

KALEIDOSCOPE

A peaceful protest

The government should respond positively

WE thank Begum Zia for choosing a non-violent means to ventilate her party's stand. That a peaceful civic protest can carry the intended message more loudly than any other form of political agitation has been proven by the BNP's hunger protest.

Given the inevitable violence that programmes such as hartal and mass procession or rallies degenerate into either due to the belligerent behaviour of the opposition or the extreme coercive attitude of the law enforcing agencies, this was indeed a thoughtful alternative, when even an innocuous human chain inevitably leads to traffic snarl and throws up other forms of impediments for the public.

That said, the underlying purpose of the hunger strike should not be lost on those the message was intended for -- the government. The three basic issues for which the protest was organised were disappearance of Ilias Ali, release of detained party leaders and restoration of the caretaker system. And the last was again forcefully articulated by the BNP chairperson, among other rhetorical statements, asking the government to propose talks on the caretaker system in writing.

We feel there are all the reasons for the government to react positively to the demands of the opposition regarding the caretaker system. The government cannot be oblivious to the fact that the public is in fact hoping fervently for the impasse to be resolved through dialogue, and is perhaps bracing for the worst if that does not eventuate. And the major reason for the stand-off being the issue of how the next election would be held, it is that concern which the government must address immediately.

There is no alternative to dialogue and the general opinion is that the next election, to be participatory and universally acceptable, must be held under a neutral dispensation, call it what you will. And it is our understanding too that the government is not altogether disinclined towards such an idea. Thus we fail to understand why this reluctance to engage in talks? And for this the lead must come from the government.

Without sounding alarmist we must caution that the road the present impasse might lead the country to is not one that we look forward to.

We felicitate Nishat

She has reached the pinnacle of women's endurance

ANOTHER Bangladeshi female youth has done us proud. Nishat Majumdar, a 31-year-old accountant, has become the first Bangladeshi woman to conquer the Mount Everest, the world's highest peak. We congratulate her on this outstanding achievement and also for the indomitable spirit and determination that she has displayed in pursuing her dream and realizing it.

She had prepared for her mission with due diligence. She took part in many training courses and several smaller expeditions with her fellow members of Bangla Mountaineering and Trekking Club (BMTC). Finally, after such a long period of unrelenting efforts through numerous adversities, she obtained her goal last Saturday. In this context we also congratulate the BMTC for supporting her and MA Muhit for accompanying her in her quest.

This is clearly an extra-ordinary feat of indefatigable spirit that the youth in general are capable of recording. In fact, she has set an inspirational example, particularly for young women, in that if anyone is willing to endure hardship, s/he can accomplish anything whether it is climbing a mountain or overcoming other challenges in life. It also proves that if given equal opportunity and dignity, there is nothing called an impossible mission for women.

Above all, Nishat has epitomized the boundless potentials that our youth are endowed with. It makes us believe if this huge potential can be properly tapped, they as well as making their mark internationally, can come up with all sorts of innovative ideas to tackle the mounting social problems. Therefore, it is solely for the government to provide our youth with necessary facilities so that they

A novelist's dilemma



SYED FATAHUL ALAM

HUMAYUN Ahmed is a popular novelist among Bangla-speaking readers in Bangladesh and elsewhere. At the February 21st

book fair at Bangla Academy, Humayun's novels have long been bestsellers. Whenever, at any of the bookstalls of *Ekusheyr Boi Mela* (21st February's book fair), you come across a long queue of youngsters, you can be sure that it is for the latest novel by Humayun Ahmed that has just been published. Small wonder, over at least the last three decades, his novels have been the hottest item at the book fairs. Especially, readers in their 30s and below are crazy about Humayun's novels.

This popular novelist is now facing a big dilemma. A part of his latest Bangla novel, *Deyal*, was published in the May 11 issue of the Bangla daily *Prothom Alo*. Attorney General Mahbubey Alam found a certain para of the story that relates to the killing of little Sheikh Russel, the youngest child of martyred Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to be at variance with the facts of the August 15, 1975 tragedy as recorded in the judgement of Bangabandhu murder case.

And to correct facts, as given in the court judgement recorded in the documents, Mr. Alam brought the lines of the story he found controversial to him the notice of the High Court (HC). And the HC in a rule on May 15 asked the authorities concerned to furnish the writer with copies of relevant documents and judgements of the Bangabandhu killing case so that he (Humayun) could present the information in a correct manner in the book.

It is now the task of the authorities concerned to supply the novelist with the facts as ordered by the HC.

It will be Humayun Ahmed's turn now to decide either to defend his narrative as it was written by him, or to change it in keeping with the court judgement and documents.

Leaving the matter to the writer's own discretion, the first question that comes to mind is, being an accomplished and celebrated novelist as he

about how she/ he would mesh the facts of history with the story she/he would like to narrate.

There is always a state of conflict between the story-teller and the realist in a writer. In the present case the fictionist Humayun Ahmed appears to be in conflict with realist Humayun Ahmed. Of course, the reality we are



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is, was not Humayun aware of the facts as indicated in the court ruling? Or is it that he was not aware, or that he has his own interpretation about the historical facts in question?

It is common knowledge that a writer, especially a fiction writer, enjoys certain degree of freedom

talking about is the facts of the August 15, 1975's real life tragedy, which is now part of history.

Writers have their own interpretation of history.

Humayun, like every other writer and novelist of consequence, has his own style of taking the drama of his

stories to its climax and then draw it to a close. Readers will be waiting with bated breath how Humayun has planned his storyline to unfold basing on a real life tragedy that took place in 1975.

As it has come in the media, the novel, *Deyal*, has been termed a political one. But since it is also based on history as the tragedy took place within the last four decades history of Bangladesh, it can also be termed a historical novel. Under whatever category we may like to place this latest novel of Humayun Ahmed, the book is neither purely a political, nor a historical one.

Despite its political or historical twist, it would be a novel, pure and simple. Because, from whatever source novelists, playwrights and long or short story writers may gather materials for their work, their ultimate objective is to entertain their writer or make them think with their story. They are story-tellers in the last analysis.

Being a very powerful story-teller in recent Bangla literature, Humayun Ahmed's aim no doubt was to tell a story in *Deyal*. But the readers will now wait for Humayun's decision about what he would do about a particular section of his narrative where the writer has come in conflict with the version of the history as recorded in the official documents of the court.

It is anybody's guess what the novelist himself is thinking. At this critical juncture of his life, the novelist Humayun Ahmed is torn between a two-dimensional dilemma. One relates to the cancer he is trying to beat, while the other is a moral one.

We think the novelist has the strength and courage to survive both the challenges.

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Balancing fertiliser production and power generation

SYED MANSUR HASHIM

BANGLADESH is currently passing through a huge energy crunch, which is very clear to most citizens of the land. The biggest challenge today is how efficiently and economically the policymakers will manage this crisis. We have two bulk sectors -- powers and fertiliser -- that consume 43% and 12% natural gas of the country's total gas production respectively. Power undoubtedly is our top priority. But while there exist alternative energy sources for generating power, gas remains the only raw material for fertiliser production.

Energy efficiency is bound to become the buzzword in the chronic energy shortfall that has opened up Pandora's Box, whereby one sector is sidelined to provide gas supply to another. Nowhere is this more evident than in Chittagong area where the fertiliser sector has been subjected to chronic rationing of gas supplies so that power generation may get priority. The logic put forward by policymakers is that fertiliser can be imported, but power cannot. The unpalatable truth that has surfaced is that a great majority of the heavy fuel oil (HFO) dependent power plants are kept offline since the government has no money to pay costly fuel import bills. The net scenario is that we are now suffering from shortage of both fertiliser and power!

Obviously this scenario cannot continue for the long-term. A major rethinking is required. Time has come for government to decide where to put the country's natural resources based on priority of greater value addition. For the sake of argument, a comparative analysis may be worked out taking Karnaphuli

Fertiliser Company (KAFCO) as an example and an HFO-run power plant to explore the notion that it is possible to produce fertiliser using natural gas; the earnings from sale of which will generate foreign exchange, that will pave the way for the government to procure fuel from the international markets, and this in turn, will allow for HFO-dependent

is KAFCO-Japan whose share is less than the GOB's @31.28%. Three government secretaries sit on KAFCO's board to oversee the smooth functioning of the largest single foreign direct investment company in Bangladesh, which also happens to be the largest public-private partnership till date.

The final argument for taking



SHAIKH MOHIB UDDIN / DRINK NEWS

Energy efficiency is bound to become the buzzword in the chronic energy shortfall that has opened up the Pandora's Box, whereby one sector is sidelined to provide gas supply to another.

power plants to run.

Although KAFCO has been unjustly dubbed by many as just another greedy multinational company, this is a myth. According to published information, KAFCO is a company where the largest share holder is the Government of Bangladesh (GOB), which owns 43.51%. The other major stakeholder

is as follows: Utilising 52mmcf (mil-

lion cubic feet per day), it is possible to produce either 198MW of electricity, or, 2,000 metric tons (MT) of fertiliser. It is also possible to produce 198MW power from HFO fired power plants. Going with Option A: electricity generation from HFO based power plant, we find that it will cost the government (as per fuel price in Singapore @ \$650/tonne on 21/05/12) \$0.73m (million) per day to pay for HFO and other operating expenses required to generate.

Conversely, if we look at Option B: whereby same 52mmcf gas, that is not utilised to produce 198MW power, is utilised to produce 2,000MT fertiliser, the results are surprisingly positive. Consider the facts, KAFCO operations allow for GOB, on average, to gain cash benefits (gas bill, corporate tax and dividend) @ 60% of sale price. Current price of fertiliser in international market is \$550/MT. Hence, revenue on 2,000MT fertiliser produced daily @ \$550 comes to \$1.1million. Thus, GOB gets cash return of \$0.66million. If we factor in loss of \$0.7million for producing fertiliser at KAFCO, other costs including freight and docking charges of \$0.1million results in net cash earnings by GOB of \$0.03m per day. In addition to that, subsidy bill is avoided. Thus, conserving 52mmcf gas from inefficient power plants is, in the long run, beneficial to the country because it is securing both power and fertiliser.

Thus, KAFCO could be utilised as money generator for the government to pay off either fuel bills or any government purchase and as a reliable supplier of high quality fertiliser for the farmers of Bangladesh to secure food production.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 22

334 BC

The Macedonian army of Alexander the Great defeats Darius III of Persia in the Battle of the Granicus.

1176

The Hashshashin (Assassins) attempt to murder Saladin near Aleppo.

1926

Chiang Kai-shek replaces communists in Kuomintang China.

1939

World War II: Germany and Italy sign the Pact of Steel.

1943

Stalin disbands Comintern.

1972

Ceylon adopts a new constitution, thus becoming a Republic, changes its name to Sri Lanka, and joins the Commonwealth of Nations.

1990

North and South Yemen are unified to create the Republic of Yemen.

1992

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia join the United Nations.