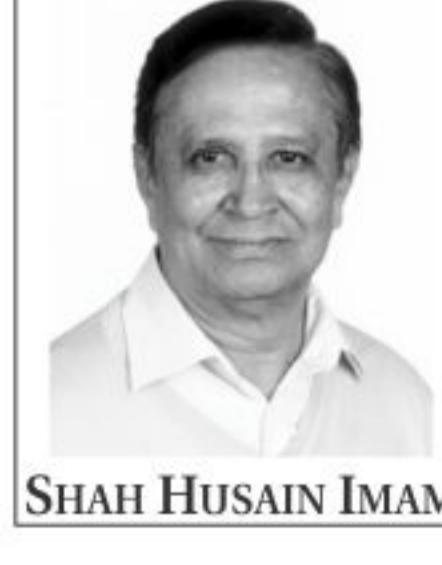


PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Even miracle shying away from us!



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

BANGLADESH appears to be ill-starred. Even the much-awaited miracle that incurable optimists had pinned their hopes on to relieve us of the ongoing political ordeal is veering away from us. To add to the misfortune, nothing seems to gel in Bangladesh. We are in a perpetual state of being overtaken by events. A convulsive issue arises, and in no time it gets pushed on to the backburner since something more pressing comes to occupy and agitate our mind.

The science fiction story by Robert Heinlein titled "Road must roll" comes to mind, in a little far-fetched yet strangely relevant way. The futuristic writer visualised roads rolling rather than human beings walking on them, a close approximation to walkways in many high-profile airports around the globe. You remain stationary as a moving conveyor belt takes you to a point you wish to land at. We are catapulted on to a trajectory but we have no clues where we would land. Indeed, facts are stranger than fiction!

Just when we were bracing up to a tightening of screw on both sides of the political divide, and with almost the entire BNP hierarchy barring Khaleda Zia in jail wondering how could any talks be held to hammer out a mutually acceptable interim caretaker formula, comes from the blue the Rana Plaza building collapse. As the walking undead await the shoving out of survivors or the dead from underneath the debris, we plunge into national mourning over the grievous loss. But however sensitive you may be to the grief of others it will never be as striking as the agony of those who have lost their near and dear ones, many of them sole bread earners for their families.

That is the tragic thing about human emotion which can be as short-lived as a dewdrop on the leafy branch of a tree. Soon amnesia would take hold of our consciousness as we get on with the business of life as usual. But we may be forgetful but never forgiving. Whether you forgive or not, the perpetrators are likely to go scot-free as their ilk has always done because of a potion of muscle, money and manipulation applied to elude the grip of law. Those who are in charge of bringing to justice the murderers in the guise of building owners, garment entrepreneurs, architects, supervisors and, above all, a self-arranged municipality cell in Savar dishing out design approvals, are on the spot.



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Overridingly, it should have been for Rajuk to scrutinise and give approvals for construction within its jurisdiction inclusive of Savar. But Rajuk, for reasons more wrong than right, is a master in the art of abandoning its responsibility under corrupt or at best dubious circumstances.

In effect, there is no standardising authority with adequate manpower and logistics to enforce the national building code which is conspicuous for non-compliance with it rather than adherence to it.

The post-disaster attitude played out by an eloquent home minister clearly smacked of tainting a massive human tragedy with a political brush. He told the BBC something to this effect: The *coup de grace* was applied by miscreants, an oblique reference to BNP-Jamaat elements, by shaking the "cracked columns" (thereby precipitating the collapse of the building). One thing is irrefutable though, that the building had been closed to business following clear knowledge of its impending fall like a house of cards. So badly constructed was it

that the roofs fell one upon another crushing down on more than a few thousand inmates under the wreckage. That is where the government should concentrate on, rather than even creating any smokescreen around the grievous culpability of the garment owners who forced the workers into the jaws of death.

On the other hand, the opposition delivered a puzzle of its own. BNP staggered the withdrawal of *hartial*, first limiting it to Savar area and then extending the reprieve countrywide. It was a good gesture but one that fell short of enabling the victims' relatives to come to the venue of disaster at the earliest.

That said, the political parties have brought the country to such a pass that a picket's missile kills a three-month old infant on the lap of its mother. The powder-keg is dangerously close to ignition. If at any time the political leaders have stoked with fire, this is it, in more ways than one. The religious right of the still non-violent kind (in contrast to the Jamaat-Shibir combine) is clamouring for various, mostly impossible, demands.

These are neither in sync with the people's normal lifestyle nor with the values attained through the Liberation War and our opening out to the world of liberalism and interactive dynamism.

The explosion of demands from Islamist organisations is a new rage that shouldn't be trifled with. Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat's 12-point demand, Hefajat-e Islam's 13-point and Islamic Front's 21-point charter of demands rend the air with Hefajat's mass rally in the capital scheduled for May 5 in the foreground. Of them, only Islamic Front is a political party. Meanwhile, AL Joint Secretary General Mahbubul Alam Hanif has counseled Hefajat-e Islam to form a political party before speaking on political agendas. When there is a demand for a ban from *Jagoron Mancho* on religion-based parties, isn't it a little naive to call upon Hefajat-e Islam to form a political party?

Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, Islamic Front and Hefajat-e Islam are known to be ideologically polarised but Ahle Sunnat and Islamic Front are supportive of the demand for war crimes trial striking a resonance with the general public view. The Islamic organisations by and large are all geared to capitalise on (or appeal to) religious sentiments of the people.

All the religion-based organisations, Jamaat included, are playing the Islamic card to push their radical agenda. Jamaat-Shibir's belligerence and political ethos put it at a somewhat different level than the other Islamic platforms. Jamaat's bellicosity is, however, attributed to its stance on the war crimes tribunal and its opposition to the tribunal's proceedings and its verdicts. Because all the senior Jamaat leaders are in the dock, their ire against the government's move to punish those proven guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity is explicable, if not condonable.

Nevertheless, they should count for, at least Hefajat should, their crowd-pulling power as witnessed in their long march convergence in Dhaka on April 6. Of particular concern, however, is the spread of rumours through microphone in mosques about a perceived impending assault on a village with hollering crowds swearing counter attack on the imaginary perpetrators.

This is a wake-up call to contain obscurantist tendencies that bear the portents of Muslims fighting Muslims as in Egypt, Yemen, Malta, Nigeria and Syria. Let's heed it and try and bring some balance in the upset equations between the communities.

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Let our leaders reason together

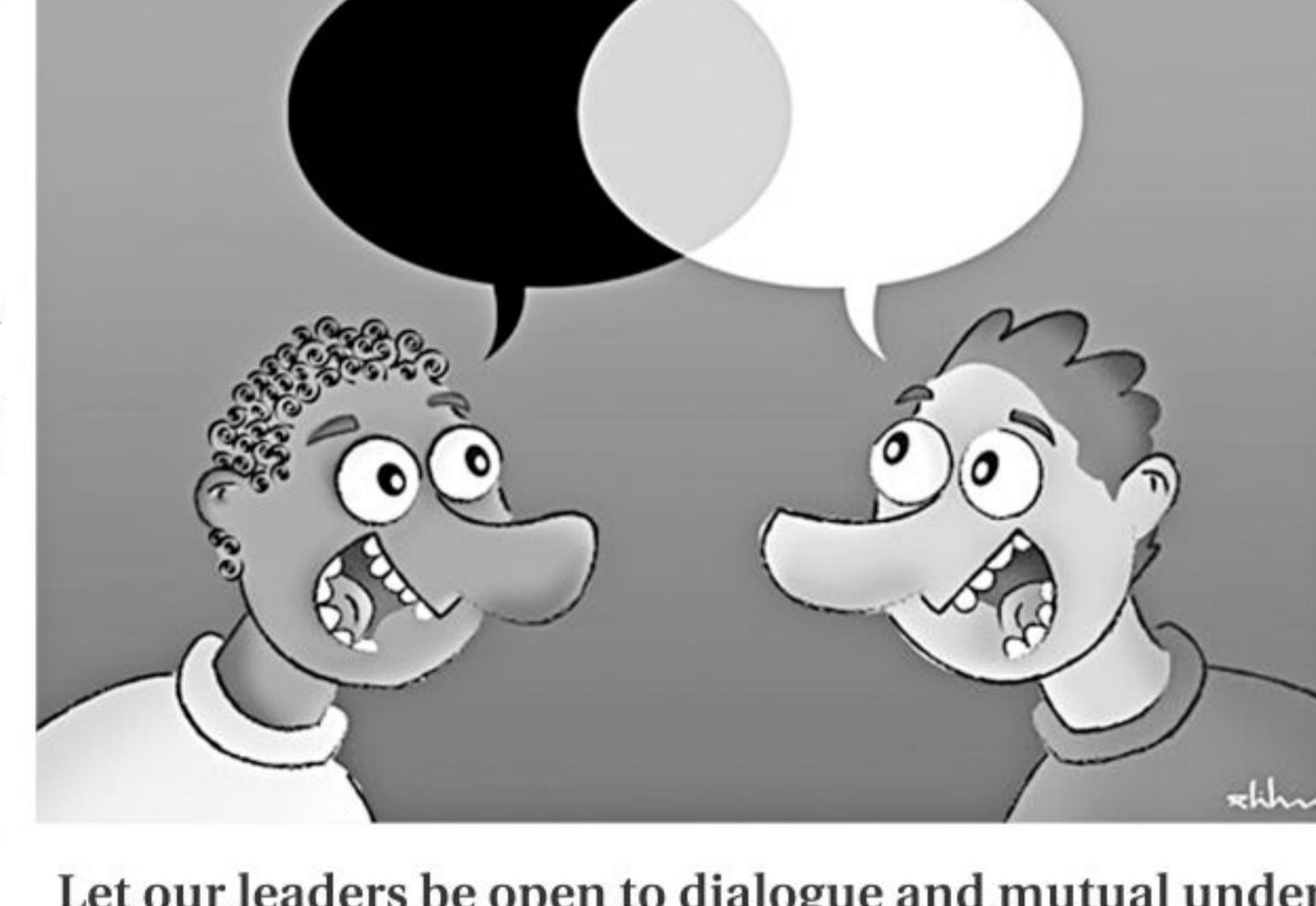
MARTIN ADHIKARY

HARTALS and arrests are no remedy for the prevailing political chaos. The two mutually aggravate one another. Politics is not only difficult in Bangladesh today, it has also been rendered nasty and brutish. We won liberation from Pakistani domination at a very high price in 1971, but what is happening in Bangladesh in the name of politics is rather unbecoming of an independent nation. Violence and vandalism continue to increase, tears and blood are shed, sufferers of people continue.

Today, in the name of protest, irreparable damage is being done to life and property, public and private, and horrible crimes are being committed. We have to look for a *hartial*-free day to carry out our daily activities. Prices of daily necessities are getting higher day by day since production and transportation are being disturbed and disrupted. This also constitutes a wake-up call for us all, a call for all of us, government or non-government people, for renewing our love and devotion to our country and people.

Most heinous crimes against humanity were committed by these people during the Liberation War in 1971. Corruption was blatantly exhibited in the rehabilitation of the collaborators of the Pakistani occupation army who did all within their might against the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign country. I vividly remember what the razakars, al-Badr and al-Shams did against the people in those fateful nine months. Worse is that those who perpetrated all the crimes do not even feel the prick of conscience for their wrongdoing, rather they do not want to leave any stone unturned to prove that they did the right thing!

As we seriously consider what is needed for us as a nation that we may enjoy the fruits of our freedom we also need to be far more serious about the challenge to transform our mindset. The moral basis of many of our political leaders has been characterised by abuse of their



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mandate and wanton desire to accumulate wealth. Life's worth has been unduly measured in terms of material prosperity only. There is a lack of integrity, patriotism, and desire to serve the poor and helpless millions in an overwhelming majority of our leaders who delude people after almost every general election.

The lust for power and wealth among many political leaders makes millions of people suffer immeasurably, crippling their bodies, minds, hearts and sentiments. The entire nation pays the price for the misdeeds that they do when they have their day. The people want the criminals to be punished and corruption eliminated, and the lives of the poor and weak to be free from those. For we have been freed for freedom's sake.

I believe that the nationwide protest somewhat embodied in the *Shahbagh Chottor* against the verdict against one collaborator and the demand for capital punishment for all collaborators represents the popular psyche of the whole nation that has been panting for freedom from oppression and injustice.

The 13-point demand of Hefajat-

e-Islam has surprised the people. How can Islamic teaching be compulsory for all children irrespective of religion in a People's Republic, when the four cardinal state principles include democracy and secularism? How can the growing empowerment of women and the positive scenario of the exercise of women's human rights be put to a halt? These questions, among many others, come to mind after reading the Hefajat's demands.

We are a progressive nation. Over the recent years our economy and social arena have exhibited great progress. Both men and women have made definite contributions towards this phenomenal growth and progress. Let not narrow sectarian interest reverse all these. Let our leaders be open to dialogue and mutual understanding that will contribute to the reconstruction of a mindset so vitally needed for an authentic road map for our national journey towards a better future.

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AKHTAR SHAH

YET again, Bangladesh garment industry hogs the worldwide headline completely for the wrong reasons. This important sector hardly needed a major setback like this so quickly after the Tazreen garment fire disaster that killed 117 and injured 200 workers on November 24, 2012. The culprits literally got away with murder.

With the background of cancellations of orders by major buyers, ravaged by continual *hartial*, the industry looks battered and bruised.

At the time of writing 170 bodies have been recovered. Six hundred workers have been rescued and 2,000 are still unaccounted for at Rana Complex in Savar. Erratic power supply for night time rescue and mostly untrained enthusiastic rescuers hand-balling rubble seems like a far cry from a well rehearsed, orchestrated search and rescue mission. Army and Rab's presence is a comfort but the operation lacks boulder busting equipment, basic search cameras, sifting and heavily lifting machinery.

Time is fast running for workers buried under the rubble.

Considering large numbers of wonky multi-storied buildings constructed flouting every conceivable building regulations and safety measures, the catastrophe rescue and fire department are woefully inadequately prepared. The construction of these buildings takes place with the authorities turning a blind eye. Brown envelopes under the table are greasing the palms that are supposed to ensure strict adherence to regulations thus ensuring safety of the workers and occupants of such buildings.

One can't point the finger at garment industry alone for past, current disasters. Although their disregard for law in building a



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multi-storyed headquarters in Hatir Jheel area has not set an example that is follow worthy! Medium and small manufacturers have been "encouraged" to justify bending or breaking laws without any compunction whatever.

Despite noticeable Rana complex cracks, the management allegedly forced workers to go to work in the ill-fated building that was ready to collapse like a domino tower. Who's responsible for "murdering" these hapless workers whose only crime was to try and make an honest living?

These kinds of human disasters keep recurring in Bangladesh with predictable regularity. Various department chiefs and ministers of all colours, past and present, make microphone and TV camera pronouncements that elicit plaudits from party faithfuls and bosses but

deliver no tangible result.

In the meantime thousands of poor workers are sacrificed due to unparalleled inefficiency of officials and factory management, they are simply dying just to live! The present is bleak for this industry and the future flirts with dozens of disasters if continuance of this inept, totally unacceptable behaviour is not severely punished with complete transparency.

Let this disaster be a clarion call for the government do what is right and not kick the ball in the long grass in the hope that, time the "best healer," would make life easier for the officialdom.

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