

Long tailbacks on highways

Urgent remedy needed

ROAD travel has of late become the most painful experience and that our highways and traffic management and vehicle control on them remain much to be desired. Looking at the unmitigated sufferings of the road travelers the last two days has all the more reinforced that fact.

There is no reason for the communications minister to feel contended with road repairs only, and we know him as person who spends as much time outside ensuring that the conditions of the roads were up to scratch, as he does in his office. But he should much rather plan the expansion of the existing highways particularly those that connect the capital with the divisional headquarters. If not, the situation will get even worse and a journey which a decade ago took only four hours but takes double the time now under normal circumstances and six fold on religious holidays, as we saw this time, will take even longer.

We feel that a thorough evaluation of the reasons for the jam, seventy kilometers in some places on the major highways, is called for. Yesterdays lead article in the leading Bangla daily enumerates six reasons for this, which can all be cured quickly. But what will remain the biggest problem is the road capacity which has been so severely overtaken by the huge number of vehicles on the highways. Unless work is initiated immediately to expand the major highways, which are no more than single-way roads, to four-way lanes, the sufferings of the travelers will continue.

Murder in Savar

Let law take its course

WHAT the convenor of the Savar unit of the Bangladesh Chhatra League did on Saturday was not just indulge in bad behaviour, but engage in a clear commission of a crime. His brutal treatment of a physically challenged young man, whose only sin was to have protested the former's breaking of the queue before a shop serving mobile phone owners, has tarnished not just his reputation but has also undermined further the image of a ruling party already grappling with a series of crises on its doorstep. The young man has died. Who takes responsibility for his tragic end?

Such criminality, unless ruthlessly tackled, can only lead to a further erosion of people's confidence in the government. The perpetrator is conveniently not being hauled up before the law because of his affiliation with the ruling party. That simply will not do. Since this lawless young man holds an important position with the BCL, it is all the more necessary that action be taken against him. It has to do with the grave need to inform people that party label is no licence for criminality.

We demand swift and appropriate action on the part of the authorities. Additionally, measures must be there for all kinds of aid to be provided to the family of the murdered young man, among which the provision of security is of paramount importance.

Dear leaders, life is an echo!

KHANDAKER ZIA HASAN

I would like to narrate a story at the outset. A little boy got angry with his mother and shouted at her, "I hate you, I hate you." Because of fear of reprimand, he went up to the valley and shouted, "I hate you, I hate you," and back came the echo, "I hate you, I hate you." This was the first time in his life he had heard an echo. He got scared, went to his mother for protection and said there was a bad boy in the valley who shouted "I hate you, I hate you." The mother understood and asked him to go back and shout, "I love you, I love you." The little boy went and shouted, "I love you, I love you," and back came the echo. That little incident taught the little boy a lesson for a lifetime that our life is like an echo: We get back what we give. Worth reading, isn't it?

Our two arch political rivals are busy criticising each other. They don't see anything good in the opposite party. The filthy words they utter against each other, even in the parliamentary sessions, are totally beyond imagination.

Ideally, in a democracy both the ruling party and the opposition should perform their respective responsibilities so that there is accountability in their politics, but they should do that with due respect to each other.

Why don't they do so? The answer is pretty simple, they think that, as an opposition party, if they praise the good work of the government they will never be able to come to power. People will think that the government is running the country very well since the opposition is praising them. So, they will keep voting the ruling party to power again and again. If they only knew, things work totally the other way round. To be honoured, you have to show honour first. By the same token, to have a friend, be a friend first. They are perhaps scared of a third political alliance, or they just don't like it, but it is they who are creating the opportunity for third political platform because the citizens are really frustrated and tired of these two parties' activities and attitudes against each other.

The writer is a communication trainer and journalist.

Egypt under military boots

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

(The military) had been serving over the past many decades, chose to look away when Egypt's fledgling democracy was being thus smothered to death.

President Obama, however, has been routinely exhorting the Egyptian military, or the interim government it backs, against using excessive force to dislodge protesters from their camps. But the Egyptian army, which depends crucially on the \$1.3 billion-worth annual military aid to sustain itself, seems to be giving a damn about American persuasions! And what is America's response to this recalcitrance on the part of the Egypt's interim government? Nothing like stopping or suspending the military aid. The Obama administration has only cancelled the joint military exercise with Egypt scheduled for next month! What a reaction from the helpless (!) Obama administration!

The secret of the Egyptian interim government's arrogance lies exactly here. The Egyptian military was never a friend of the much-hyped Egyptian Spring or revolution of January 2011. The Tahrir Square phenomenon only made them wary of the looming uncertainties over Egypt's political horizon in the wake of the social upheavals across North Africa and Middle East -- the Arab Spring.

The Egyptian military was quick to realise that Hosni Mubarak was a dead horse. So they simply chose to sit on the fence, allowed the regime of Hosni Mubarak to crumble and gave the impression of taking sides in favour of the people. In this way they could cleverly pull the wool over the eyes of the Egyptian people and emerge as the saviour of the Egyptian revolution. The Egyptian people were fooled. The military did not really deserve the respect they commanded from the masses as their saviour and as the symbol of national unity and stability.

The military waited with patience knowing that the crowd assembled in the Tahrir Square was a hodgepodge of diverse political views and once the main focus of their resentment, Mubarak, was taken out of the view, this short-lived bonhomie would be over. So, they allowed the election to be held in June and let the most organised of the shouting lot at the Square, the Muslim Brotherhood, sweep the board.

But it did not take more than a year for the Tahrir Square camaraderie to fall apart. Winning the election, Mohamed Morsi pushed ahead with his own political agenda, which was only natural in a party-led democracy. But since it was an Islamist agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood, it was a cause for disillusionment for others - liberals, minorities, seculars and the like, who did not belong to the Brotherhood.

But amid this non-Brotherhood crowd were also the vested quarters, especially cronies who thrived on the favours shelled out by despotic Hosni Mubarak. Needless to say, they were the greatest losers in the events unfolding since January 25 of 2011.

Morsi was neither able to address the economy, which was already in a shambles, nor initiate a process of political consensus among the major stakeholders in Egyptian politics. Morsi or any other politician in his place would have faced a similar situation, since this was Egypt's first experiment with democracy.

The disillusioned public again gathered in the Tahrir Square and chanted against Morsi. This was also not unnatural in a democracy. But, not unlike the manner that nascent democracies were not allowed to flourish in many third world nations in the past on the excuse that they were messy, it was not too late before the apologists of despotism struck back at Egypt's first attempt at democracy in the name of stability and order. And

the military bulldozers, armoured personnel carriers, tanks and helicopters bought with Egyptian people's money are being used indiscriminately against civilians demanding restoration of democracy. Hundreds have already perished under military boots on the US's and all other Western democracies' watch!

Unfortunately, fear of the Islamist agenda of Morsi and his party, Muslim Brotherhood, has blinded the liberals, secularists and minorities to the cunning of the military, which has skillfully driven a wedge into the democracy-loving Egyptian people's unity and is playing one group against the other to its (army's) own advantage. They are now planning to ban the Muslim Brotherhood, which to the present ruling clique is nothing but a bunch of terrorists. Now it is Muslim Brotherhood, but the day may not be too far away when the liberals and secularists would also become equally bad to the military-backed regime. Realising his mistake, the liberal Mohamed ElBaradei has resigned from the interim government. The sooner other liberals and secularists understand this, the better for Egypt's democratic future.

Who are the liberals' and secularists' worst enemy? Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood, or the phantoms of the old dictatorial regime? The Egyptian people will have to decide this first, if they want to save their revolution and democracy.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Egypt's blood, America's complicity

AMR DARRAG

FOR millions of Egyptians still reeling from the shock of Wednesday's state-led massacre, which killed at least 600 peaceful protesters and possibly many more, the questions are now very basic: How do you reconcile with people who are prepared to kill you, and how do you stop them from killing again?

I represent an alliance of Egyptians who oppose the military coup that overthrew President Mohamed Morsi in July. Over the last two weeks, we have met with foreign diplomats, including Bernardino León, the European Union envoy, and William J. Burns, the American deputy secretary of state, who were invited by the coup's leaders to mediate. We respectfully listened, honestly communicated our assessment of the situation and emphasised our desire to find a peaceful solution.

But those efforts were doomed by the bad faith of Gen. Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt's military ruler. It was he, not the alliance, who rejected the mediators' proposals.

The mediation efforts have been problematic. Diplomats and journalists continue to speak about negotiating only with the Muslim Brotherhood, even though the protesters come from all over the political spectrum; 69% of the country opposed the coup, one Egyptian poll showed.

Worse, shocking and irresponsible rhetoric from the State Department in Washington and from other Western diplomats -- calling on the Brotherhood and demonstrators to "renounce" or "avoid" violence (even when also condemning the state's violence) -- has given the junta cover to perpetrate heinous crimes in the name of "confronting" violence. The protest sites have been teeming with foreign correspondents for the last several weeks, and there has not been a shred of evidence suggesting the presence of weapons, or of violence initiated by protesters.

The mediators' most disastrous error was their choice to put pressure on the victims. In their eyes, we were the cause of the crisis, not the illegal putsch that suspended the Constitution and kidnapped the president.

Secretary of State John Kerry's astonishing remark on August 1 that the coup was "restoring democracy," despite a disavowal from the White House, did not leave the impression that America was on the side of the peaceful protesters.

If only we could accept the coup as a fait accompli, we were told, all would be well. There would be "goodwill gestures" from the military, and there would be an "inclusive" democracy.

We have heard all those promises before. The military and so-called liberal elites have shown time and again that they believe they are entitled to a veto over Egyptians' choices. But the general who betrayed his oath and held the only elected president in the history of Egypt in extralegal detention cannot be trusted to let an opposition movement survive, let alone thrive.

For those seriously interested in a way out of this crisis, some hard facts must be acknowledged.

First, this is a battle between those who envision a democratic, pluralistic Egypt in which the individual has dignity and power changes hands at the ballot box and those who support a militarised state in which government is imposed on the people by force.

Second, this coup has already sent Egypt back into the dark ages of dictatorship -- with tight military control over both state-owned and private media, attacks on peaceful protesters and journalists, and detention of opposition leaders without criminal charges or due process.

Third, there is no promise that Sisi can make that he hasn't already betrayed. He took an oath to uphold the Constitution; he suspended the Constitution. He took an oath to loyally serve in the government; he toppled that government. And in the classic doublespeak of military juntas, he loudly condemned the opposition for dealing with foreign powers, while he was actively seeking the help of Western diplomats as well as the Persian Gulf sheikdoms that largely financed his coup.

Through all this, the United States government has pleaded impotence. Hardly a day goes by without some

press officer, analyst or public official pushing the idea that Washington's influence really isn't that decisive with the Egyptian generals. This cop-out simply won't do. America had influence and still does. It was an American official, not an Egyptian one, who informed President Morsi's staff of the finality of the coup decision.

There is only one way forward in Egypt today. The legitimate government must be restored. Only then can we hold talks for a national reconciliation with every option on the table.

The reinstatement of Morsi is not about ideology or ego. It is not political grandstanding. It is not a negotiating tactic. It is a pragmatic necessity.

Without this crucial step, without accountability for those responsible for the bloodshed and chaos facing Egypt today, none of the promises of inclusion, democracy, liberty or life can be guaranteed.

What the United States ultimately decides to do with its diplomatic relations or foreign aid is President Obama's decision. But Americans need to recognise that every passing day solidifies the perception among Egyptians that American rhetoric on democracy is empty; that American politicians won't hesitate to flout their own laws or subvert their declared values for short-term political gains; and that when it comes to freedom, justice and human dignity, Muslims need not apply.

The regime we are facing in Egypt is not new. It is one with which we are intimately familiar. Its leaders are selling torture, repression and stagnation. We are not buying. And America shouldn't either.

The writer is a member of the executive board of the Freedom and Justice Party, which is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. He was Egypt's minister of planning and international cooperation under President Mohamed Morsi.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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The billboard episode

Just before Eid when I was going to university, some billboards describing government's achievements caught my attention. After a couple of days, I noticed many more of them at different points of the city. Later on, I learnt from the news reports that such eulogy of the government has been hung all over the city. Further, it was learnt that those were occupied overnight without notifying their owners.

Does the government need to be ostentatious to advertise their successes? In the next few days, some leaders of the ruling party tried to justify the billboard publicity while the opposition criticised it. Lately, those are being removed, and, little wonder, at night. The government misused taxpayers' money, engaged large workforce in preparing, hanging, and removing them, harmed the billboard owners' business, and spoiled their own reputation too. I wonder how the politicians can waste their time and energy behind such useless activities.

Tashrif Billah
Dhaka

Egypt bleeding

After decades of military and autocratic rule, Egypt returned to democratic governance just a year ago. But the country plunged into unprecedented turmoil after the elected president was removed by the military. The military even did not allow the democratically elected president Morsi more than a year time to address the problems of the country piled during the rule of the past rulers with the blessings of the military and the world super power, the USA. Egypt is now bleeding and burning. So far, official death toll is 638 (unofficially thousands) from the crack-down carried out by the military on the two camps housing supporters of ousted president as they are demanding Morsi's reinstatement. Their demand is hundred percent legal as Mr. Morsi was elected president through a general election. Against the backdrop of this highly volatile and explosive situation leading to bloodshed and turmoil and imposition of month long state of emergency, and a dusk-to-dawn curfew on the capital and 10 other provinces, the world conscience is calling all the stakeholders to play their desired roles.

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque
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Distracting public mind

World leaders have often used smokescreens, red herrings or other clever diverting tactics to distract the public mind from important but embarrassing issues. This is also a very common military device: to create a diversion, such as a pretended attack in one sector when actually the main drive is going to be in another.

This has been the favourite trick of despots and dictators throughout the ages: get the people's minds off their internal problems and needs and altercations by creating a much more frightening bugaboo, such as an external war or fear of their neighbours, or causing them to focus their fears on some scapegoat leader, class, race, sect or supposed problem.

It is easy to see why he and his cohorts would have done everything in their pernicious power to get out of the papers for a while. Illegally boring into the private affairs of its citizens and scandalously destroying their personal freedom, while at the same time he tries to hide his evil-doing!

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Comments on post editorial,
"Something that should seriously worry the PM," published on August 16, 2013

Nds

Thanks to Mr. Anam for very correctly pinpointing the most acute and insidious shortcomings of the AL and particularly its supreme leader is beset with.

Snr Citizen

A beautiful and realistic analysis and a very genuine concern have been expressed.

NH

If you notice carefully, you will see that our PM has the habit of appointing the least qualified, the most incompetent person to various posts in the government as well as in her party. Why? Simple. Such persons who themselves are aware of their unworthiness, will never dare to question or contradict the PM. Such persons will never give the right advice.

deepjeleai

I don't think that most of our political leaders have a clear concept of moral value.

Ash C.

Welcome back to The Third View. Another extremely fine piece from editor Anam. This 'battle of figures': about 11+ according to the government, 40+ by The Daily Star & 61 by Odhikar and the fallout thereafter surely could have been easily avoided if only the government had constituted an independent court of inquiry (as had been the practice until in the recent past) headed by a retired judge to investigate and make public its report on the May 5-6 mayhem; and, thus save the country from further embarrassment, due to the present mindless action of the rulers against Adilur, at home and abroad.

SA

This is a fantastic piece of writing. Clear, concise and thought provoking. If the government had an advisor like the writer of this article, they could do wonders in the polls.