

## Pre-hartal terror

**Mentors have to rein in perpetrators**

ACTIVISTS of Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, as a part of their pre-hartal terrorisation, carried out vandalism on Tuesday evening and into the early hours of Wednesday, subjecting unsuspecting commuters and general public to endless suffering. Such pre-shutdown violence has become a pattern. This is abhorrent and reprehensible because it comes without a notice.

In a skirmish between Shibir activists and law-enforcers, commuters, a policeman and three photojournalists were injured in Rajshai on Tuesday. Pro-shutdown activists also resorted to arson, and bomb and cocktail-throwing.

Shibir called hartal demanding release of their arrested leaders. Oddly enough, to achieve that purported end, they have inflicted this punishment on the same public whose sympathy they expect to draw!

Parties or groups that resort to such vile and brutal methods of intimidating people to enforce a shutdown only betray their political bankruptcy. And near normal flow of traffic and movement of people during hartal amply demonstrates how the public have rejected hartal calls and methods.

If Shibir or its political mentor Jamaat have any respect for the people, they must shun the path of hartal and violence. They will only draw the wrath of the people by such disruptive political tactics.

Hartals achieve nothing but cause immense public hardship and destruction of the economy. That is why we, in this paper, have consistently opposed hartal as a means of realising political demands. Invariably it foments violence and leads to hardening positions on both sides as the public are caught in the crossfire.

## A grandiose project

**Implementation will be challenging**

THE government has approved a Tk.1,333 crore project that aims to bring 17,000 government offices at district and upazila levels under the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) network. What has been learnt from newspaper reports, the programme will connect the capital city with all districts and 485 upazila-level government offices. The scale of procurement to equip the various levels of the government structure is stupendous. Thousands of pieces of equipment that will be procured under the Tk.1,087 crore loan from China will include video conferencing systems and personal computers. While appreciating China for its assistance we wish to point out that the procurement exercise should be undertaken with due honesty and efficiency.

There is no denying that such a programme will help revolutionise the way the government does business and provides service. The question is, why embark on a programme at this late stage in the tenure? Is this being done by taking into consideration the corresponding needs assessment for training up requisite manpower to handle the equipment that will be inducted into service? Secondly, given the power deficiency the country has been experiencing, particularly in areas outside the capital city, precisely how will the procured equipment be run? Have these fundamental questions been asked or, more to the point, addressed prior to approval of the programme? However, the crucial point is to ensure a steady start to it.



**Blessed by a soldier**

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

NATIONS are often condemned to live through the hypocrisy and perfidy of their political classes. Time was when both the Awami League and the BNP waged an intense struggle to have General Ershad driven from power. They succeeded, in late 1990, and then went about making him pay for his sins.

It now appears that Ershad's sins, ranging from his extra-constitutional seizure of power to administrative corruption to questions of plain morality, have now gone through expiation. A few years ago, the former military dictator was spotted sitting at the feet of Begum Zia at a public rally. He then changed sides, swiftly going over to Sheikh Hasina. For a man who should have been a closed chapter in politics, Ershad has done well. His dreams, like his age, are constantly leaping ahead.

And now comes the climax. Ershad's old enemies now have given him a cult status, almost along religious lines, over the Gazipur City Corporation elections. Both mayoral candidates -- the AL's Ajmat Ullah Khan and the BNP's M.A. Mannan -- have sought and obtained Ershad's blessings. Think back on Ershad's good old days, when the military ruler, sycophants and hangers-on in tow, made regular trips to the *pir* of Atroshi. Think of that other *pir*, he of Sayedabad, whose talcum powder product was once praised to the skies by political turncoats and their toadies.

Today, in his avatar as the new *pir* of politics, Ershad relishes his moment in the ancient sun. Ajmat and Mannan rush to him, as Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia bite their nails in nervous anticipation of the outcome. But everything ends well. Both candidates emerge smiling, almost beatifically, from his presence. His holiness -- former soldier, one-time dictator, lapsed poet -- has had the palm of his hand touch their bowed heads in blessing. Lo and behold! They have seen the beauty of the Lord!

Lord, what fools these politicians be! Sorry, Shakespeare, about the mangling of a word.

The writer is Executive Editor, *The Daily Star*.

# Justice is a hidden treasure

STRATEGICALLY  
SPEAKING



Brig Gen  
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

IN formulating the heading of this piece I could not help appropriate a part of the comments a reader had made in response to news report on the NHRC commissioner's so-called mediation attempt between Limon's family and the state. Reportedly, the HR boss tried to convince the victim's family that it was futile for any one individual to stand up to the oppression of a state agency.

While it is absolutely unacceptable that the NHRC chairman should have taken upon himself the task of a mediator between a victim and what happens to be, in our country, the most coercive arm of the state, what is of note is the underlying message he conveyed to the victim and his family, which is the reality in Bangladesh today. The police have become a behemoth that, unfortunately, the people have to seek protection from rather than seek protection of. And woe betides anyone that even makes the faintest attempt to cross its path.

Limon's is a case in which, unfortunately, the police has pitted itself against one individual, and there can be very little respite if the state decides to go after him or her. He is perhaps the most wretched person in the land at this particular time, where, as one reader commented recently, "justice is a hidden treasure that cannot be opened for all in a country like Bangladesh."

Recently, the unfortunate boy, who was maimed as a consequence of being shot in the leg by Rab in March 2011, has been indicted, in one case for allegedly possessing illegal weapons. Another case, obstructing officers of the state in execution of their duty, has been transferred to the court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate for starting proceedings against him. The speed with which the police have proceeded with these two cases stands in acute contrast to the one that Limon's mother had lodged against Rab.

There is no need to recount the antecedent of the case and the manner in which a young man of perfectly sound health was maimed except to record the fact that the shoot-

ing was indeed a mistake, something which was also acknowledged by DG Rab himself. And the probe that has exonerated the policemen of the allegation of shooting Limon falls flat in the face in view of the DG's admission of the mistake.

So, why has the poor boy and his family been made victims of police persecution through the two litigations? Clearly, it is to either justify their act of shooting Limon or to coerce his family to compromise.

The arms case is hollow, anyone can see the loopholes in it. What can one make of an arms case where the main litigant, the police, has admitted that the arms that Limon was alleged to have been in possession of, were actually not found in his possession but "found in the area from where Limon was arrested." As for him obstructing justice, one would need to be a repository of supreme strength to obstruct the law enforcing agencies after being shot in the leg. And that is what begs the question.

It is a pity that the chairman of the NHRS should involve himself in a role which makes him appear to have become a part of a state organ rather than the head of the country's human rights watchdog. That he should have even thought of making a quid pro quo proposal to the victims family, which he himself as the NHRC boss had acknowledge as being wronged, makes a mockery of justice and human rights in this country. And he knows too well that the cases against Limon are false and reportedly had written to the home ministry to withdraw the cases.

A country's police, as an organ of the state, cannot afford to have its credentials as keeper of law and security of the people be tarnished by indiscretions of a few of its members. The police have to choose between standing by its members, who acted imprudently, by trying to prove Limon a criminal, or doing what is right -- bringing these errant elements to justice and show that transgression of the law shall not be condoned. The police should make a clean breast of its mistake. That would help in retrieving its image, and even more, if that mistake was atoned for by adequately compensating the unfortunate victim. Unless that is done justice will remain to be a hidden treasure for the poor.

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

## A third front in West Bengal?

ARKO DASGUPTA

WITH the Indian voter eagerly anticipating next year's general elections for the 16th Lok Sabha, the talk of the town seems to be the viability of a Third Front-- a coalition of non-Indian National Congress and non-Bharatiya Janata Party led-parties -- to challenge the electoral dominance of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance and the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, to set up shop in parliament. Details are sketchy but as of this moment the composition of this so-called Third Front includes, among others, the Communists, two major political parties from the South, and some other regional outfits with stated secular credentials. If recent history is anything to go by, this front will lack the necessary collective leadership (individually they may have some of the finest leaders of the post-Nehruvian era in their ranks) and level-headedness duly required to dislodge the UPA and prevent the NDA from coming to power.

A "maverick" (as she was once described on a television news programme) regional leader who is neither part of the UPA nor the NDA, and has kept away (understandably so) from Third Front politics, is West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Her party, the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) (it is yet to conquer India although its name might suggest otherwise) was voted into power with an overwhelming majority two years ago in the West Bengal legislative assembly elections. The TMC alone controls over 60 per cent of the seats in the assembly.

Miss Banerjee, propelled to power after decades of political activism (one still hears about her days as the sprightly Youth Congress leader in the 1970s and the young parliamentarian in the Rajiv Gandhi-led government in the 1980s) and the clumsy handling of dissent by the Communist Party towards the middle of the last decade, was also aided by a sea of support from sections of the Bengali intelligentsia -- many of whom were avowed leftists--including the venerable writer and grassroots activist Mahasweta Devi and popular singer Kabir Suman (who is one among the 19 members of parliament from the TMC in Delhi). Given all that, it would seem "Didi" had truly arrived.

No sooner had Mamata Banerjee come to power as chief executive of West Bengal than it dawned on the people of the state that their newly-elected leader showed scant resemblance to the untiring, dauntless figure who used to stand up to the domineering Communists and had once even borne the brunt of a baton-wielding policeman during a public march. Her quick fall from grace has been written about in these pages and beyond and it is now accepted that her tactless public remarks betray a leader who is not only insecure but also deeply cynical.

Rudrangshu Mukherjee of *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, in a piece titled "The Wasteland" published in *Seminar* (May, 2013) writes: "When she [Mamata Banerjee] won the elections in May 2011, a veteran and committed supporter of the CPI(M) told me, 'the greatest achievement of the Left Front in West Bengal

is the making of Mamata Banerjee.'" The Left Front which governed West Bengal for 34 successive years before the 2011 Assembly Elections had all along ruled the state without a care for the likes of Mamata Banerjee as it was returned to power term after term under the redoubtable Jyoti Basu and much later, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

Mamata Banerjee it seemed existed only because of the Communists and not despite them. With the Communists out of power, what then? One need only ask Mahasweta Devi who, in 2011 itself, had decided that the only epithet that applied to the TMC government was (that perennial term of abuse) "fascist" (of late however the writer seems to have tempered her disapproval of the dispensation in her home state).

Gone are the days when West Bengal had leaders of the stature of Bidhan Chandra Roy and Jyoti Basu, who, although far from perfect, commanded respect from New Delhi and were immensely popular at home. While the former remained chief minister until his

death, the latter voluntarily resigned from the position after having been in office for a record 23 years. Today, the disenchantment with both the Left Front and the Trinamool is such that no one leader can hope to replicate the kind of confidence -- both inside and outside the State Assembly -- that used to be enjoyed by the two aforementioned former chief ministers.

Now is the time for a third alternative to take root in West Bengal politics. The principal party that may emerge in a Third Front could well (for better or for worse) be the Indian National Congress -- the party that Miss Banerjee started her career with and which was, until some time ago, her ally both in the state as well as the centre. At present, the Congress has a little over 40 seats in the 295-member assembly. The BJP, on the other hand, is a nonentity.

A Third Front in the state (much like in the centre) seems unlikely to shake off the influence girded over many years by the current government and current opposition. Nevertheless, that is no reason for an eventual Third Front (presuming it is now in the making -- industrious men and women huddling together over tea booths in the countryside and in the grand old city) to jazz around and wait for destiny to hand them power on a platter. There simply has been too much time and effort invested in the state by people like Mamata Banerjee and those in the Left for that to happen. This should not be taken to mean that the people of the state have to forever choose only between the Trinamool and the Left. They cannot be asked to resign themselves to such a fate.

"If you can look into the seeds of time, and say which grain will grow and which will not" -- surely enough, these words of Banquo are being echoed by Mamata Banerjee and the Communists. There may be, however, no sorceress to indulge their fancy. Come 2014 and 2016, their only hope shall be the worthy people of West Bengal.

The writer is a New Delhi-based researcher.

## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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### Limon's misfortune

I was utterly disappointed that the Jhalakathi court framed charges against Limon who has become a scapegoat of Rab. This youth has already lost one of his legs and gone through so many hurdles and tribulations. His family was also put through so many hurdles because they filed a case against Rab for the injustice done to their innocent son. It is an irony that a person gets 7-year imprisonment for posting comments on a social networking site that contained murder threat to the country's PM whereas Limon can't get justice even after losing his leg.

Nusrat Jahan  
Dhaka University



### Cocaine courier caught

Your staff correspondent's report on June 19th should enable the narcotic department and the CID to unearth the local links involved in this criminal activity. The personnel of the local La Vinci hotel may also be linked with it, one way or another. These links need to be thoroughly investigated till all details of this dangerous drug trade are fully exposed. The criminal must be held in custody, till the matter is fully exposed.

S.A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

### Harmful fruit drinks

Nowadays we see flashy advertisements in which different fruit drinks (e.g. litchi drinks, mango drinks etc.) are displayed in such a way that they seem yummy and pure. But the reality is different. These drinks are prepared with bad ingredients which are very harmful for health. Different companies are manufacturing them. Who are the victims of these fruit drinks? Obviously, children. Instead of advertising, these companies should improve the quality of their products.

Ahmed As Sami  
Anandeniketan School, Sylhet

### Lawmakers or law-breakers?

We are really unfortunate to see the horrifying environment in the parliament created by some women members (especially who belong to the reserved seats). We know them as lawmakers, accountable to the nation for preserving the dignity of our constitution. But forgetting their responsibilities, they are attacking one another with abusive words. We have also heard that they are being praised by their party leaders. The question is, are they lawmakers or law-breakers?

Md. Mojammel Hoque  
Fatickchari, Chittagong

### Comments on news report, "Limon indicted," published on July 2, 2013

#### Wind

It is very sad to see an innocent and impoverished boy is being hammered by the government.

#### Nds

It now establishes the truth, however unpleasant and morose it might be, that an individual in the ultimate analysis is absolutely helpless against the belligerent state authority.

#### Md. Shahjahan

What an injustice!

#### Sheikh Monirul Islam, Opee

What a shame! RAB was created as an elite force to protect people and here we see how they frame charges against an absolutely innocent young man who belongs to a very poor household. The charges were framed on baseless ground. It is also a huge shame that instead of protecting Limon, the HRC sided with RAB.

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### "No major changes required for GB" (July 2, 2013)

#### Abul Kashem

The reasons behind these vindictive activities of the government against GB are not known.

#### Abdullah Al Fahad

AL will lose votes in millions if anything happens to GB. The educated youth of Bangladesh love and admire Dr. Yunus.