

## PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

## Public hospitals and corruption

### Recruiting efficient technicians an imperative

THE nation's public hospitals are in a spot. The reason is of course a familiar one, corruption. As many as 370 health technicians have for the past one year had their recruitment stalled owing to allegations of financial corruption on the part of a now retired senior official at the Directorate General of Health Services. The then director (administration) of DGHS reportedly accepted pecuniary benefits from those seeking employment as technicians in hospitals in return for appointing them to the services.

The good news here is that the DGHS authorities called a halt to the questionable recruitment, which was earlier preceded by a written examination in August and then a viva voce earlier this month. The bad news is that an absence of good technical hands is clearly impeding the public hospitals from functioning effectively, which in other words means that hundreds of patients could be facing difficulties in undergoing treatment at these hospitals. Obviously, it is important that reports of corruption in the recruitment of the technicians be vigorously and swiftly investigated and those alleged to be involved subjected to a thorough inquiry. There cannot be any compromise here particularly since a technician's job demands great skill as well as experience. These are necessary since it is the lives of ailing people they will be dealing with through being able to operate the intricate, sophisticated equipment in hospital labs.

That takes us to the next point. There are at present 731 posts of technicians lying vacant in the public hospitals. Why that is so is beyond comprehension given that public health is dependent on a twenty-four-hour presence of such technicians. The DGHS authorities should be speeding up the process of filling in the vacancies. Now, where the 370 already selected technicians are concerned, let there be a quick re-examination of those who may not have been part of the corruption involved. A new examination will surely be tedious, but under the circumstances it is the only way of addressing the grievances of those who might feel they have been wronged by the DGHS' putting a stop to their recruitment.

## Desperate hill grabbers

### Need for tougher measures to stop it

DEFYING High Court ruling against cutting hills without Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) clearance from Department of Environment (DoE), yet another reserved hill has fallen prey to a grabber's greed near Cox's Bazar sea beach.

The local influential person involved in the forcible occupation used faked documents of ownership and has started a housing project and levelled a large swathe of land at hilltop threatening a government-owned telecommunication tower adjacent to his project.

The individual responsible had been doing his illegal construction works under the nose of the local administration before it could take action. Surprisingly, the grabber claimed that he was ignorant of the hill's reserved status, while the head of the district police administration admitted to only having heard of the illegal activity.

It may be recalled that, in the first week of this month, the DoE had penalised two housing projects at Sitakunda and in Chittagong. And the HC order restricting the offence was issued on August 23 amidst a free-for-all among the hill grabbers.

The latest incident is a patent case of desperation on the part of the grabbers who think nothing of the administration and the HC ruling in the criminal act of inflicting irreversible damage to the environment and biodiversity of the hills.

The way the illegal act of hill cutting is continuing, it appears, its perpetrators are very powerful and influential so much so that they can bend the laws at will.

The destructive trend has been going on too long to allow it any further and has to be topped under any circumstances, if we mean to protect the hills and their ecology.

What the administration had been doing so far to arrest the illegal activity has proved inadequate. Now the need is to take tougher measures. The government will be required to exert its political will to put an end to the

# Loud as town crier's announcements



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

HERE is nothing called private, confidential and secret between key players in the public domain,

even perhaps in any interstate relationship. WikiLeaks has not just exploded that myth, but debunked it as well.

Even the time-wrap of 30 years before official documents could be accessed and revealed to the public might not have a leg to stand on.

The much-touted veils of secrecy are stripped away laying bare unvarnished, often unpalatable, stories behind stories over a happening period of time.

In the US much has been made about the WikiLeaks disclosures, these being allegedly in breach of confidentiality putting individual lives at risk and damaging US international relations. For all we know, however, "the confidences were posted on a US government intranet with around 3 million Americans cleared to read materials thus classified. So, The Guardian said: "Before US government officials point accusing fingers at others, they might first have the humility to reflect on their own role in scattering 'secrets' around a global intranet."

Of the 2,182 items of information in possession of WikiLeaks about Bangladesh, reportedly only one-third of the total has seen the light of

the day. Are we in for bigger shocks?

Even whatever has come out impacted hugely on the public mind, political parties, leaders and the media itself. Public appetite for information and transparency up front has only grown. As a result, the demand on national newspapers and the electronic media has increased that much more. And also on the government to live with the times,

State Department responses. Their veracity can always be checked by serious researchers.

The political parties and leaders have been dismissive of the parts that put them in bad light and savoured those that went against their opponents.

WikiLeaks', or for that matter, the US embassy representatives' pattern of emphases and their readings of

*Will the political parties and the domestic power brokers be wizened by the experience? They must learn to look inwards, respect public sentiments for self-reliant solutions and give a better account of patriotism overall.*

viz. the liberalised information world.

In truth, have we been really surprised by the revelations? Shocked and perturbed, yes; but not overly surprised or sensationalised. The people have only found new perspectives and answers to questions that have been agitating their minds prior to and during the last caretaker government. Public impressions had been already well-formed about political parties consorting with foreign diplomats and development partner representatives. Most of the speculations and rumours of the time have found corroboration in the WikiLeaks reports.

These, however, sound plausible and credible given that they are sourced in US embassy cables and

situations could have been somewhat different in tone and temper than those on the Bangladesh side. But there is no questioning the meetings held with US embassy and approaches made courting US support for the differing agenda of the political parties. Caught in the crises of their own making and prisoners of their own contrivances, they had to cry on the others' shoulders.

Thus what is conclusively brought to light is: self-shaming. Instead of taking public into confidence based on a reading of their pulse, or trying an indigenous solution to a national problem, they fell for a scramble to steal a march over each other by cultivating foreign diplomats. The bankruptcy of our political parties couldn't be more exposed.

There are some positives though. The international community effectively discouraged one-sided election planned by BNP for January 22. They spurned any suggestion of extra-constitutional takeover linking it to a withdrawal of prospect for participation in the UN Peacekeeping Force.

The agenda such as minus-two theory, sending of two prime political leaders to exile and creating a third political party, didn't receive the support of key Western powers or the Coffee Club in short.

It is as well that the idea mooted by the military-backed Fakhruddin-led caretaker government for National Defence Advisory Council and placing a ban on student politics were thrown out of gear.

Will the political parties and the domestic power brokers be wizened by the experience? They must learn to look inwards, respect public sentiments for self-reliant solutions and give a better account of patriotism overall.

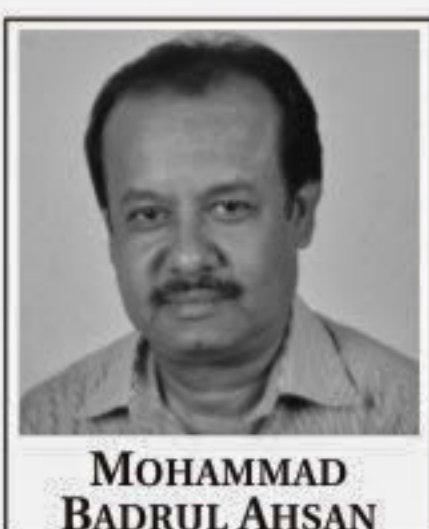
The WikiLeaks exposes are like post-dated cheques with expired dates that cannot be encashed to pin down any political party for its part in the proceedings. They are all to blame collectively.

The messages are loud and clear like the town crier's announcements. Heed you must, or enact a replay of the same journey through the dark, dank tunnel. History teaches that it does not. Yet, in our extraordinary situation it hopefully will.

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## CROSS TALK

# We hate the sinner and love the sin



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

WHEN everybody ganged up on the communications minister before last Eid, his quick-to-smile face was also in

the discussion. That was when he thought he owed us an explanation and said in a press conference that he was born a laughing baby before pleading why he shouldn't be blamed if his face lit up with a smile every time he opened his mouth. Reports claimed that the giggling minister was visibly embarrassed like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar. He was trying to cover his smile with one hand in the manner a lampshade diffuses light.

That this minister is still sitting tight in his chair shows that his good luck is as enduring as his smile. The roads are beginning to look like the surface of the moon again as hastily done patchworks are coming off like plaster falling off a crumbling house. Those who vowed to unseat him may have gone home, harried and tired. But the man, who was the center of the obstreperous attention, is still going strong laughing his way to the bank. The lucky ones stay lucky no matter what rest of the world likes to think of them.

Let's face the fact. The heat turned up on the communications minister not because he had done anything wrong. We really do not have a strong

case against this man except for the miserable condition of our roads, which are virtual deathtraps. The underlying assumption is that the minister wasn't doing his job. He should have literally kept his eyes on the roads from the driving seat of his power position.

What piqued us more is what we believe we know about this man. We hear his fingers are in many business pies. We hear his company represents Chinese companies like a stalk holds inflorescence. These are but unsub-

stantiated rumours hard to prove because when an affluent man sits in public office the line between him and his money becomes a no-man's land.

It was Machiavelli of all persons in the world who left government service poorer than he had entered it. "My loyalty and honesty," he boasted, "are proven by my poverty." Perhaps that is one way to find out which a private man in public office serves better between his country and bank balance.

*All should know it's our fault if money-based politics is debased by money. We hate the sinner but love the sin. Nothing will change if one minister goes. Money will create many more.*

Not so when a private man concurrently pursues his business interests as a public figure, because it creates confusion. It becomes difficult to tell,

which of the two interests is moving faster than the other. Even worse if both are moving at the same speed, because illusion of speed makes it tricky. It might seem neither is moving fast enough.

That is why more democratic countries require politicians to leave their private businesses at the doorsteps of public office. Even an unconscionable Dick Cheney had to appear distanced from Halliburton, while he was the vice president of the United States. In this country, we are running in the

opposite direction. We are taking politics to the doorstep of business. If observed from space, they might even appear indistinguishable from each other.

We hear dreadful stories of party nominations being auctioned for money. We hear that cabinet positions are allocated depending on one's ability to bankroll the party. That is why we have no choice but to accommodate profit motive and patriotism in equal space in our imagination.

Few years back a commerce minister had inaugurated his own hotel business while in office. A former foreign minister had opened his car showroom as if it was some national project. Their ribbon-cutting pictures were flashed in the media unabashedly putting political face to their personal flourish.

In all fairness, this communications minister has been a victim of circumstances. He never went out and personally sabotaged the roads. He was not sitting behind wheels when reckless drivers crashed into other vehicles. He has been busy with mega deals -- flyover, beltway, monorail, and subway. Friends say he is taking our road communication to the next level. Foes say he is more interested in big-budget projects because they make more business sense to him.

But, if unsparingly judged by performance, other ministers are not doing, if not worse, better than him. Prices of essential commodities have turned into roulette board betting. Denial has become the best way to safeguard law and order. Foreign policy is often an alien subject to the concerned ministry. An avuncular minister is obsessed that small investors are responsible for stock market manipulation. The shipping minister has gone amphibious, spending more time on land to meddle in the road transport business.

Oye, Oye. All should know it's our fault if money-based politics is debased by money. We hate the sinner but love the sin. Nothing will change if one minister goes. Money will create many more.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 16

1941

World War II: concerned that Reza Pahlavi the Shah of Persia is about to ally his petroleum-rich empire with Nazi Germany during World War II, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union invade Iran in late August and force the Shah to abdicate in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

1945

World War II: The surrender of the Japanese troops in Hong Kong.

1955

Juan Perón is deposed as the ruler of Argentina.

1963

Malaysia is formed from the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, British North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak. However, Singapore soon leaves this new country.

1970

King Hussein of Jordan declares military rule following the hijacking of four civilian airliners by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). This results in the formation of the Black September Palestinian paramilitary unit.

1982

Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon.

1990

The railroad between the People's Republic of China and Kazakhstan becomes complete at Dostyk, adding a sizable link to the concept of the Eurasian Land Bridge.