

## GROUND REALITIES

## Speaker takes a positive stance

*This should help resolve the controversy*

**S**PEAKER Abdul Hamid has made clear his stance on the controversy that had unfortunately raged between the Speaker and a Justice more than two weeks ago. Now we have the Speaker ruling that the Justice in question has violated the constitution. He quoted Article 78(1) of the constitution which states that the validity of the proceedings in parliament should not be questioned in any court.

In the same breath, the Speaker has asked the MPs to drop their motion for removal of Justice AHM Shamsuddin and left the matter in the hands of the Chief Justice to resolve as he sees fit.

The spirit in which the Speaker is trying to set the matter at rest should now be reciprocated in the interest of harmonious relations between the two important organs of the State. But what we would like to strongly emphasise is that the parliament and the judiciary should be mutually respectful of each other, specially given the high esteem the people of the country hold them in. They should never allow any controversy to embroil any exchange of disparaging remarks.

The open display of acrimony witnessed by the people between a sitting judge on the one hand and the collective vehemence expressed by the ruling party lawmakers in parliament was hardly an inspiring sight. What was exposed is that these two institutions enshrined in the constitution were at loggerheads with one another, a situation that is hardly conducive to the effective functioning of the State. These two institutions are much larger than individuals, but if public confidence in these institutions is shaken, then a disservice is done to democracy. That there is a serious attempt to resolve the issue is welcome news.

## Encroachment on highway

*High time to curb it*

**R**OADS and highways connecting different districts have turned extremely hazardous as farmers encroach on them for threshing and drying of crops during harvesting seasons.

A report in the Tuesday's issue of this paper depicts how a big chunk of the Dinajpur-Dhaka highway at Saidpur is being used up for post-harvest purposes posing a serious risk for the movement of all types of vehicles, motorised ones in particular.

Such occupation of roads is not only illegal but can also cause accidents, let alone interfering with the easement rights of other road users. Roads are public properties and cannot be used for any private purposes.

We can understand such unwarranted spillages on the roads in the face of ever-reducing spaces for households, but that cannot justify such a malpractice.

The increase in traffic movement has worsened the condition of these roads further, especially with the onset of the rainy season.

As it is, sizeable proportions of roads and highways have been in a state of disrepair.

Add to the obstructions, roadside weekly bazaars and stray or tethered domestic animals grazing on the roadsides, you have a huge risk factor for the highway traffic.

Local administration, local government authorities included, needs to look into the issue and find ways to stop the practice. The authorities must have designated spaces for permanent use of farmers for threshing and drying purposes throughout the year. At the same time squatting wayside bazaars will have to be prohibited.

In order to discourage villagers from using roads in the wrong way and making them aware of the risks involved, publicity wings of the government should launch a nationwide propaganda on the media as well as through



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

**M**AMATA Bannerjee reveals in being abrasive, or so it seems. There is something about her brand of politics which does

not allow her to exercise the sort of grace you would find, naturally, in someone like Aung San Suu Kyi. In Oslo last week, the Burmese democracy icon reminded us once more of why she remains a much respected figure on the global stage in these times. The years of internment, the denial of power after the 1990 elections, the psychological torment inflicted on her by a regime clearly out of joint with the times have never been able to nibble away at the fundamental dignity in Suu Kyi. Through her travails, Suu Kyi has grown, from the perspective of both morality and politics. Like Nelson Mandela, she is today the voice of conscience for oppressed people everywhere. She does not enjoy power and yet power is what she exudes through the simple graces she bestows on those she comes in touch with.

You cannot say the same about Mamata Bannerjee. Having stormed to power in West Bengal over a year ago, she has demonstrated in this period of time a remarkable ability to squander the goodwill she came to office with. When Pranab Mukherjee emerges, through the deep and abiding respect of people, as India's next president, Bannerjee makes it known to everyone that she does not like the man. And like some people who cannot quite express the reason for their dislike of others, she cannot quite convince others why she does not approve of Mukherjee as India's future head of state. Part of the reason could be Mukherjee's no-nonsense attitude in politics. There have been the times when he snubbed Bannerjee on significant issues in cabinet (when the West Bengal chief minister was part of the union government). Part of the reason could be the growing ego in Bannerjee that if

# The abrasive Ms. Bannerjee . . .

she could dislodge the thirty-four year-old Left Front government in Kolkata nearly single-handedly, she can very well call the more important shots in the rest of India. That is a mistake. Proof of it lies in the rising unpopularity of her government.

The emergence of Mamata Bannerjee as chief minister of West Bengal was in a number of ways a rude decline in social and political values among India's Bengalis. No matter how ill disposed towards the

on policy. Mamata Bannerjee may have had all reasons to prevent Tata from making new inroads into West Bengal, but she did not quite conceive of the opportunities of progressive industrialisation she was throwing to the winds in her state.

A seasoned politician does not treat her political opponents as enemies. Yet Bannerjee has brought precisely that attitude into her assessment of the Left in West Bengal. She does not want to have anything to do with the

terrorists and criminals of an assorted kind, the Left Front gave Bengalis freedom from fear, to a point where young women were not afraid to stay out till the late hours of the night. In these new Mamata times, though, instances of women going through the ordeal of rape have occurred. The blame, of course, is being put on the victims, for their audacity in staying out late and so provoking the rape.

In the early months in power, Mamata Bannerjee marched to a local police station to free two of her party workers hauled up for criminal conduct. She not only compelled the police to let the two men go but also publicly reprimanded the police officer in charge over having brought Kolkata to such a bad pass. Having been placed in power through the democratic means of popular electoral exercise, Bannerjee now believes democracy is another name for conspiracies against her. She storms out of a television channel live show when uncomfortable questions are put to her. There are Maoists and their agents in the audience, she cries indignantly, before stalking off. That is a clear sign of a leader losing her way. Another is when a leader believes, as does Bannerjee, that the media are deliberately looking away from the achievements of a government and so the government needs to have its own media. Bannerjee now has her own newspaper and her own television channel to disseminate the wonders her administration achieves. That is a step toward megalomania.

Mamata Bannerjee has held up progress in India-Bangladesh relations through refusing to countenance a Teesta deal between the two countries. She now thinks even the land boundary agreement between Dhaka and Delhi goes to Kolkata's disadvantage.

When a politician keeps saying "no" to everything, she remains petty and pitiable. Worse, people like her end up fanning distrust among their own kind and between nations, to everyone's regret.

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CPI (M) you might be, no matter how much of an anti-socialist you could be given your belief in the ability of capitalism to do wonders for the world, you cannot ignore the truth that the collapse of the Left Front government in Kolkata was but a synonym for the rise of mediocrity in the state. And mediocrity comes from those whose politics has traditionally been grounded more on agitation and less

colour red, for it reminds her of what she believes was an age of darkness for India's Bengalis. When anyone calls the times of Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharya a dark age, he or she is not quite at home with a study of history. For thirty four years, the Left Front made Bengalis feel secure in their homes and on their streets. Where once West Bengal and especially Kolkata covered in fear of

# What Rio can do

THOMAS LOVEJOV

**T**WENTY years after the largest gathering of heads of state in history at the 1992 Earth Summit, the world's nations are returning to Rio de Janeiro to negotiate further progress toward sustainable development.

The 80-page draft text that the delegates will be discussing addresses a number of important issues. Yet it is clear that not only has humanity failed to address the problems at the needed scale in the intervening years, but that "Rio+20" will fail to do so as well.

That said, it would be shortsighted to give up on Rio+20: humanity needs the building blocks that can be added by this conference to be as robust as possible.

Part of the problem is a preoccupation with the here and now. That includes the drama of economic problems in the euro zone and weakness in other large economies. In the United States, partisan politics are so polarized and poisonous, and media so fractured, that there is little mention of Rio+20. Many key leaders will not attend: Barack Obama, Angela Merkel and David Cameron (despite the change of date to avoid conflict with the Diamond Jubilee), to name three.

Another problem is the absence of any sense of urgency, even though the world's actions today are producing an

unacceptable environment for those who will be living at the century's end. One scientific colleague, newly a grandmother, says that in addition to grasping the issues intellectually, she now takes them personally.

What in fact can be achieved at Rio+20?

First, there could be a wholehearted agreement on the draft. Key elements include important energy goals: Dubbed "Sustainable Energy for All,"

cessors, the Millennium Development Goals.

Negotiations around global governance, on which progress has been halting at best, will be tougher. Nowhere is that clearer than with the talks on a United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which have been marked by wrangling over which major emitters should go first. It could almost be caricatured as a game of musical

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they include energy access for all and ambitious but achievable goals in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

There are also important "green economy" initiatives -- efforts to bring environmental value into economic decision making. Sustainable Development Goals should be negotiated to include much stronger environment elements than their prede-

chairs were it not so deadly serious.

In the United States in particular, science has been systematically debased and questioned, as if it killing the messenger will make the problem go away. More than once I have been told that Rio+20 is about development, not environment, losing sight of the fact that environment is an integral part of sustainable development.

A mosaic approach can make

some progress. Regional carbon markets involving countries or groups of states can move things in the right direction.

The private sector -- which includes corporations with product dwarfing the G.D.P. of many nations -- can play a leadership role. There are huge opportunities for innovation in both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors. Science can identify ways to pull carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and feed nine billion people without destroying more natural ecosystems.

There is pressing need to redefine what is reasonable. The usual approach is not reasonable if it leads to a runaway climate problem, cascading loss of biodiversity and a world increasingly resembling a toxic waste dump.

Twenty years beyond the Earth Summit, the clock is ticking. In 1992, atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations were 357 parts per million. Today they average 395 p.p.m. and readings of 400 p.p.m. have been observed in the Arctic. Rio+20 must mark a start in managing the planet with greater seriousness of purpose than humanity has displayed so far.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June 20

1214

The University of Oxford receives its charter.

1652

Tarhoncu Ahmet Pa'a is appointed grand vezir of the Ottoman Empire.

1837

Queen Victoria succeeds to the British throne.

1877

Alexander Graham Bell installs the world's first commercial telephone service in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

1963

The so-called "red telephone" is established between the Soviet Union and the United States following the Cuban Missile Crisis

1972

Watergate scandal: An 18½-minute gap appears in the tape recording of the conversations between U.S. President Richard Nixon and his advisers regarding the recent arrests of his operatives while breaking into the Watergate complex.

1982

The Argentine base (Corbeta Uruguay) on Southern Thule surrenders to Royal Marine commandos in the final action of the Falklands War.

1991

The German Bundestag votes to move the capital from Bonn back to Berlin.