

## Wasa water causing havoc

Public health calamity staring in the face

**T**WO facts stick out about the outbreak of diarrhoea in the metropolis. First is the virulence with which it is occurring: more than 700 patients land up at the ICDDR,B on daily basis. Its second feature is the early onslaught, since late February, instead of early April, it is known to occur.

That's, however, is not the only variation or marker of unusualness about the phenomenon. The precipitation of diarrhoea this time around is not ascribable to the normal factors linked to the overall deterioration of environment in hot and humid summer, but primarily to one reason which is the piped water of Wasa. This has gotten dangerously contaminated through pipeline leakage, thanks to poor maintenance by Wasa. It is to be noted that most of the diarrhoea patients come from areas of the city exposed to most contaminated supply of Wasa waters.

In other words, Wasa which is supposed to provide pure drinking water to the citizens for the sustenance of their lives, is actually doing the opposite, pushing them into the mire of lethal health hazards. This is an infliction of double-jeopardy on the citizens, for the Wasa is not only failing to meet a basic need of the denizens, that too at a monetary cost to them, it is also subjecting them to water-borne diseases. This is Wasa's disservice in the name of service.

What is, however, quintessentially ominous is the admission of some Wasa sources that it has become impossible for its treatment plants to purify the stinky pitch-black water of Shitalakkhya and Buriganga. This then takes us to the broader issue of tanneries, chemical processing units, textile, plastic and dying factories and steel rerolling, fertiliser and paper mills polluting the river waters by dumping effluents. Successive governments' failure to enforce environment standards on industry owners is a glaring shortcoming that the present AL government must endeavour to avert.

To be sure, a holistic approach is needed to ensure adequate supply of potable water to the citizens, such as would include capacity building in Wasa, private sector involvement in water supply, given that Wasa only caters to part of the water demand, and above all, make sure that the sources of surface water are not themselves polluted through sewer and effluent dumps.

## Poor state of historical relics

Preserve the links to our heritage

**T**HE government's declaration of 93 edifices and seven locations in the city as being 'protected' thereby prohibiting their demolition could not have come a day later. But merely tabooing man-made damage obviously will not suffice; for, what is actually needed is an affirmative action to protect, preserve and maintain the structures under some designated authority of the government. Much as these are keyholes through which to glimpse our rich heritage in order to be able to step confidently into the future, they are also potential tourist attractions awaiting skillful projection.

The initiative, long overdue as it is, should not be confined to Dhaka city alone; actually, the whole country is strewn with historical remnants, objects and artifacts as new discoveries are being made interminably of very ancient traces of civilisation. This paper's report titled 'Savar ancient site left unprotected' on Wednesday last brought up the appalling state of neglect in which the 1000-year old Harishchandra Rajar Dhibi was found only 32kms off the capital city. This basically highlights the concern for 391 archaeological sites declared 'protected' since the British rule all over the country. What with their protected status, most of them have been encroached upon or are in illegal possession.

That is one aspect of the matter, the other much broader need arises for a systematic recognition of all our archaeological sites through an extensive and intensive survey carried out by knowledgeable people in the field. We fully endorse the concrete suggestions aired by president, Asiatic Society, Prof Sirajul Islam and reputed historian Prof Abdul Momen Chowdhury for stemming any further degeneration of the antiquities. This will require taking the archaeological places under the wings of a specified authority. A composite body of experts should be formed to go into the entire matter and devise ways and means to ensure preservation of our historical relics in accord with international standards for which global support will be forthcoming.

The ministry of culture has its job cut out.

## The baffling investigation of the BDR carnage

The queries and doubts raised are not without ground and significance because the taxpayers need to know if we have failed to empower the supreme investigative outfit of the country at our own peril.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

**I**T can be said with some amount of certitude that never before had the criminal investigation agency of the country been beset with such a massive task -- the unearthing of the multidimensional crimes committed on February 25 at the BDR headquarters. The enormity of the assignment can be gauged from the comments of external investigating experts to the effect that between 200 and 400 investigators would be required to adequately investigate the occurrence.

The fact that our CID does not have adequate personnel to properly investigate incidents of such unusual dimension is now clear. The CID has requested Police Headquarters to depute additional manpower to meet the shortfall.

Such a scenario gives rise to many questions and apprehensions. First of all, will the CID get properly trained personnel to do the exacting and complex investigation expeditiously? Secondly, how strong is the pool of expert investigators that has been developed over the preceding years? Thirdly, how badly has the organisation's performances with regard to other sensational cases suffered due to the reported whole-time preoccupation with the BDR incident?

The queries and doubts raised are not without ground and significance because the taxpayers need to know if we have failed to empower the supreme investigative outfit of the country at our own peril. Venturing into specifics, it is important to know if we have made timely allocation of resources to strengthen the technical capability of the investigators, thereby encouraging and nurturing a scientific temperament.

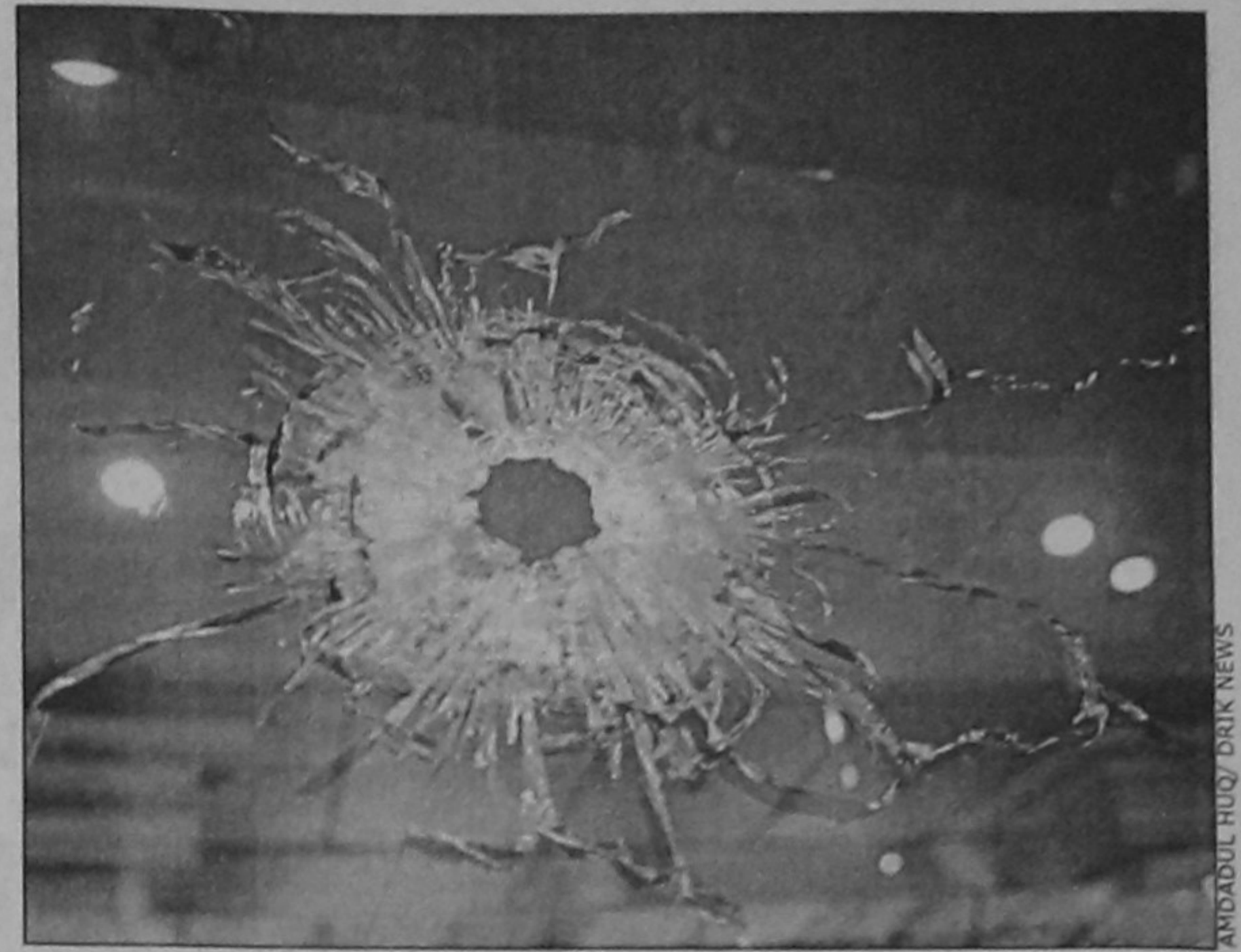
A crisis of the proportion of the BDR carnage has exposed us to a situation where lapses and deficits will not be condoned by the families of the victims nor the nation as a whole. It is definitely time to comfort the afflicted and afflict the perilously comfortable.

Though not made public for obvious reasons, those in the know of things tell us that investigators from distant shores have been surprised to see the paucity of our resources in fighting and unearthing serious crimes. Howsoever disappointing and galling this may be to our national prestige, it is time to locate the deficits and take adequate remedial actions without any further delay. It would also be important in the process to pin-point the unthinking comfortable in the corridors of power in public interest.

Law enforcement throughout the world has two major dimensions, that of crime and public order, though the two cannot be placed in watertight compartments. Experts tell us that imbalance in allocation of resources between these two areas will be harmful insofar as it relates to the objective of proper maintenance of law and order.

In Bangladesh, we have attached disproportionate importance to the so-called maintenance of public order at the expense of overlooking crime prevention and scientific investigation. Thus, we see more personnel for political intelligence collection, security of VIPs including the foreign diplomats, riot police establishment and the so-called elite units.

Capital investments for public order situation have been accorded priority over similar expenditures for improving scientific skills of the investigator. The armoured



The truth must be found.

car has been more important than the forensic laboratory.

In a scenario as above, the professionals and the politicians have to share the blame, but perhaps the politicians are more to blame. This is so because enforcement leadership had to satisfy the political boss's requirement. To the political leadership the political opposition is the graver threat and, as such, greater resources have to be deployed to counter that scourge. The political executive is the authority, and he has the last say.

The above observations do not mean that things are irreversible or irreconcilable, or that we have reached a precipice. In fact, it is time to initiate a pragmatic and beneficial discussion involving all stakeholders to fix our order of priorities in the law and order enforcement sector.

It may be appropriate now to know about the enormous sums of public money that have to be spent to counter public

order threats caused by hartals and other such situations. One needs to know how many such harmful events could be avoided to save public money that could be used elsewhere for tangible public relief.

Equally important is to reduce the public order situation by means of discussion between the politicians. It may be an occasion now for our politicians to examine the deficits of our investigative skills in the public interest. In fine, there has to be an intelligent and pragmatic understanding of our law and order requirements.

Allocation of more resources for enhancing our investigative abilities should be a priority. Such allocation should be considered an investment in the planning process as expenditures in this area would produce handsome returns, in addition to firmly establishing our credentials in the primary regulatory function.

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## Talking less, talking sense

The bottom line is that we Bangladeshis love to talk. Talking may always help some -- like mobile phone operators -- but in most instances, it invites undue trouble.

SYED MUNIR KHASRU

**G**EORGE Bush Jr. has been one of the most unpopular US presidents. However, what has caught attention of many is his restrained and sober conduct since he left the White House. In his first public comments after leaving office, Bush stated that it was "critical" that Obama succeeded. When asked to comment about Obama, he said that Obama deserved "his silence."

The point is that even Bush knows when to be "silent." Alas! Look at some of our politicians and intellectuals dishing out words at every opportunity, no matter whether the nation either desires or deserves them. As if "words are always bold" and "silence can never be gold."

The commerce minister continues to reveal something new almost every day to anyone who holds a microphone in front of him. He has a service record from a disci-

plined force and was known for his sensible comments during tenure of the CTG. Hence, when someone like him starts talking so randomly, it raises more questions than it answers. When some of his cabinet colleagues are saying that he should not pay heed to rumours, he himself has become a source of rumours.

In the early hours of the BDR mutiny, the electronic media became quite insensitive to what is known as "the other side of the story." When popular TV anchors were scuffling with each other to record the comments of the mutineers on how the army has deprived and exploited them, none of them bothered to say: "We are yet to have comments on this issue from the army."

In TV talk-shows, some intellectuals and politicians could not wait to voice their opinions without realising that a national crisis of such a magnitude required calm, composure, and sensible behaviour from

everyone. When most of the people were shocked by this unprecedented mutiny, it was the duty of the opinion leaders to talk less and understand more before speaking publicly.

When the full picture started emerging, the same people appeared in the media again and cried their hearts out for the army officers and vilified the BDR. In their desperation to recover lost ground, they don't realise that the people are more sensible than they think, and have better judgment.

Exercising a little discretion while talking in the early hours when people were more confused than informed, and then making matured observations later when things started surfacing more clearly, would have helped everybody. The lesson -- please talk less and talk sense so that you don't have to scramble later to recover lost ground.

During meeting of the PM with army officers after the mutiny, it came out that one of the major causes of the anger and frustration of the army was the loose talk of some politicians and intellectuals, as well as the imprudent journalism that many had indulged in during the mutiny. The PM had to bear the brunt of the immature

behaviour of some of her colleagues and party intellectuals, and she showed praiseworthy patience in handling the situation.

The same sagacity was shown by the agriculture minister when she recently commented that it was better for ministers to speak less and work more as the opposition was there to the talking. The law minister also has shown sensibility in his comments on the mutiny.

The bottom line is that we Bangladeshis love to talk. Talking may always help some -- like mobile phone operators -- but in most instances, it invites undue trouble. In a recent round table discussion with leading South Korean intellectuals, one of the Korean professors remarked: "You Bangladeshis have lot of talent, and ideas but why do you have to talk so much? Please do and show."

The visiting professor indeed captured well one of the major weaknesses we have in a land where at times there are too many advisers and not as many doers. When the balance shifts, we as a nation will move at a much faster pace than we have been able to do so far. Let's talk less and work more.

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## Combating militancy brooks no let-up

One imperative is the dissemination of Islam's message of peace and love in the society, which would help stem the misleading indoctrination. Increased investment to generate employment on a wider scale will discourage the poor from committing desperate acts of militancy.

MD. ALI AKBAR

**R**EPORTS have that it religious militants have struck extensive roots thanks to years of overlooking. The recent home ministry revelation puts the number of Islamic militant outfits at 31. Prof. Barakat has referred to seven key investment sectors of terror finance and annual recruitment of one million militants. Allegedly due to leniency of the BNP-Jamaat regime, militants strengthened their foothold, which has reached today's alarming proportions.

Militants thrive because of the mushrooming of *quomi madrassahs*, which impart name-only education, mostly to boys of poor backgrounds. With the kind of impractical, religious education they receive, they find themselves unfit to do anything in life. Frustrated, they fall easy prey to those who nourish a secret agenda in the guise of promoting sublime Islamic values. These ill-motivated quarters take the advantage of their poverty to draw

many have-nots into their fold with money and religious indoctrination.

The horrendous militancy issue has not cropped up overnight. When religious terrorism first appeared, the then government flatly refused to even take it into cognisance, let alone proceed against it.

Who does not know that religious extremists wreaked havoc under the noses of law enforcing agencies in northern districts? They killed their adversaries in broad daylight, unleashing a reign of terror. They even forced people to pay tolls in the name of *jihad*, with the knowledge of the pliant administration. Some political black sheep allegedly harboured them, so the police looked the other way while they were carrying out mindless atrocities.

In 2005, a horrible spate of militancy shook us through serial bombings in 60 districts, and killing of judges and lawyers, artists, and commoners. Faced with rising public sentiments, the then government had to eat humble pie and conduct a crackdown on the militants, leading to the arrest and trial of their kingpins.

The execution of the top militants dismantled the militants. They went into hibernation temporarily to re-emerge with vengeance, as it is feared they are doing now.

Despite the busting of militants' dens, their preparations have continued almost unabated, thus resulting in a well-entrenched build-up across the country. What looks most ominous is the emerging threat of terror strikes anywhere on the heels of BDR carnage, in which many suspect there were invisible militant hands.

If that suspicion is true, the militants must have been terribly emboldened by successful execution of the brutal mayhem to try further misadventures. That is what makes it imperative to deal with the phenomenal rise of militancy in the country on a war footing. Otherwise, militancy might recur with more frequency, maybe after a lull.

Against this appalling backdrop, the government move to unearth possible sources of terror financing is quite in order. But, the more the drum-beating about it, the less will be the chance of finding evidence, as the alerted financiers will erase all clues of dubious transactions. Instead, meticulous searching sans media hype may yield better results.

One important side to terror financing has perhaps escaped notice. The terror finance might not have come through the banking channel, and in case did, it must have been disguised so it could not be

traced. Whatever the case, underestimating the militants and their backers will be a blunder.

Some say that the NGOs approved in ex-social welfare minister Mujahidi's stint may be responsible for terror financing. That a large chunk of Tk.90,000 crores worth of foreign finance received by NGOs during the previous regime has gone into militants' hands (*Samakal*, March 20) horrifies us, thus inviting urgent investigation.

One means of terror finance might be through remittances by *hundi*, which remains out of the purview of the probe. What is the way to destroy the route? Bangladesh's entry into global anti-terror financing networks might be a worthwhile step.

One imperative is the dissemination of Islam's message of peace and love in the society, which would help stem the misleading indoctrination. Increased investment to generate employment on a wider scale will discourage the poor from committing desperate acts of militancy.

Religious education needs streamlining with modern education, so it can hold out job prospects to all. Last but not the least is the need for restructuring the intelligence outfits, and installing a comprehensive counter-terrorism mechanism for upgrading our intelligence capability to track newer security dimensions.

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