

## Come out to share graft information

### Whistleblower Act requires awareness building

THE Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) chairman's call to the public to supply it with information along with 'evidence' on corruption taking place in the government or non-government organisations is welcome.

The call finds instant resonance with us as it should with others.

We urge our readers and citizens at large to come out with information supported by necessary leads, clues and better still with circumstantial evidence and make those available to the ACC.

They may be personally aggrieved by a deliberate act of corruption or suggestion of it or have knowledge of others being so affected. In both cases, they should volunteer information to the ACC.

In the same breath, as we extend our support to the ACC, we also urge our fellow media houses, the civil society and non-government organisations to help launch an awareness building campaign to motivate people in using the Act.

In specific terms, the campaign should educate people about the Public Interest Related Information Disclosure (Protection) Act, 2011 and its provisions that protect the whistleblower in case the quarters affected by the information try to harass or punish him or her. That would go a long way to encourage the public to come up with enough information.

The ACC for its part should publicise the provisions of the Act to secure wider public cooperation and participation.

On a cautionary note we would like to make it clear that the Act must not be allowed to be abused to exact personal or professional vendetta by anyone against any person. Just as individuals should not unnecessarily lodge complaints against anybody to malign or vilify, or to fulfil one's personal agenda, so also the ACC should ensure some failsafe measures to weed out biased, motivated and concocted information.

Basically the onus is on the ACC to check on the information through proper investigation before processing it for action.

## A trifling matter turns bloody

### Why do police play bystander

THE news of fifty villagers including three policemen being injured in violent clashes over a trivial matter is an indicator of a disturbing trend. Small arguments turn into battles with mobs appearing, ready with sharp weapons, to pounce upon their perceived enemies.

Law enforcers are either too few, too ineffectual or just plain absent during these outbursts of violence that escalate and paralyse the roads.

In this particular case two residents of two villages got into an altercation over CNG fare. Their relatives, ready with machetes and sharp spears got involved and full blown brawl was underway. Then others joined in and the police could not control the situation despite using tear-gas and rubber bullets.

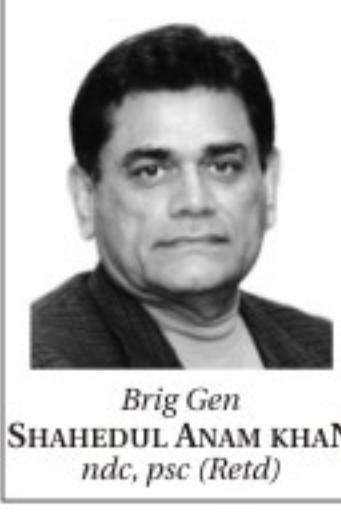
While the tiff between the two villagers should have been manageable with the help of others on the scene, it is hard to understand why their relatives would be so ready with sharp weapons, to take the scuffle to such violent levels. Witnesses have said that clashes between the two villages are quite common. It always degenerates into a clannish war.

Add to that the fact that most of those in the mob took advantage of the gridlock created by the brawl that blocked four highways, to loot all those passengers stranded in the buses for more than two hours.

All this indicates another brewing problem -- lawlessness in these areas where the police have very little presence, far less control over such volatile situations. They shy away from such a situation lest they are blamed for taking sides.

Obviously the authorities have to have more law enforcers patrolling these areas where large number of people gather and where crime is easily facilitated. Community police could also be a good addition to the regular forces. Strong

# A bunch of contradictions



Brig Gen  
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
psc (Retd)

**A**s we find ourselves in the cusp of the fifth decade of our independence that is very frankly my assessment of ourselves, of politics and our polity -- a bunch of contradictions.

We have passed 40 years of our independence and it seems that we have grown old without growing up and really have to settle for all the contradictions, right from the day we picked up the pieces of a war-ravaged country till now. One finds it hard to explain to one's progeny.

And frankly not many are willing to grapple with this either because they do not find it worth their time or would not risk stepping on sensitive toes investigating these issues.

The very first contradiction which we still can't explain is the advance to the rear in the democratic front the country made when democracy was replaced by a one party rule. We find many explanations as a postscript of the political narratives of post-December 16, 1971 justifying Bangabandhu's move. But those remain as unconvincing now as they were then.

How do you respond to the query as to why the elected representatives of those very people that were subjected to the most brutal treatment by a military gone berserk, for demanding their rightful share in the governance of the country and for establishing majority rule, could think of discarding a democratic system and go for one party rule? The complete change of mental tack of our leaders is hard to rationalise. It is more exasperating when the military alone is blamed for the demise of democracy in the country, conveniently forgetting that the first nail in coffin was driven in on January 20, 1975.

The 16 years of military rule is yet another contradiction that one finds hard to answer. We managed to do what the Pakistani military could not dare. They did not dare to kill Sheikh Mujib but we did not blink an eye to

kill the main architect of our liberation, and along with him most of his family members. There is no point in indulging in recrimination and talking about who failed to do what and why. The fact is the change was validated and fealty was expressed to the leaders of the coup. And that is the contradiction one finds difficult to explain.

August 15, 1975, ushered in the dispensation of the Khaki, a dispensation that was anathema to the psyche of the Bengalis during the Pakistani rule. And yet they managed to pre-

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dominate politics for good part of sixteen years till a people's movement toppled it. The military managed to near-perpetuate its rule only because of direct and indirect compact of a segment of the polity with the military rulers. And that is another contradiction that one finds hard to explicate.

Even more confounding is the fact that in one recent instance intervention by the military, albeit indirect, was welcomed by the people, only because they found in that a respite from the stifling political situation that the two major political parties had managed to create between themselves. What a contradiction in a society that is willing to die for democracy yet choosing a completely non-pluralistic arrangement.

Look at the contradictions arising out of the ruling of the highest court of the country. In its verdict on the 13th Amendment to the Constitution the Appellate Division had declared the said amendment prospectively void yet left the option of holding the next two elections under the caretaker dispensation, "to avoid chaos." If allowing something by the court, which it itself declared illegal, to

In recent times there can be nothing more contradictory than some parts of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, where the government wanted to have the cake and take it too. Without offering a value judgment, on religion or on secularism, one cannot find a more contradictory situation for state that claims itself to be secular and yet retain a religion as the state religion. And this is where the courage of conviction and politics comes in.

And when one is asked to explain



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remain operative, even if for a limited period, not a contradiction, then what is? As we had said before, the verdict was like declaring a marriage illegal, and the three offspring too, yet allowing the couple to produce two more illegal children should the illegally married couple wish to.

Some of the contradictions stem from our inability to stand up for our "convictions." And the inverted commas are deliberate, because of the compromise made to accommodate these beliefs one cannot but feel that either there is lack of courage of conviction or these are but ploys for political gains.

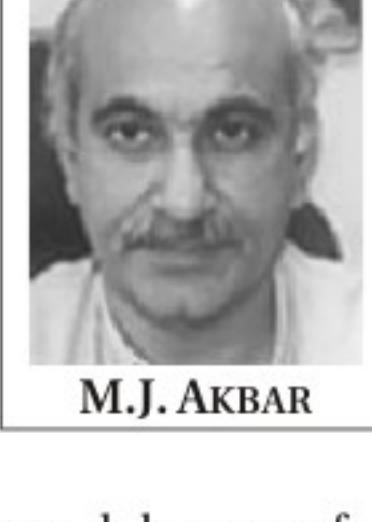
the difference between "people" and "citizen" used to differentiate between a Bangalee and Bangladeshi, as the 15th Amendment does, one can only struggle to find a plausible reply.

We are living with these and many more such contradictions perhaps believing in Goethe that, "contradiction makes us productive" and Nietzsche's invocation that, "only idiots fail to contradict themselves three times a day." In fact our record shows that we are neither anymore the productive nor the wiser.

The author is Editor, Defense and Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

## BYLINE

# The world of Maya



M.J. AKBAR

**T**HAT formidable number cruncher of the Mayan civilisation who, 5,125 years ago, initiated a calendar which decided, without

much by way of explanation, that its last date would be December 21, 2012, had one distinct advantage over any contemporary astrologer. He isn't around to find out whether he was right.

So will the world end in a little less than 12 months?

My own prophecy is: yes. The world will end for most of those who are currently leading the world. Superstars will splutter into some black hole, primarily for political reasons. Biology may take its toll in one or two cases, but we shall leave God's decisions to God. I am not insisting that the world will become a better place in 2012, but it will be a different place. A democratic cull of serious proportions is going to happen.

The year will get into the mood with Taiwan's presidential elections on January 14; and in February India will echo with the click of ballot boxes. Admittedly, Uttar Pradesh is not a nation, but it has a population equal to that of Pakistan; so while it is a province, its impact is never provincial. On March 4, Vladimir Putin will discover whether his carefully laid plans to be in power till the end of time have been interrupted by street rage. In the same month, Iran will get

a new Majlis [Parliament]. On April 22, France heads for the ballot box, finalising Nicolas Sarkozy's fate on May 6. Pesky London will provide some pantomime entertainment alongside, when lusty Boris Johnson and sperm-donor Ken Livingstone face off for the most glamorous civic job on the globe. In October, the most boring election in history will replace Hu Jintao with Xi Jinping as general secretary of the Chinese Communist

sleeves like an amateur wrestler, or asks for ten years in office when the legal limit is five. Do not overestimate him either, just because the jangle in his pocket is the sound of the silver spoon he was born with. The UP elections will test the limits of charisma as much as they question the traditional contours of voting mathematics. The real surprise, so far, is that Rahul Gandhi, who set out to become a new icon, has been reading by a trite and

hand will revive fading support from the community.

But it is the hard push for a food security bill that indicates the intensity of the effort. Populism works as long as it remains popular; once it frays, as MNREGA is beginning to do, it becomes counter-productive.

MNREGA was timed perfectly, just before the last general elections, and the rewards are visible. Similarly, the investment in the food security bill will provide maximum political returns by next monsoon or winter; after that, its internal inconsistencies could turn it into a liability. In the immediate term, it will help in UP poll atmospherics, but it is a national investment, not a regional one.

It makes sense if this is the Congress scenario for 2012. A reasonable performance in UP provides the ballast to make Rahul Gandhi prime minister after the presidential elections in June. This should not be much of a problem; Dr. Manmohan Singh will be 80, and can make age an excuse to retire. The Congress will welcome the change with due jubilation. Allies will have little option except to submit. And then Prime Minister Rahul Gandhi will, riding the media hype stimulated by his promotion, announce that he needs the legitimacy of popular support and call a general election next November.

Welcome to 2012, and the world of Maya.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 29

1786

French Revolution: The Assembly of Notables is convened.

1911

Sun Yat-sen becomes the provisional President of the Republic of China; he formally takes office on January 1, 1912.

1930

Sir Muhammad Iqbal's presidential address in Allahabad introduces the Two-Nation Theory and outlines a vision for the creation of Pakistan.

1937

The Irish Free State is replaced by a new state called Ireland with the adoption of a new constitution.

1998

Leaders of the Khmer Rouge apologize for the 1970s genocide in Cambodia that claimed over 1 million lives.