

# Laid back on vital highway project

## Indecision causes unnecessary delay

DESPIITE claims to the contrary, the expansion of Dhaka-Chittagong highway from existing two lanes to four has progressed at a snail's pace. Four and half years into its tenure, the government has completed a mere 30 per cent of the work. Doubts persist whether the remaining work can be completed in the next 18 months.

According to a study by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation (IMED) of the planning ministry, indecisions at every stage have caused project cost overruns by about 47 per cent. Not only that, the tendering and re-tendering processes for the expansion project spanning three governments has not helped matters. Allegations have risen against successive contractors who have failed to mobilise requisite manpower, equipment and construction material as per scheduled timeframes. But most damaging of all is the fact that the post of project director has changed as many as 11 times over the 7 year period of project timeline. All these factors smack of flouting of government policy, especially since a change at this level requires recommendations from a high-level committee led by none other than the prime minister.

We are aghast at the apathy of government agencies to fast track such a vital project. Although the ministry of communications has highlighted several causes for the delay, one cannot but be dumbstruck at the lack of prioritisation for such a crucial project. The highway connecting Dhaka to Chittagong should have been prioritised as it carries the bulk of RMG exports and imports into the country are equally dependent on the highway.

# JU impasse

## Govt should act to end it

ACADEMIC activities of the Jahangirnagar University (JU) have come to a halt with its besieged VC being pressed to step down by agitating teachers. Organised under the banner of Sadharan Shikkhak Forum they have been staging a sit-in since Wednesday morning.

It may be recalled that amid a siege enforced by striking teachers under JUTA (Jahangirnagar Teachers' Association) since June 30, the High Court, responding to a petition, ordered to open the administrative building on July 24. But then the new phase of the agitation led by Sadharan ShikkhaK Forum started.

So, the impasse in JU is continuous. The previous VC had also to go last year in the face of continued strike by teachers, while this is for the third time that the incumbent JU VC, the first elected one, is being asked by his colleagues to leave office.

Teachers have been demonstrating with their 12-point complaints that include irregularities in students' admission and teachers' appointment, death of a student, assault on a teacher by a BCL leader, terrorist attack in the campus by hooligans, alleged undesirable statements by the VC to the media and so on.

Granted the agitating teachers may have their point, but then why should the general students' academic life suffer indefinitely? Teachers should rather settle the issue amicably among themselves without in anyway affecting the university's educational activities.

The government, especially, the president and chancellor should put their foot down in the matter to end the stalemate and restore normal academic environment on the JUCampus.

### What people think

Friday: August 16, 2013

Do you think Awami League will welcome the move if the US can convince BNP to have a dialogue with AL?

Yes

No

33%

67%

Saturday: August 17, 2013

Do you think it is possible for the ruling Awami League to bring back the six fugitive killers of Bangabandhu within its tenure?

Yes

No

11%

89%

Sunday: August 18, 2013

Do you think main opposition BNP will respond to the call of Awami League to place a proposal on the election-time government in the next session of parliament?

Yes

No

19%

81%

Monday: August 19, 2013

Do you agree with BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain that the government wants to stay in power by not holding the next parliamentary polls?

Yes

No

68%

32%

Tuesday: August 20, 2013

Do you think Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's allegation that the opposition wants to create constitutional crisis is justified?

Yes

No

25%

75%

Wednesday: August 21, 2013

Do you think political impasse will rise after the PM's statement that she won't budge an inch on the constitution?

Yes

No

88%

12%

Thursday: August 22, 2013

Do you agree with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia that people have lost trust in the Awami League?

Yes

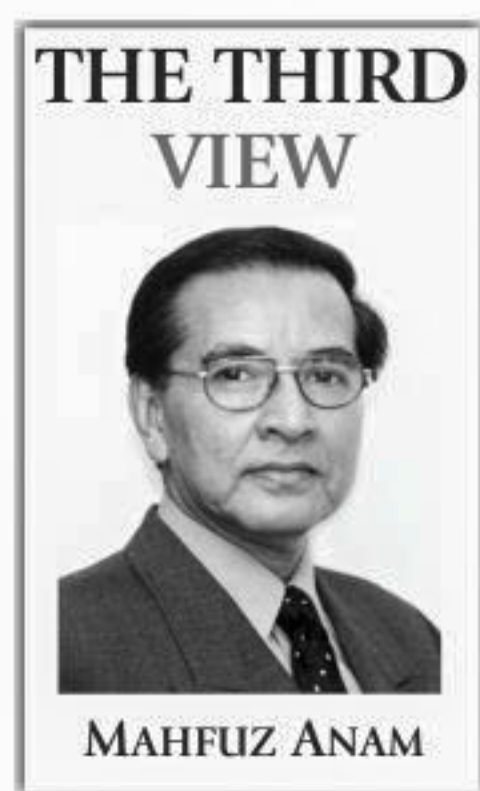
No

68%

32%

# Stubbornness is not leadership

## Democracy is never served by refusing to compromise



THE THIRD VIEW

MAHFUZ ANAM

"will not move a hair" or "blow your hair way" stance may end up moving the whole election and blowing democracy away, does not seem to have entered their thought.

Everybody except them appears to know well that the paths they have chosen can only lead to clashes, violence, death and into political 'troubled waters where unwanted elements may fish in.' In fact, so pessimistic is the mood that some people say 'no one will need to come to fish, people will invite them to do so.'

So knowing all this, why do our two supreme leaders persist in, what is patently, a self-destructive path? The answer is that they confuse "stubbornness with leadership, steadfastness with being principled and, most regrettably, with courage."

They remind us of a characteristic of elephants. These powerful beasts are kept confined in circular lairs, the enclosures of which are kept propped by angular pillars from outside, with no inside support. The elephants know only how to push, and the more they push the more the outside pillars prevent the barriers from falling. Only if the elephants pulled at the barriers with their trunks, the whole edifice would crumble and the elephants would go free. But they never pull but only push, and so they always remain imprisoned.

Only if our leaders knew how to step back once in a while, give a little space to their opponents, find some logic, some sincerity among those they oppose, we could have solved, most, if not all, of our problems. The lack of trust is so pervasive that there is nothing about each other that they believe, except perhaps the worst.

We, as a people, must share a lot of responsibility for this. Once when Awami League was in the opposition and this paper was writing constantly, vigorously and relentlessly against *hartals*, parliament boycott, and against the opposition's negative politics in general (this we do today, as we have been doing ever since our birth, and through all regimes), Sheikh Hasina told this writer that "the party that calls *hartals*, boycotts the parliament and all the things you criticise, gets elected the next time there is an election".

Subsequent events vindicated her stance and will do so once again if BNP wins, if the mayoral polls are any indication, the elections in spite of all the *hartals*, boycotts and negative politics they have indulged in.

Observers say that we never vote for a party but

always against the other. It is "rejection" that dominates our thoughts. So while we criticise our leaders for being negative we must accept the blame that we reward them for it. We must introspect as to how long we should continue such politics, how does it help us to modernise our country and how indeed does it help to energise the younger generation into nation building.

It is the younger generation who are the main victims of this vicious and negative politics. They spend their youth seeing mostly the manifestation of muscle power and crony politics. They also hear nothing but abuse and denigration of leaders by their opponents. Without any alternative in sight, they end up joining the process.

The egos that prevented any understanding in the past are once again threatening our future. With only a few months to go before the election, we now face a stalemate on the nature of the election-time government. We had a solution in the form of the caretaker government for the last four elections. Under it we had four peaceful elections, participated by record number of voters and accepted by our people and the world as being properly conducted and reflecting the general will. Each of those elections, while not giving the voters much of a chance to choose new leaders, definitely served as opportunities of punishing the old ones.

Now the tables have been turned, more precisely overturned by the PM and AL leader. (Please read our response today to the PMO's rejoinder published in full yesterday). Our story reveals how, in spite of the draft recommendation of the Special Committee to the contrary, the PM insisted on scrapping the caretaker provision and thereby created the impasse which is practically threatening the election process and the democratic edifice today.

The moment for a grand compromise, which can only come from true and visionary leadership, is now. Sheikh Hasina must, as the chief of the party in power, start the process by going back to her original assertion that "only elected people" can form the election time government. This is a principled position and one we can all support. Khaleda Zia, on her part, has already indicated that nomenclature is not important but only that the election-time government must be neutral.

We see significant possibilities of compromise in these core positions of the two leaders. However, we also know that presently the stumbling block is that Sheikh Hasina wants to remain the chief of the election-time government, which the BNP has refused to accept.

This is where the PM needs to compromise. She has won on the point of only elected government forming the election-time government. Now she should compromise on the question of head of that government. Here is where a dialogue should take place, but only if the AL chief agrees.

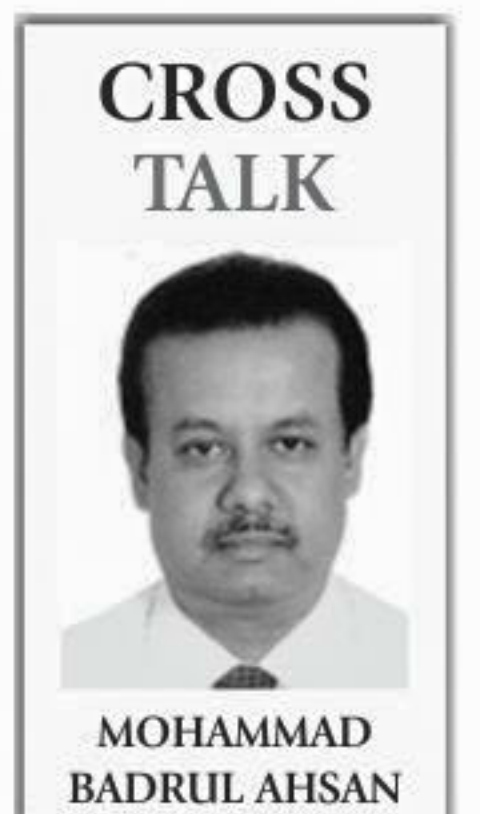
This is the time to show visionary and courageous leadership, one that endures in the hearts and minds of the people over time and not vanishes as one relinquishes power.

.....

The writer is Editor, *The Daily Star*.

*This is the time to show visionary and courageous leadership, one that endures in the hearts and minds of the people over time and not vanishes as one relinquishes power.*

# Are we making our children sad?



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

A 17-year-old girl was allegedly involved in the killing of her parents. Her 8-year-old brother was initially sleeping, later locked up in a room after he woke up to the murderous commotion. The twelve-year-old maidservant helped the killers drag the dead bodies to the bathroom. If the guest killers were friends of the girl, we suppose they were also of her age. It was like an adventure of Peter Pan spending his never-ending childhood with his gang of boys on the island of Neverland.

The gang leader in our story is the girl herself, who put sleep-inducing drug in the coffee of her parents. She prepared them for their imminent death with the diligence of an anesthetist preparing patients for surgical procedures. This girl told the police that she didn't kill her parents in the sense of actually stabbing them to death. But it's suspected she was the one who master-minded it and invited her friends as hired hands. She could have acted in vengeance to eliminate two adult obstacles to her footloose freedom.

Now we know the girl is an addict and so are the accomplices who brought their butcher's skill to help a friend. This girl had an undisciplined life and she was disobedient and reckless. She stayed out of the house until late night, failed in her studies and gave her parents enough reasons to restrict her movements. That was when she planned to kill.

Newspaper columns and television talk shows are screaming how this one grisly tale showed that our society had lost its mooring. They said we have neglected social issues while being overwhelmed by political squabbles. One talk show host even asked parents to be friendly with their children, too late for parents already dead.

But is that so? What about developed countries where politics is more streamlined and peaceful? What prompts kids in those countries to bring guns to their schools, mowing down teachers and classmates in blood-curling fury?

Once, poverty was the number one culprit for all things wrong. Everything was blamed on the stomach growling with hunger. It has been either due to poverty reduction or improvement in the behaviour of the poor, or both, that penury-led crimes have gone down in this country.

Most crimes nowadays are connected with solvent,

affluent people. Most of these crimes are prompted by sex, money, turf control and political showdowns. It's no longer about satisfying hunger or basic needs. Cholera, malaria and smallpox are killing fewer people than arteries clogged with clumsy cholesterol. This society has moved one notch up in Maslow's hierarchy of needs where security, family, health and property are the new priorities.

The double murder at Chamelibagh has hit us close to home. It has exposed the risks involved in these new priorities, families slipping away in the frenzy of building fortune. No, it's not about bashing the rich and the fortunate. It's not about the unbreakable cycle of greed to sin to death. It's about that monster living in the dense layers of our genes. This monster does its own bookkeeping, exacting usurious interest for its gifts.

How that works in juvenile minds is a complex thing. Scientists tell us that teenagers respond to the world differently from adults. Not because of hormones, but because teens and adults use two different parts of the brain to think. Teens mostly use the amygdala, a small almond shaped region that guides instinctual or "gut" reactions. Adults rely on the frontal cortex, which governs reason and planning.

That doesn't apply to every teenager though. Some are born defective like toys coming from factories. They aren't normal, malfunctioning due to flawed wiring. In our days we grew up with autistic kids in the family, some had physical or mental deformities. We saw naughty kids, violent kids, many of whom were incorrigible bullies. But how many of us remember growing up with juvenile addicts?

If drugs are messing up children today, what is ransacking their part of the brain? Why do they have to smoke or drink to give them a fix? Psychiatrists argue that children get high to cope with the lows in their lives. These lows can come from many sources, but almost always starts from the family. Our Peter Pan made that evident when her mother's body received eleven wounds and father's received two.

This nine-wound difference gives the measure of it. It gives the motive but it also deepens the mystery. The girl hated her mother more, which must have been why she was also hacked more.

It brings us to the fundamental question. Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Are drugs pushing the children to despair or are we pushing them to drugs? Food for thought: In pursuit of rumbustious material merriment, are we adults making our children sad?

.....

The writer is Editor of weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

## Apologists for police

Professor AI Mahbub Uddin Ahmed and his team recently conducted a study on Dhaka Metropolitan Police. In the report they said that people are 'satisfied' with the service of police! However, a few days back, TIB showed the police department as the top ranking corrupt organisation of the country.

I exactly don't know how to criticise this report. We all know how corrupt our police department is. There are many incidents that people are beaten to death in police custody just for money. We also know what happened to a girl who went to a police station seeking help after being molested by hooligans. Seeing that she was helpless, some members of the police gang-raped her inside the thana! Some police officers of DMP lead such luxurious lives that even a CEO of a multinational company cannot dream of!

Moreover, every single day people are being harassed by police. When this is the reality, a group of teachers of Dhaka University are beating the police's drum. If the DU teachers give up all their pride and behave like paid agents, what can we expect from others?

Motiur  
Dhaka

## "The legacy of partition"

This refers to Syed Badrul Ahsan's above titled thought provoking write-up dated 14.8.13. Many blame Nehru for torpedoing the Cabinet Mission Plan for a confederated union of India comprising A, B, and C zones, the B zone roughly constituting what is now Pakistan together with East Punjab and possibly Kashmir and the C zone roughly comprising what is now Bangladesh together with West Bengal and North East India. The reason behind Nehru's outright rejection of the plan, which was accepted by the Muslim League, was the latter's insistence on the implicit right of the B and C zones to secede from the Union through a future referendum, Hindu-Muslim parity at the centre and other undemocratic, unreasonable and unacceptable demands. His greatest nightmare was the distinct possibility of the loss of roughly a third of India through such a referendum leading to chaos, civil war and the break-up of the sub-continent.

S. Ahmed  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## TDS section on agriculture

I am delighted to know that TDS is launching five new supplements soon. But I am disheartened that there is no space for agriculture. Earlier I had expressed my views in this column for a separate page on agriculture that may contain the latest technologies in agriculture, agricultural economy, marketing, product price, food value, etc. I hope the TDS authorities would reconsider the proposal to widen its horizon.

Md. Refatul Hossain  
Program Director  
Dept. of Agricultural Extension  
Khamarbari, Dhaka

## Comments on news report, "You'd better budge," published on August 20, 2013

### Abbasuddin

Khaleda is trying to bluff the voters of the country with her "new trend"; the same way Hasina did with "digital Bangladesh" at the last election. Keeping relation with war criminals, Khaleda is not going to do anything "new"; the way Hasina didn't do anything "digital."

### SM

May be she needs a nudge to budge....

### Molla A. Latif

Why doesn't Khaleda Zia budge and save the country?

### Shahin Huq

It seems that Sheikh Hasina may not budge and is ready to drag the country into anarchy.

\*\*\*\*

## "Diplomats not convinced" (August 20, 2013)

### A2ZWorldTravLR

Yet another example of how clueless the foreign minister and the foreign ministry are.

### Shahin Huq

If these diplomats were really sincere about the betterment of Bangladesh, they could and would stop the Awami League government from repressing the people of Bangladesh long ago.

### Molla A. Latif

Why only CTG is to be pressed for holding the election? Why not find out any other viable modus operandi sitting across the table? If Sheikh Hasina is blamed for not yielding to Khaleda Zia's CTG demand, then why not blame Khaleda Zia also, for pressing only for CTG and not heeding the call for forming an interim government? If Sheikh Hasina is dragging the country to turmoil, then what is Khaleda Zia doing?

### Abul Kashem

It is totally confusing that while the PM expressed her firm stance not to budge on the constitutional restrictions, the foreign minister mentioned that still there are possibilities of dialogue. The leaders of the ruling party have been making cruel jokes with the nation. On one hand, they express their firm determination not to budge an inch; while, on the other, they deceive the public by calling for a dialogue.