

## PM's emphatic 'no', a rude jolt

*Must she choose the path of ruinous confrontation?*

**I**N an abruptly called press conference on Sunday raising public anticipation of an important political announcement, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated her familiar stance that the election will be held as per the constitution. We recall that she herself amended it according to her own wishes, and in undue haste, without a serious effort to engage anybody, including her own allies, let alone the opposition. It poured cold water on public expectations.

The Prime Minister's latest no-holds-barred obdurate signals, nationally and internationally. One, it may conclusively signify a lack of sincerity and intent of the AL government to reach any understanding with the opposition on ways to hold the election ensuring their full participation. Two, it signals imposition of ruling party's will on one of the major stakeholders in national politics denying democratic pluralism a legitimate opportunity. Last but not least, it signifies a negation of peaceful methods in preference to the ruinous path of confrontation making economy and the people suffer immeasurably in the days to come.

The PM's latest move puts across a number of negative signals, nationally and internationally. One, it may conclusively signify a lack of sincerity and intent of the AL government to reach any understanding with the opposition on ways to hold the election ensuring their full participation. Two, it signals imposition of ruling party's will on one of the major stakeholders in national politics denying democratic pluralism a legitimate opportunity. Last but not least, it signifies a negation of peaceful methods in preference to the ruinous path of confrontation making economy and the people suffer immeasurably in the days to come.

We think not all is lost yet, and that good sense will prevail sooner rather than later.

## Jute prospect brightens

*A good feat by our scientists*

**B**ANGLADESHI scientist Dr. Maqsood Alam has put yet another feather in his cap by decoding the genome of deshi or white variety of jute. He discovered the genetic sequence of tosha jute in 2010. This is yet another milestone in the research to discover the genetic makeup of different types of jute, once famous as the major foreign exchange earning crop.

The discovery is of enormous significance for reviving the past glory of the 'golden fibre', the production of which is now saddled with multiple problems including ever shrinking acreage coupled with low market price for the crop. These are, again, a source of disincentive for jute growers.

Conventional approach will not help resolve these problems towards reviving the golden era of jute. What we need is a more advanced scientific approach.

Equipped with a deeper insight into deshi or white jute's genome, scientists will now be able to tackle those issues from a new angle. They, will, for instance, be able to develop new strains of jute that can fight pests better and stand adverse climatic conditions such as drought, salinity and so on.

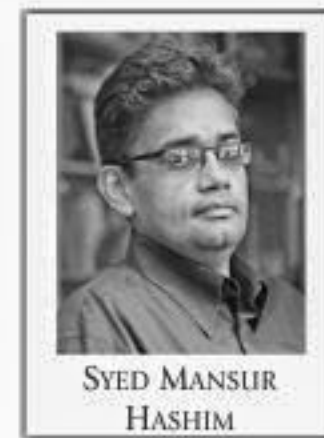
The information may lead to creating new types of jute with finer fibre quality as well as higher per acre yield potential.

Bangladesh can make the most of this discovery to grab the rising global market of natural fibres replacing synthetic ones. At the same time, it can also recover its lost place in global market as the number one jute producing nation.

## Managing riches in the Arctic



*As the world's leading drilling companies are in a rush to tap the Arctic's untapped resources, it becomes more imperative than ever to set up an appropriate liability regime.*



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

**A**N unprecedented warming of the Arctic region is underway. According to a study by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) the region is set to become ice free by 2070. Yet more recent studies and satellite imagery have moved that date to anywhere between 2020 to 2035. Whatever may be the case, the region which had until recently been considered impassable is now set to become the playground for exploration of natural resources ranging from oil to gas. Nearly a quarter of the world's estimated undiscovered oil and gas and massive deposits of other valuable minerals are thought to be located in the polar region. Looking beyond the vast untapped deposits of oil and gas, the Arctic supplies 40% of the world's palladium, 20% of diamonds, 15% of platinum, 11% of cobalt, 10% of nickel, 9% of tungsten and 8% of zinc.

It had been feared that Arctic nations that include Russia and the United States would engage in armed brinkmanship to settle scores over the "race to riches;" that has not happened. Contrary to popularly held beliefs, the five states with Arctic coastlines, namely, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States have effectively used the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the basis for settling maritime boundary disputes and enacting safety standards for commercial shipping.

Although the United States had a hand in its drafting, for decades senators on both sides of the political divide have blocked its ratification. As pointed out by Scott Bogerson in his article 'The coming Arctic Boom' published in *Foreign Affairs*, "UNCLOS allows countries to claim exclusive jurisdiction over the portions of their continental shelves that extend beyond the 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zones prescribed by the treaty.

In the United States' case, this means that the country would gain special rights over an extra 350,000 square miles of ocean -- an area roughly half the size of the entire Louisiana Purchase. Because the country is not a party to UNCLOS, however, its claims to the extended continental shelf in the Beaufort and Chuchi seas (and elsewhere) cannot be recognised by other states, and the lack of a clear legal title has discouraged private firms from exploring for oil and gas or mining the deep seabed." Ratifying UNCLOS could be the first step for the US to form a coherent Arctic policy.

Energy hungry nations of Asia led by China and India

have already taken the lead to gain a foothold in the new Arctic spring that has just begun to unfold. China for instance has already begun to make inroads into the region, signing a free-trade deal with Iceland and setting up the largest embassy in the country. Denmark's sway on Greenland, which is recipient to an annual \$600 million could wane as foreign direct investment from South Korea, China and other nations outstrip the aid it gives to the now autonomous region.

The race for riches is on. The biggest question that looms large at this stage is to strike a balance between exploitation of natural resources and conservation of the environment. The stakes couldn't be higher. Given the delicate ecosystems in the Arctic already strained by consequences of climate change, the coming boom in economic activity will inevitably lead to make them more precarious. The construction of pipes and roads, noise pollution from offshore drilling, seismic surveys and added maritime traffic could all collude to make matters worse.

The world's leading drilling companies are in a rush to tap the Arctic's untapped resources. Hence, it becomes more imperative than ever to set up an appropriate liability regime. The European Union at present is mulling over a proposal that would oversee companies' compliance requirements for both equipment standards and financial guarantees. As pointed out by Lloyd's report titled 'Arctic Opening: Opportunity and Risk in the High North': "Arctic Council Task Force is developing recommendations on an international instrument on Arctic marine oil pollution, preparedness and response, due for release in 2013. This aims at developing a more streamlined process to ensure more rapid clean-up and comprehensive payments. Given the potential transnational impact of spills, this may include an international liability and compensation instrument. Greenland, for example, has argued that 'different national systems may lead to ambiguities and uncertainty delays in oil pollution responses and compensation payments' and that any regime must adapt as understanding of the 'worst case scenario' in the Arctic changes."

Given the region's remoteness and difficulty in accessibility, Arctic countries need to take into account the infrastructure gaps and address them accordingly. Similarly, environmental regulation and liability issues must be addressed through adoption of regulatory mechanisms that will go a long way in mitigating risks associated with mining and drilling.

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

## PM's press posse: Epitome of ineffectiveness

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

**T**HE media in Bangladesh is used to taking broadsides from high-ups in the government from time to time. And that includes the PM, who perhaps surpasses some of her more voluble colleagues in having a dig at us. And only on Sunday, while speaking to the press, she made a rather snide comment about *The Daily Star*. She feels the paper distorts whatever she says because, according to her comments as reported in this paper, "that is the character of the paper."

We also find very surprising the PM's comments at the same press meeting that in spite of so many new TV channels that the government has permitted to operate during its tenure they are running it down with their criticism. Is that a condition for granting TV licenses, that these channels should only wax eloquent of the party and the government? Is this her idea of a free media? Are we then to understand that these licenses were awarded on partisan consideration alone?

The attitude of the PM, and indeed most of her colleagues, towards the press in general is exemplified by these two remarks of hers. Does the government want a pliant media that would sing the praise of the government only, instead of telling the truth and reflecting public opinion?

Every government and every PM has the need for a good PR. But for that the PM needs to have a bunch of good professionals around her who should not only be efficient in interacting with the media but also offer her correct advice as to how she should deal with it.

We understand that there is a new deputy press secretary (DPS) to the prime minister. This has brought the total number of DPS to the PM to four. And very recently a senior journalist was appointed media advisor to the PM, a new post. We understand that, apart from these gentlemen gracing the PMO, there is a PM's press secretary and special assistant (media) to boot. And this does not include the plethora of staff they have.

If the PM feels that she is getting a bad press it her posse of pressmen that she should ask why. The fact that these persons are being paid from the public exchequer obliges one to ask what they are actually doing. What has been their input and what have been their achievements. Two recent media/PR exercise of the government, one of which was an unmitigated disaster, compel one to ask whether these people are up to the task.

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Look at the billboard 'madventure.' Had her media advisors been in sync with reality, they would have advised the PM differently. Surprisingly, everyone in the party who can speak, spoke of how good the idea was, without owning up as to who actually did it. However, I see a positive side to it. The speed with which the billboards were filled up and the promptness with which those were removed only a few days later, speak volumes of the 'efficiency' of the hordes of these workers. One wishes the government would do some of the repair works on the streets of Dhaka with similar alacrity.

And take for example PM's Sunday's press conference. While the nation was expecting the PM to speak on the political impasse, she talked about the genome decoding of jute. While a very important matter was revealed to us, why should the PM take credit for what is a normal function of the government -- providing money for research and development? Does the US president have press conferences with all the Nobel Prize winners? Were her press team been thinking and an efficient lot, their advice to the PM would have been otherwise.

And that leads us to ask whether the PM has ever taken stock of what her press team is actually doing. It is not their job only to put up press cuttings to the PM every morning. We ask how often has the PM's press advisors engaged the media or interacted with those at its policy level. And lack of regular interaction is what has caused the de-link between the PM and the public.

And how fair is the comment of the PM that this paper distorts whatever the PM says. We have no example of the PMO ever taking up issue with us on any so-called distortion, or proving our points wrong.

If one looks at the makeup of the PM's press team one would find a very important adjunct missing -- a spokesperson. We have been consistently harping on the need for a spokesperson at the PMO, who should be well informed on national, and international issues, and who can brief the media on government policies instead of the ministers speaking in different tones on the same matter.

Regrettably, the PM's press wing has been ineffective in linking and communicating with the public and the media, and that is because of its inefficiency, ineptitude and bloated makeup. And that is where we suggest the PM should focus her attention on.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### As good as his word!

The other day a middle-aged gentleman showed up at the gas station where I work. He came to me and asked if I could let him buy gasoline for his car. He gave me his credit card information which he did not have with him, neither did he have any cash to pay for the gas. I replied I need to ask my boss. My boss told me that we can not sell anything with the credit card information as that could be stolen information. I came back and declined to sell gasoline. Being denied, he asked me if I could help him with five dollars worth of gasoline to go home, which he would return back to me the following day eight times more.

I had only five dollars in my wallet. I let him buy the gasoline telling myself that I was helping a person in dire need. My co-workers were telling me that he was never going to come back. Interestingly, the following day he arrived and laid two twenty dollar notes on the counter in front of me. And not only that, he also brought a packet of cookies for me. He rushed back saying, "I told you I was gonna come back."

Saleh Mohammad Ayub  
Houston, Texas, USA

### Increase in airline accidents

These days the rate of air accident has been increased although airliners are using sophisticated modern airplanes with computerised control and navigation system. Recently an Asiana Airlines Boeing 777 crashed before landing at San Francisco airport killing 2 Chinese school-girls and hurting 180 passengers before ending its journey from Shanghai via Seoul.

The Boeing 777 is a wide-body long-range jet plane with a huge fuselage equipped with modern controlling system. But what exactly happened to the aircraft before landing is yet to be ascertained. Meanwhile as revealed by the competent US authority, the plane was travelling significantly below its intended speed before landing. Again the pilot in charge of landing was actually on training who had only 43 hours of flying experience with the Boeing 777 jet! Now the question naturally arises, what factor caused the accident -- mechanical error of the airplane or human error of the pilot? I think both airplane manufacturers and airliners plus other international aviation experts should suggest ways to avoid air accidents to make air journey safe and sound.

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

### MPs' behaviour in parliament

This refers to the report, "Indian MPs behave like anarchists" (Aug.14). There should be a code of conduct for MPs' behaviour inside the parliament, and this code should be linked to their application for contesting the Lok Sabha polls. The speaker's frustration is understandable. That will be democracy in the real sense. A report should be made on their behaviour inside the parliament and like a school report card, there should be red, green and blue boxes for bad, good and average behaviour.

Deendayal M. Lulla  
Mumbai, India

### Comments on news report, "Daughter surrenders," published on August 18, 2013

#### Ahmed Zakaria

There is obviously more to this case than meets the eye. I simply cannot believe a minor child would be able to murder her own parents in such a manner. The police should unearth the real motives behind this grisly murder.

#### Touchstone

What can be more tragic than parents getting killed by their child? Who can we trust if not our children?

#### Sheikh Monirul Islam, Opee

Children would never do that if they did their parenting properly. We need to dig for more information and wait.

#### deepjelejai

The most important thing for parents in a family is to educate moral value to the children. Otherwise, mental balance will be lost no matter how much money do you have.

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### "HRW says it's flawed" (August 17, 2013)

#### Nasim Hasan

There are numerous allegations against HRW's activities around the world. Most importantly there are rumours that statements like this can be made by them for a moderate amount of Jamaati money.

#### Nds

Human rights organisations are nothing but another sort of business enterprises. Their activities have nothing to do with the rights of man. They offer their services to the highest bidder.

#### Abbasuddin

HRW itself is flawed organisation that remains silent on all human rights violations in the USA.