpability of all BDR troops present on that day.

It will not be difficult to find out who played leading roles in the mutiny resulting in barbaric acts of killing, rape, loot and arson and disposing of the dead bodies. There are video footages of those mutineers who spoke before various TV channel reporters in support of their acts of mutiny and those who went as a delegation for talks with the prime minister. Once these mutineers are apprehended and taken on remand, it will not take much time before they begin to spill the beans and a clear picture emerges as to who did what during the mutiny.

Mutiny is the most serious offence for a military or paramilitary force to commit. Usually a military unit or battalion involved in a mutiny is disbanded. Troops involved in inciting and leading mutiny are court-martialed and awarded capital punishment. Others are meticulously screened out. Officers are sacked for command failure.

In the case of BDR mutiny, since it is a mutiny by BDR troops at Pilkhana only, there is no need to disband BDR as a

whole. But the name BDR should be changed suitably because this name will always carry with it the ignominy of mutiny.

All BDR personnel from deputy assistant director to any sepoy whose active involvement in the mutiny is established through an enquiry committee should be tried and punished as speedily as mutineers are usually tried and punished.

The remainder of the BDR troops who were physically present on that day and remained passive on-lookers, in my opinion, need to be screened out of service because their loyalty and dedication in service will always remain suspect.

As for BDR troops in various sectors outside Dhaka, a screening committee can be formed which will screen out troops whose personal conduct during and following the Pilkhana mutiny was questionable and amounted to breach of discipline and obedience.

As a long-term policy the government may consider absorbing suitable retired army officers into the force. Once army officers are permanently absorbed into the force, this will facilitate greater understanding and fellow feeling and camaraderie between officers and troops.

The present policy of posting army officers on secondment to the force may continue for the time being. But over a period of ten years or so serving army officers posted in this force may be phased out completely.

Brig. Gen. Shamsuddin Ahmed (ret'd) is a former Military Secretary to the President.

## Role of MPs in light of the Constitution

The AL government has pledged to bring about a positive change by rendering good governance. For this, the Parliament must be made effective. According to Article 65(1), MPs are vested with legislative powers of the republic and their supreme obligation is to formulate and modify legislations.

MD. ANWARUL KABIR

**T**HE ninth parliament has started its journey with a promise to establish genuine democratic ethos in the country. After the fall of autocracy, Bangladesh restarted parliamentary democracy but failed to establish an effective and efficient parliament. The eighth parliament was marked by the controversial role of the speaker, session boycotts, quorum crisis, and the sidelining of the parliamentary standing committees.

The parliament lost its significance due to the hegemony of corrupt MPs, so the republic was virtually administered by the prime minister. The government was hardly accountable to the parliament, although Article 55(3) of the constitution explicitly states: "The cabinet shall be collectively responsible to parliament."

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their supreme obligation is to formulate and modify legislations.

Instead of working at the policy level, MPs in the past involved themselves in local development works, which eventually led to all-pervasive financial corruption. For them, the major motivation for becoming MPs was to be a "millionaire." Consequently, the nation observed the influence of black money in the electoral races. Due to this paradigm shift in the politicians' psyche, the parliament became ineffective and democracy was at stake.

For the strengthening of democracy, the parliament must be the focal point of national politics. While discharging their obligations, MPs must be aware of their constitutional role and jurisdiction. Local government bodies in every administrative unit of the republic are the major actors in the field of local development works. What the parliament can do for local governments is also defined in our constitution.

Article 60 says: "Parliament shall, by law, confer powers on the local government bodies, including power to impose taxes for local purposes, to prepare their

budgets and to maintain funds." So the parliament is constitutionally bound to provide the local government bodies with full autonomy. Hopefully, instead of involving MPs in local development works, this parliament will facilitate the local governments to become more effective.

As we follow the Westminster-style parliamentary system, we should consider the role of MPs in the British parliament. British MPs split their time between working in parliament itself, working in the constituency that elected them, and working for their political party. In their constituency, MPs often hold a "surgery" in their office, where local people can discuss any matter that concerns them. MPs also attend functions, visit schools and businesses and generally try to meet as many people as possible. This gives them insight into issues they may discuss when they return to Westminster. As in Britain, our MPs should also play vital roles both in the parliament and their respective constituencies.

MPs can have offices in their constituencies so that they can assess the opinions of the people regarding laws and government policies. Besides, MPs should monitor different activities of the local government bodies from a distance, just to ensure that they follow the parliament-adopted policies.

Our constitution has bestowed great honour on the parliament and the MPs. For instance, Articles 78(1), 78(2), 78(3), 78(4) render special immunity to MPs and they are not accountable to any court for the utterances they make in the

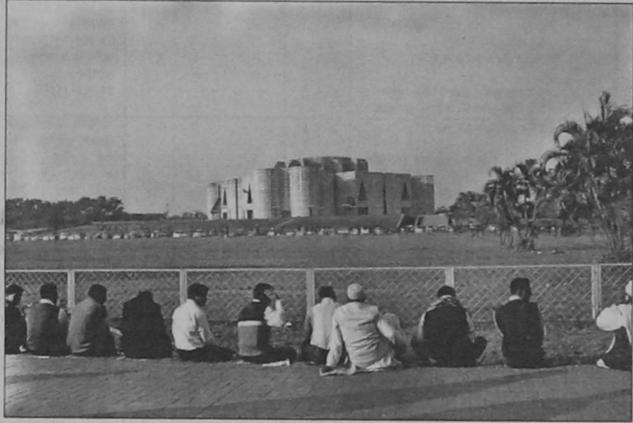
house. Unfortunately, in the past, many MPs turned the parliament into a forum for unprofessional and unethical discussion. Hopefully, this time, MPs will enhance the dignity of the parliament.

In the past we observed that many parliament sessions were either suspended or adjourned due to lack of quorum, for which 60 members are required. Every session of the parliament costs a huge amount of tax-payers' money, so attending parliament sessions is a moral obligation, if not a legal one, of an MP.

Due to partisan role of the speaker and row over trifling matters, the opposition boycotted the last parliament. This time, people want to see a different scenario. However, it was unfortunate that the opposition refrained from attending some sittings of the current session of the parliament on a dispute over sitting arrangement.

To make the parliament effective, Article 76 provides for standing committees of Parliament on different ministries and issues of public importance. These committees examine draft bills and other legislative proposals, review the enforcement of laws, and monitor the activities of the concerned ministries. However, our past parliaments undermined the parliamentary standing committees, which, in turn, curbed the role of the parliament in the governance of the country.

However, the new parliament has initiated a policy of empowering these standing committees. Besides, the treasury bench has offered at least four chairmanships in such committees to



Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action.

the opposition. In this context, it is expected that this parliament will establish the office of the ombudsman as it will further enhance the accountability of the government.

Finally, it is expected that all MPs will actively participate in the parliamentary sessions. For this, they should acquire adequate knowledge on the constitution and other government policies. However, Article 70(1) is at present a barrier to healthy parliamentary debate.

This article prevents an MP from voting against the decision of his/her party. This is a severe blow to the fundamental freedom of expression. Conscious citizens of the country expect that this article will soon be

deleted from the constitution. In fact, the parliament should be a place, in Tagore's words: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high/Where knowledge is free/Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls/Where words come out from the depth of truth/Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection/Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit/Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action."

MD. Anwarul Kabir is an educationalist, working at AIUB. E-mail: kabir@aiub.edu.

## Residents of Asia as foodstuffs



**S**OMEONE asked me the other day if I was a banana. It wasn't as odd a question as it sounds. She wanted to know if I was "yellow on the outside but white on the inside," indicating a cultural mix of east and west.

As a South Asian, I couldn't possibly be a banana. But what was I? A curry? A poppadum? A lime pickle, extra spicy? What would you call Imran Khan, the Anglicised Pakistani cricketer, or Pat Morita, the American actor who played Japanese sages? Charlie Chan, the famous Chinese movie detective, was played by a Swede, as in the nationality, not the vegetable, although come to think of it, it wouldn't have made much difference to the quality of acting either way.

It got me thinking. Can a Swede be a banana? Can a banana be a swede? We need a wider range of metaphorical edibles, I decided. So here's a guide to "Residents of Asia as Foodstuffs."

You are a Banana (yellow on the outside, white inside) if you look Chinese but speak Mandarin with an accent and gag at the thought of eating chicken feet.

Where Bananas are found: In the Asia-Pacific offices of US multinationals,

talking about their guangxi (contacts) and trying to dress like Omelettes.

You are an Omelette (yellow on the outside, yellow on the inside) if you regularly eat things, which have tentacles and can make money with your eyes closed.

Where Omelettes can be found: Running businesses in off-the-beaten track locations such as Saigon and Irian Jaya.

You are a Choc Ice (brown on the outside, white on the inside) if you look south Asian, but you prefer jazz to bhangra, like lager better than lassi, and have a thing about blondes.

Where Choc Ices can be found: At technology companies all over Asia.

You are a Cappuccino (white on the outside, brown on the inside) if you look Western but you'd instantly swap a fortnight in Florida Disneyworld for a week in a high-class ashram with an ayurvedic spa.

Where Cappuccinos can be found: In yoga classes in every main city in Asia.

You are a Boiled Egg (white on the outside, yellow on the inside) if your parents raised you to go to church but you now think Buddhism is cool, Tibet is a mystical paradise, and Richard Gere is an actor.

Where Boiled Eggs can be found: Wandering around Asia working as teachers and editors.

You are a Vanilla Yogurt (white on the outside, white on the inside) if you think of yourself as cosmopolitan but almost all your albums are by Caucasian singers

and you hold your nose when you smell natto, tofu or lime pickle.

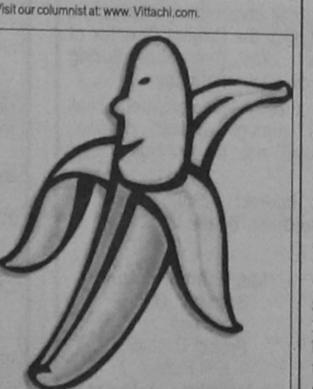
Where Vanilla Yogurts can be found: In international schools all over Asia.

You are Beef On Rye (brown on the outside, brown on the inside) if you add fresh chopped chilli to everything you eat, including chilli sauce, and sit cross-legged on Western chairs and sofas.

Where Beef On Ryes can be found: All over Asia in fields which favour swots, such as medicine and electronic engineering.

So what am I? I decided that I was a Deep Dish Super-Supreme, which is a pizza with everything on it. Or to put it another way, some of us are just plain mixed-up.

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## Cricketers hurt in Lahore

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RAVI VELLOOR

**H**EAVILY armed terrorists attacked the visiting Sri Lankan cricket team in the heart of Lahore yesterday, wounding six players and a British coach and killing at least seven Pakistanis, mostly policemen. The bloody rampage shocked cricket-mad South Asia and was further indication that militant violence has spread into the Pakistani heartland.

The team's bus came under fire from at least 12 men bearing rocket launchers, grenades and assault rifles at Liberty Circle when it was on the way to Gaddafi Stadium in an upmarket district of the city. The first grenade apparently missed its mark. The gunmen then shot bullets into the bus tyres but it continued to roll slowly towards the stadium, witnesses said.

A 25-minute firefight ensued, and the terrorists escaped. Star batsman Thilan Samaraweera and Tharanga Paranavithana were treated in hospital but were out of danger, while team captain Mahela Jayawardene and vice-captain Kumar Sangakkara were among those who suffered minor injuries.

Hours after the event, the area was still littered with broken glass, bullet casings and smashed vehicles. Policemen carried away unexploded grenades. The tour bus itself had some 25 bullet holes. Salman Taseer, governor of Pakistan's Punjab province, of which Lahore is the capital, said: "These were trained killers armed with heavy weapons."

The attack was the latest in a string of terrorist-related incidents that have reached deep into Punjab province. In September, a suicide bomber killed more than 50 in Islamabad's Marriott Hotel. The Pakistani army, seen as the bulwark of the state, is bogged down in anti-insurgency operations against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the North West Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's two main political parties are involved in a nasty feud. "They are trying to shake the stability of the state and demoralise the security forces," Ahmed Rashid, author of the widely acclaimed recent book, Descent Into Chaos, told Reuters. "They are trying to create a vacuum of power in which eventually they can take over."

Colombo instantly scrapped the tour and called its players home. The cricket

squad went to Pakistan as a stand-in after India called off its own tour after the November terror attack on Mumbai. New Delhi cited security reasons for its decision, which came in the wake of renewed tension with Pakistan after it was established that at least some of the Mumbai gunmen came from that country.

Sri Lanka's gesture was highly appreciated in Pakistan, which is as crazy about the sport as India and Bangladesh, and the Sri Lankans are widely popular there. That has raised the question of whether the Pakistani team was the target. Pakistan coach Intikab Alam said his team left their hotel five minutes late and were turned back at the scene of the shooting by security officials.

The last time a touring side had a close call in Pakistan was in 2002 when a bomb went off near the hotel where the New Zealand team was staying. There was no official word on the identity of the attackers yesterday although Taseer said they were 'from the same background' as those who attacked Mumbai in November.

Television footage showed the attackers were young men, carrying rucksacks and automatic weapons, reminiscent of the Mumbai attackers. India said it was "shocked" by the incident in Lahore and called on Pakistan to dismantle "infrastructure and facilities available to terrorist organisations."

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