

Another senseless hartal

People's patience wearing thin

WHY must people be made to suffer a political party's dissatisfaction with a verdict of the court? That is what the Jamaat-e-Islam (JI) is doing to the common man by calling a 48-hour hartal today and tomorrow.

One may not like a legal verdict, but that is entirely a matter of law which should be addressed through the process of law. It is abhorrent that a political party should choose to play politics with a legal matter instead of seeking recourse to law. And going by the timing of the hartal it would appear that it is not expressing their resentment at the judgment but deliberately putting the people through unmitigated hardship is what the aim of the JI is.

Jl's programme had totally disrupted the Eid plans of a large number of people who use these few days to celebrate with their near ones, not to speak of the severe impact on tourism it has had. It is a pity that a party that does not hesitate to exploit the religious sentiments of the people for political gains should spill cold water on people's enthusiasm that follows the end of a month of fasting. JI did not even hesitate to call hartal during the month of Ramadan either and had indulged in violence too.

We feel that people's tolerance is running out and that might manifest into an outburst. JI's senseless repeated call for hartal is also blunting the edge of what is otherwise a lawful political means to express legitimate grievances against an establishment.

Wailing amidst accidents galore

Recommended preventive measures gather dust

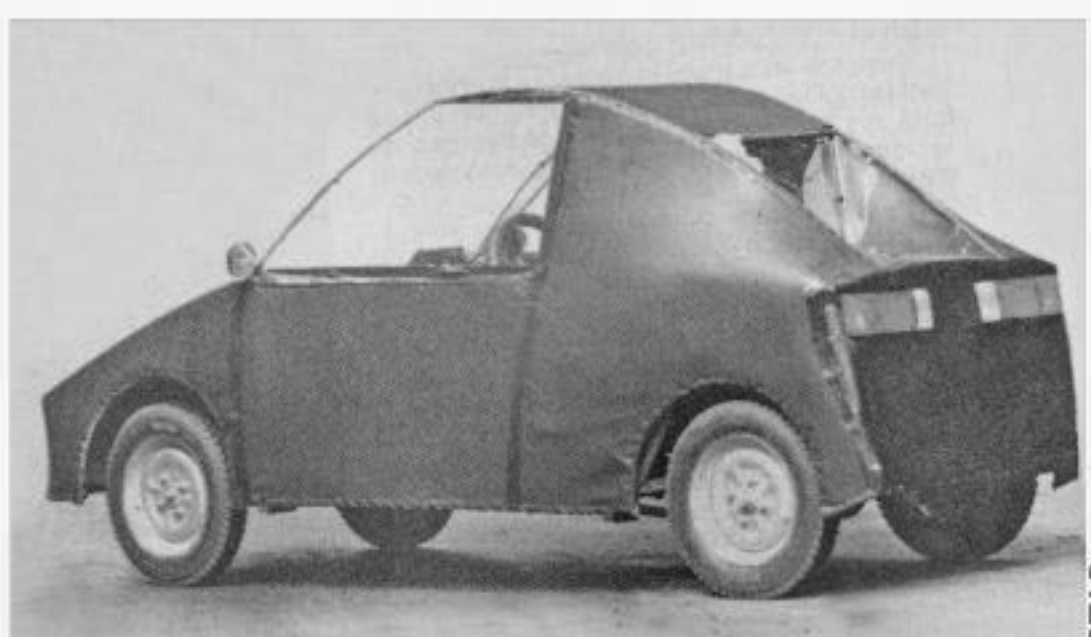
AS of Sunday, 56 persons died in road accidents and by drowning during Eid holidays. This is besides the casualties at Brahmanbaria over a small tiff regarding passage through a bridge, fatally hurling a stone at the head of a lady engineer sitting by the window on a running train and the motorbike with three on board ploughing through a young couple and her 6-month toddler thrown underneath a whirling motorbike wheel. All these conjure up human lives teetering at the edge of dire insecurity accentuating by the year.

In all of these just as slack in law enforcement in to blame, there is a missing element of civic responsibility on two counts: First, the tendency to take law into one's own hand; and secondly, the failure to properly assess risks, overt and covert in public journeys these days. On a correct assessment of the risk factors depends fending off accidents through preventative precautions.

Most of the road accidents were caused by man-made factors: The buses and trucks were overloaded, variegated transports either collided head-on or fell into roadside ditch, mostly due to over-speeding. The number of pedestrians getting overrun has markedly increased. The roadside encroachments dangerously impede constricted two-lane highway traffic.

These are ills that will begin to be addressed meaningfully if we have an adequate highway patrol mechanism coupled with local public accident resistance committees working in tandem with both police and transport operators.

Excellent innovation!



STAR

S.A. MANSOOR

CONGRATULATIONS to the group of students from BUET (also my alma mater, as Ahsanullah Engineering College-1954) for building a wonderful 100 cc economical car. It can be a boon in reducing environment and noise pollution and ideal for our usually narrow urban roads!

Though the prototype was built for around Tk. 70,000, mass producing the car, including seat cushions, internal lining and painting, could raise the retail price to around Tk.1.25 lac! Even if it is, say, Tk. 2 lac including dealer's margin, it will be a bargain!

The best way will be for the two neighbouring assembly and metal working plants near Sitakundu Industrial Area to help in manufacturing and assembling the car. The major investment will be for the body forming dies and necessary jigs and fixtures for regular mass production. Off the cuff, my guess is that this investment may be around Tk. 2.5 to 3 crore, for setting up an assembly line for this car.

The government should positively support this car production venture by giving special duty benefits only for this plant so that the sheets for making the body, engine, seats, windshield wipers, seals, brake, clutch and other needed components that have to be imported can be bought for less price.

For city driving, it should be a safer vehicle, given its small engine and overall size and low maximum speed! It will be a dream come true; to see this project off the ground, and see the first Bangladeshi designed and manufactured -- and less polluting -- car on the road! Finally, congratulations to Dr. Mahbub, Sharof, Yasin and Bakhtiar for their wonderful brainchild!

The writer is a retired engineer.

Gloom besets fertiliser sector



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

WHEN experts discuss in many forums that Bangladesh has nearly attained food security, the first question that comes to mind is whether our agriculture sector is capable to feed the burgeoning population where net arable land is on the decline. The challenge of attaining sustainable food security perhaps will not be eliminated. While we proclaim positively about the improvement in agriculture productivity, we face a negative scenario in the fertiliser sector.

Agriculture and fertiliser sectors are inherently dependent on one another. Among the many needed soil nutrients; nitrogen, sulfur and phosphorous based chemical fertilisers are largely used in Bangladesh. The trend of balanced and efficient fertiliser consumption over past few years is evident for improving agriculture productivity, mostly for high yield variety rice production. Almost all the crops use chemical fertiliser to supply and maintain soil nutrients for higher yield. In supplying balanced nutrients to the soil, urea usage constitutes about 65% of total chemical fertiliser consumed in 2010-11, which is about 2.7 million metric tons. In 2011-12 consumption urea consumption was about 2.3 million metric tons.

According to Unnayan Onneshan's study "Future Fertiliser Demand for Sustaining Rice production in Bangladesh: A Quantitative Analysis," demand for chemical fertilisers by 2050 would be about 7.5 million metric tons per annum (urea- 3.8 million tons, Super Phosphates- 2 million tons and Murate of Potash- 1.7 million tons) based on recommended nutrient dose. While the actual consumption is estimated as per past trend such as urea -- about 3 million tons per annum, Super Phosphates -- 0.7 million metric tons per annum and Murate of Potash -- about 0.6 million metric tons per annum. Thus, we always use less fertiliser than recommended dose.

Presently, seven fertiliser factories, of which six are state-owned and one is public private partnership (PPP) having total productive capacity about 2.5 million. Shahjalal fertiliser is in implementation stage and is expected to start operations around 2016. Deterioration of productivity of state-owned factories went into steep decline after 2007. Reasons are obvious: (1) aging of technology and the plant itself (as can be seen in Table), (2) poor maintainability of the equipment and machineries, (3) heavy gas rationing on fertiliser sector -- all these factors have compounded to cut production dramatically. Because of plant aging, most of the state-owned factories consume as much as double the gas than a new or well maintained plant does. The lone

Fertiliser Factories	Commission Year	Year of operation	Capacity ('000 MT)		Daily gas demand (MMSCFD)
			Urea	Ammonia	
Natural Gas Fertiliser Factory (NGFF), Fenchuganj	1961	52	110	-	18
Urea Fertiliser Factory Limited (UFFL), Ghorashal	1970	43	470	-	45
Ashuganj Fertiliser Company Limited (AFCL), Brahmanbaria	1981	32	530	-	52
Polash Fertiliser Factory Limited (PUFF), Ghorashal	1985	28	100	-	14
Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL), Chittagong	1987	26	560	-	52
Jannua Fertiliser Company Limited (JFCL), Jamalpur	1991	22	560	-	45
BCIC Total			2,330	-	
Kamaphuli Fertiliser Company Limited (KAFCCO), Chittagong	1994	19	700	150	63
Bangladesh total at present			2,990	150	289
Shahjalal Fertiliser Company Ltd (SFCL), Sylhet	under construction (expected 2016)		580	-	45

PPP fertiliser plant in Bangladesh having high energy efficiency remains unproductive because of gas rationing. The outcome is quite pathetic. The total urea production from 7 fertiliser factories has dropped from 2.5 million tons to about half from 2005 to 2012 and foreign import has increased to more than one million tons per annum. The national exchequer now spends about \$0.5 billion dollars to import urea.

Given this context, the six urea fertiliser factories under Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) are capable of producing 1.8 million tons per annum at approximately 65-70% capacity if full gas supply about 226 million cubic standard feet per day (mmscfd) is ensured. As many of the state-owned fertiliser factories are in various stages of obsolescence and no productivity improvement schemes have been put into place, it is expected that over time, productivity will continue to decline while consuming more gas. KAFCCO, the only PPP plant in the country, is capable of producing 0.7 million metric tons urea and 0.15 million metric tons ammonia at 63 mmscfd gas supply. So, total gas demand of fertiliser sector is about 290 mmscfd which constitutes about 12% of country's present gas production.

Had Bangladesh several state of the art technology plants like JFCL, KAFCCO or the upcoming SFCL, current and future urea demand could have been produced by using only 225 mmscfd instead of 290 mmscfd gas supply. It would pave the way for saving a significant amount of natural gas and also a huge amount of foreign currency. The new SFCL factory would be able to supply about 0.58 million tons a year while BCIC's other old factories will continue to deteriorate, resulting in falling production. Hence the demand-supply gap would continue to exist in the future at the current level.

To secure the country's urea fertiliser now and in the future, the economic option is to produce domestically. Efficiency improvement of fertiliser sector in terms of higher production at less gas consumption is vital for survival of the crucial sector. It is imperative that policymakers initiate a long term scheme for developing the fertiliser sector that will provide a roadmap for plant renovation at right time and the gradual replacement of old plants over a definite timetable. If BCIC sits idle and misses the right time to build new facilities, Bangladesh will continue with its import dependency and we will continue to expend precious foreign exchange. In the final analysis of things, inaction today could very well sow the seeds of destruction for the fertiliser sector as has been the case with jute.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

The State versus Adilur: Facts against innuendoes

C.R. ABRAR

THE recent arrest and remand of lawyer and rights activist Adilur Rahman Khan and the subsequent raid and seizure of equipment from the human rights organisation Odhikar by the members of law enforcement agencies have cast an ominous shadow on the State and civil society relationship in Bangladesh. To the best of knowledge of this author this is for the first time in independent Bangladesh that the State has taken into remand a rights activist and the office of a human rights organisation has been subjected to search.

Senior functionaries of the State including the minister for home affairs have made public pronouncements on the arrest, and the public prosecutor has put forward arguments justifying his claim for a ten-day remand.

Explaining the reason for Adilur's arrest the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam noted that the accused published a motivated report that tarnished the image of the law enforcement agency, government and the State. The public prosecutor stated that Adilur was charged

under Clauses 1 and 2 of Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 for publishing false images and information and disrupting the law and order situation of the country. He also claimed that there was reasonable suspicion that Adilur was also directly and indirectly liable for other cognizable offences. The Minister for Home Affairs claimed that "substantial allegations" are stacked against Adilur and added "countries which are active in protecting the rights do not tolerate such things." "It is a crime to tarnish the image in the name of human rights," the learned minister observed. It is also interesting to note that keeping in tune with the government officials a section of the private media are engaged in vilifying Adilur as a pro-Jamaati activist.

From the above statements one may infer that Adilur's main crime has been undermining the law of the land and the image of the law enforcement agencies, government and the State. Before proceeding with substantive matter of the case, let us examine if the aforementioned upholders of the law had acted in accordance with the law in dealing with Adilur. Firstly, a group of plainclothesmen in a white mini van and a Pajero jeep went to pick up Adilur through forcibly entering the house. They did not produce any arrest warrant, nor was any reason assigned as to why he was arrested and where he was being taken. Secondly, at 2 am on August 11, when asked, officials of Gulshan police station informed family members that there was no case lodged against Adilur, while at the magistrate's court Adilur was shown arrested in the Information and Communication Technology Act case lodged at Gulshan police station on August 10. Thirdly, at 3 am the same day, when Adilur's wife Dr. Saira Rahman Khan went to register a General Diary about her husband the officials at the police station refused to accept the case for being "sensitive." Fourthly, it was only after Adilur was produced before the magistrate that complaints against him were handed over to his lawyers.

Needless to say, a rudimentary knowledge of the concepts of rule of law and natural justice would lead one to

surmise that in all the above counts the State agencies had acted in contravention of the law. Is it not only fair to demand that the State clarify its own transgressions when it is demanding Adilur to do his?

Let us now discuss the matter pertaining to the interaction between Odhikar and the ministry of information. The readers may be aware that Odhikar's failure to submit the names and addresses of the 61 people who were reported to have been killed during the clean-up operation of the Hefajat rally in the early hours of May 6 is a major charge brought against Adilur.

Odhikar received a letter dated July 10, 2013, from the personal secretary to the minister (deputy secretary) of information. The letter noted that "the government is enthusiastic to make public the real facts and actual number of deaths by conducting a further in-depth investigation as there has been confusion regarding the death toll during the clash between Hefajat-e-Islam and law enforcement agencies. Your fact-finding report would be necessary for this task of the government. Therefore, we request you to send us your fact finding mission report including the detailed list of 61 deceased persons along with the names of their fathers, mothers and their addresses."

On July 17 Odhikar sent a reply to the concerned minister and offered to extend its cooperation. It requested the government to compile a record of the victims so that the lists of both Odhikar and the government could be matched. Odhikar clearly stated that it could not keep the government's request of sending the list, as there was no victim and witness protection law and mechanism in the country. Odhikar went on to explain that "being a human rights organisation, it is Odhikar's duty to ensure the safety and security of the victims." It is in this context the organisation requested the minister to (a) form a neutral investigation commission headed by a retired Judge of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, after having discussion with human rights organisations that are working to prepare the list of the deceased persons; (b) take appropriate measures to ensure the security of the information providers, victims/their families and witnesses, and (c) ensure that there will not be any reprisal or any further human rights violations against victims/their families, witnesses and other information providers.

It may be pertinent to point out that there was no further communication from the ministry on Odhikar's request. One may therefore deem that the response came in the filing of two cases against Adilur Rahman Khan, the Secretary of Odhikar.

The image of law enforcement agencies, the government and the State appears to be sacrosanct for the state functionaries. One wonders if it ever crosses their mind the image they themselves generate and transmit to the world by engaging in rampant corruption, defaming persons of international repute, blatant partisanship and through enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, custodial deaths, torture and impunity -- all in the name of national security.

The writer teaches International Relations at the University of Dhaka. He is the President of Odhikar.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Set standard in politics

Of late, feud among the leaders and activists of major political parties have increased alarmingly which is causing death and injuries of party men. Being a conscious citizen, I strongly feel that national level leaders of different political parties, instead of devoting more time in making or countering criticism, should concentrate their efforts on resolving internal feud thereby restoring political values and standard.

Bangladesh has so many problems which include economic and environmental ones. So, political parties need to be more action-oriented towards ensuring good governance in the country through setting political standard.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture
SAU, Dhaka

Politics of billboard

Flooding the city with billboards highlighting the government's performance has been done as an aggressive campaign by the ruling party; and probably with the advice of Harvard Professor as per plan of Mr. Joy, one of the two probable future leaders of this unlucky nation.

The owners of the billboards said that they would suffer a loss of tk. 150 crore if the billboards are not returned within a year. But the question is, how can a government resort to such an illegal step violating all norms and decency? It is to be noted that the opposition did not launch any such billboards campaign to achieve landslide victory in all city corporation elections. The opposition can now put some billboards highlighting how much money was robbed of the share market, what the nation lost for one AL man who stood in the way of Padma bridge, how many politically motivated cases for AL people were withdrawn, crores (in thousands) of money siphoned off from public banks, achievement of our foreign minister who made world record in foreign trips, numbers of extra judicial killings etc. The list is endless.

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque
East Rampur, Dhaka

Congrats to Spelling Bee organisers

We have come to know that the winners of The Daily Star Spelling Bee competition met President Abdul Hamid at his office. This was arranged in order to encourage the winners and the young people who will participate in the next year's competition.

The Daily Star and other co-organisers of the competition deserve congratulations and heartfelt thanks for taking the initiative to hold this invaluable educational competition. Millions of people including students of various levels, parents and general public watched the competition on TV breathlessly. This competition kindled enthusiasm among young people's hearts to learn spellings of words and the participants did grueling practice in an effort to win the competition. Hats off to the organisers.

Mohammad Rukanuddin
Assistant Professor of English
Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology

Comments on commentary, "The propaganda and the mindset," published on August 8, 2013

Khan from Ottawa, Canada

I am with your comments. I would like to request Mahfuz Anam to write on land grabbing by the so-called developers. Some newsmen will not go against the land grabbers or developers who are destroying the environment by building worst types of building.

Muhammad Rafiqur

One of the finest pieces by the editor of TDS. Our PM is simply destroying AL. AL party men are silent. All intellectuals are silent. It gives me pain.

Ash C.

The government has gone completely bankrupt mentally or otherwise! Moreover, the minister of 'Black Cat' fame has proudly proclaimed to the media that what has been done so far regarding 'billboard hijacking' in Dhaka city alone is nothing compared to when even every upazilas and thanas will be covered with billboards praising AL 'achievements' soon!

A B M Abdullah

I hope and expect that the PM would read this and respond by taking appropriate action.

Ash C.

That would be the day when the sun will rise from the West!

Anon

Mr Mahmudur Rahman did spread bad propaganda but he used his licensed media. On the other hand, AL is spreading its good propaganda by totally illegal means. Both are illegal. The main problem in our country is that law is only applicable to opposition, not everyone is equal under law.

Samih34

After experiencing the nightmarish AL rule for the last 5 years, how worse can it be next?

Nantu

Congratulation is due to Mr. Anam for writing this piece. It gives an accurate picture of the nature of the ruling party. Let us recall the recent threat by the PM when the AL backed candidate lost in Gazipur: 'I will see how you feel when I shut down electricity after Eid'. She spoke as if she was the owner of all electricity produced in BD, and likewise she has decided to take-over the billboards.

Saleh Tanveer

So the question is what sort of "mindset" prompted AL to indulge in a criminal act of 'hijacking' city billboards, which are private property? The same mindset that tells them that they and their progeny are the rightful owners of this country and everybody else's rights have to be subservient to theirs?

M.R.R. Khan

After reading this wonderful piece from none but Mr. Anam, the Editor of TDS, I really feel comfortable that there are still voices in Bangladesh to speak against the wrong.