

## Taka's continuing appreciation

*Debate over impact a little premature*

THE local currency has been gaining against the dollar over the last eight months, going by Bangladesh Bank data. The greenback is currently fetching Tk. 79 per dollar, down from Tk. 81 in June last year. This is, however, reflective of the official rates, in the open market buying and selling rates are different, for all one knows.

The reasons for appreciation in Taka value vis-a-vis dollar are put down to substantial inflow of remittances, declining imports and the upward trend of exports. Bangladesh Bank must be closely monitoring the appreciation-inducing factors and their contributions, both individually and collectively to the prevailing exchange value between taka and dollar.

When Taka value depreciates, imports cost more whilst the exports enjoy the benefit of depreciation in terms of competitiveness in the overseas market. In fact, as Mustafizur Rahman, executive director, CPD observed, "The exporters had enjoyed the benefit of depreciation of Taka over last one and a half years..." Taka depreciation during period was by nearly 20 percent. Continuing depreciation in the value of Taka is not good for the economy because harder the currency as against dollar the greater the strength of local legal tender.

Understandably, the appreciating trend is causing the exporters to worry over lack of competitiveness in the world market. The exports are seemingly on an upward curve indicating a positive trend. But of course, the volume of exports may not necessarily imply better earnings in foreign exchange from the overseas market. Increase in Taka value unless held at a reasonable level, could have a knock-on to the economy. For decline in imports will have a negative impact on investment which in turn would undercut employment.

As long as taka-dollar exchange rate remains around Tk. 79-80 (plus-minus), it needn't set off any alarm bell to the exporters. But anything above that rate could hurt importers and anything below par is likely to affect the exporters.

In all, 'the central bank will have to handle the situation carefully' so that a balance is struck between appreciation and depreciation in the value of Taka.

## Highway police in the lurch

*More funds need to be invested*

THERE is little that one can expect of a service provider if it is not given the resources in adequate quantity to perform its designated tasks. To us it seems that the highway police are merely showpiece, and exist in name only. Going by a report in the leading national daily on the travails of the highway police, not only are its assets abjectly inadequate, except for highway accidents the highway police have no authority to file cases of robbery or investigate those. And for every 166 kilo meters of highway there is only one patrol car to exercise control on the traffic.

The highway police was a good addition to the police force. Given the volume of traffic on the highways, and the dangerous configuration of the roads in many places, it is no wonder that we have so many accidents on the highways and so many deaths. And given the lax oversight, inevitable because of lack of mobility and the distance between two highway police stations and two outposts, the number of highway robbery is on the rise, so much so that entire container trucks carrying costly consignments have vanished from the road without a trace. And woe betide all the travelers on our highways should there be an accident. The traffic jam that ensues runs into miles and takes hours to clear, all because the number of auto wreckers is limited.

We feel that the government should address the issue with urgency. If the 1,200 kilometre of highway has to be efficiently managed the highway police will have to be provided with more resources and manpower. What we have now is really a waste of assets. We are eagerly waiting for the assurances of the IGP that the highway police will see a qualitative increase in the

# Strategy lessons from Shahbagh

PIAL ISLAM

THE events unfolding in Shahbagh consume a significant portion of our attention these days -- and rightly so. Most of our thoughts naturally revolve around the political, human, legal, and, at times, inspirational dimensions of what Shahbagh represents. But what about the lessons that Shahbagh can bring to light for organisational strategy?

There may be several lessons on strategy here. This article highlights only two of them:

**Responsiveness and adaptability**  
Both are important characteristics of any successful initiative. Shahbagh protests began the same day when the unpopular verdict on Abdul Quader Mollah had been announced. It did not take weeks or even days for the first set of response to start. This allowed a platform for the public discourse on the subject to initiate and galvanise almost instantaneously.

On the 11th day, the organisers announced their plan to hold protests from 3-10pm every day at Shahbagh, cutting down on the 24-hour round-the-clock programme they had previously followed.

However, at the news of blogger Rajib's death, they reverted back to their round-the-clock schedule and made the necessary announcements within hours of hearing the news. This sent a strong signal: Shahbagh is in close touch with the events on the ground and it is able to adapt to any situation -- come what may.

From an organisational strategy-lens, responsiveness and adaptability are qualities that separate the leading organisations from the rest of pack. This requires at least three separate capabilities to work effectively.

First, it requires a "scan" capability: being able to monitor what's happening on the ground on a continuous basis and having a proper escalation process for things that require attention.

Second, it requires a "response strategy" capability: being able to quickly identify what remedial or

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AMRAN HOSSAIN

opportunistic steps are needed to address the issues identified through the escalation process.

Third, it requires the capability to execute the strategy. Examples of organisational responsiveness to adverse situations include: Toyota recalling nearly 14 million vehicles last year to fix its hybrid car's "unintended acceleration" problem; and various airlines cancelling flights to New York in October 2012 after cyclone Sandy and re-routing passengers to the extent possible.

**Keeping dogged focus on a single topic**

Shahbagh's focus has been single-minded from the start: bringing all war criminals to justice. There are many challenges that Bangladesh faces today. From inadequate healthcare services and mal-governance to abject poverty and human rights abuse, the list of issues that could have given rise to many a Shahbagh-like protests is long.

Moreover, once the Shahbagh platform had been established, the organisers could have used this platform to raise voice on many of these and other issues. But they have been assigned to keep a sharp focus on the

war criminal's justice issue. This has allowed the protests to resonate more profoundly among the population.

From an organisational strategy-lens, companies typically have a portfolio of products or services that they offer. However, those organisations that promote a single product at any given time tend to materialise greater returns on their investments. This requires an internal prioritisation capability and the ability to remain focused on the number one opportunity for a certain period of time.

Needless to say, the priorities can shift over time. For example, when Apple launches a new version of iPhone, its complete energy focuses on this new product for weeks and months, as opposed to also promoting other products, such as laptops or desktops, at the same time. While some may argue that this approach has the risk of potentially cannibalising the remaining products in the portfolio, if such a strategy is designed and executed right, the cannibalising effect, if any, can be kept at an insignificant level for the duration of the campaign. Shahbagh has catalysed our

thoughts and actions in a very profound way. How long will Shahbagh continue? Will the judicial system be moved by the public sentiments? Should the judicial system allow public sentiments to influence its decision making capacity? When and how does Shahbagh end? Will the monumental energy generated from Shahbagh be channeled elsewhere? How? The questions are endless.

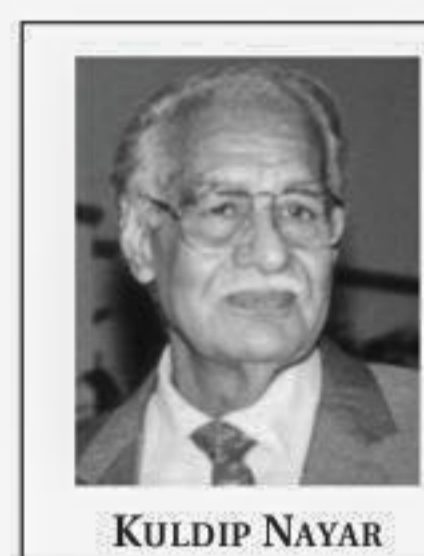
But in whatever way the Shahbagh events happen to unfold, the process it has undergone can impart many lessons. Just the same way that the 1952 Language Movement events have imparted lessons that primed the 1971 Liberation War events; the lessons from those two historical events have informed many actions during the Shahbagh events.

The lessons from Shahbagh can not only inform future mass movements, they can also be applied in more direct and immediate ways for crafting organisational strategies, may they be for a non-profit, for-profit, social, or governmental organisation, or even for a nation.

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### BETWEEN THE LINES

## Regal, but not yet imperial



KULDIP NAYYAR

I am surprised over the ease with which a public figure like Pranab Mukherjee has slipped into regal environment of President's office. In six months' time he is a different person in the midst of an array of kamarbandh (a belt-like rope around the waist) who bow whenever he passes their way. I thought he would change the office to bring it nearer to the people. But he has changed himself, to enjoy the ostentatiousness that the British viceroys had displayed when they ruled the country.

A function took me this week to President's house (Rashtrapati Bhavan). I was particular in finding out the difference between his style and that of his predecessors. But there was none. A gilded chair looked odd against three ordinary chairs placed on the dais. A buttoned-up officer, probably on deputation from one of the three services, placed the speech pad on the podium from where the President addressed. I must admit that what he spoke was relevant to the present situation in the country.

Yet, this is where he should have changed. He must realise that he is only a figure head, like the Queen in England. No doubt, he is the custodian of the constitution and all power resides in his office. But it is exercised by the elected government which is answerable to the people. Most of President Mukherjee's speeches delivered so far are political and reflect his bent of mind as if he is still a member of parliament. His role should be that of a guide and philosopher, but he endeavours to be an active politician.

If President Mukherjee had ears on the ground he would have returned the Ordinance on sexual harassment to women. Recommendations by former Chief Justice J.C.Verma should have been incorporated in toto. Women are opposed to the Ordinance because it is inadequate and does not cover the points they had raised.

Strange, after the function Mukherjee retreated to his presidential quarters. His predecessors would mix with the invitees and even have tea with them. He listens too much to bureaucrats who create a hiatus between him and the people. I have seen President Mukherjee's entourage following him when he visits any place in Delhi. The traffic is

request in view of security.

Perhaps the president should have his own protocol division which at present is looked after by the Ministry of External Affairs. The ministry is given to the old practices and emphasises on the ceremonial aspect too much. When he has eliminated buglers to herald his arrival and when he has deleted the prefix "manniya," he can make some drastic changes, especially in stopping traffic. Mukherjee should be a person easily accessible and the office of president should not come in the way.

When I was India's High Commissioner at London, I found that the Queen had only one pilot motorbike guiding the car. There was no vehicle following her and the traf-

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stopped as before and there is a fleet of cars in the procession. I once asked Vice President Hamid Ansari why he had such an elaborate security arrangement. He said it was not in his hands because the government wanted it that way. I am sure, if he were to make it an issue he would succeed.

Like the vice-president, the president's security is also in the hands of the government and guided by the Blue Book which lays down the quantum of security in the case of president, vice-president, the prime minister etc. First Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru did not want the traffic to be stopped for him. But I recall that Home Minister Govind Ballabh Pant, with whom I worked as Information Officer, rejected Nehru's

request in view of security. Perhaps the president should have his own protocol division which at present is looked after by the Ministry of External Affairs. The ministry is given to the old practices and emphasises on the ceremonial aspect too much. When he has eliminated buglers to herald his arrival and when he has deleted the prefix "manniya," he can make some drastic changes, especially in stopping traffic. Mukherjee should be a person easily accessible and the office of president should not come in the way.

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I recall another example of a cool attitude of the British in the security field. When President R. Venkataraman came to London on an

official visit it began on an ominous note. An overzealous policeman mistook a shopping bag on a railway platform for a bomb. The Royal train was waiting at a station near Gatwick airport to carry the president and his party to Victoria station where the Queen was to receive him.

The policeman sent back the train. No one questioned his judgment till the bomb experts had 'defused' the harmless shopping bag. By then the president's cavalcade had been diverted to a crowded highway. The four motor cycle outriders did a tremendous job, enabling a fleet of cars to weave through a maze of crowded roads to Buckingham Palace where the Queen welcomed him. Even I was informed about the change in the arrangement before we entered the Palace.

Security apart, President Mukherjee has to change the functioning of Rashtrapati Bhavan and what the office entails. Dr Rajendra Prasad, India's first president, did bring a whiff of fresh air when he stepped into Rashtrapati Bhavan which was until then the Viceroy's residence. It was so different from the earlier functioning that the word went around that an Indian had stepped in.

The ceremonial humbug should be changed so that it is in tune with the people's thinking. My complaint is that the office is already too regal and it is turning into something imperial. President Mukherjee may not have taken part in the struggle for independence because he was too young. But he can at least behave in a way that the style of living and contact with the public does not have the distance which the viceroys had with the people.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 25

**1921**  
Tbilisi, capital of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, is occupied by Bolshevik Russia.

**1932**  
Adolf Hitler obtains German citizenship by naturalization, which allows him to run in the 1932 election for Reichspräsident.

**1945**  
World War II: Turkey declares war on Germany.

**1948**  
The Communist Party takes control of government in Czechoslovakia and the period of the Third Republic ends.

**1964**  
North Korean Prime Minister Kim Il-sung calls for the removal of feudalistic land ownership aimed at turning all cooperative farms into state-run ones.

**2009**  
BDR Mutiny: 57 Army Officers among 74 killed in BDR mutiny at Pikhana, Dhaka.