

Adilur Rahman still in prison!

We demand his immediate release

ADILUR Rahman Khan, secretary Odhikar and an advocate of Supreme Court of Bangladesh, was arrested under Section 54 on 10th August without warrant for allegedly violating some provisions of the ICT Act. His bail petition has been rejected but the HC stayed the remand order wanting him to be interrogated at the jail gate. His petition for grant of division has also been rejected. In effect, he has been languishing in the jail for more than 17 days to his long drawn misfortune.

Section 54 is applied based on suspicion rather than on material grounds. The onus, therefore, is entirely on law enforcers to specify the charges being framed against him. When there is no well-defined and specified charges as yet, and no bail nor division has been granted to him, this amounts to clear curtailment of his freedom and civil liberties. More than a month had elapsed since Odhikar replied to the letter of information ministry on the figure quoted in the rights body's website, leaving us to wonder what necessitated the belated action against Adilur Rahman.

It is not merely a coincidence that ICT Act has been amended *post facto* whereby some non-cognizable offences in the original law have been made cognizable and wide powers given to the police to arrest anybody without warrant.

All this erodes the credibility and image of the country, both nationally and internationally. So, we demand Adilur's immediate release, otherwise this will convey a sense of illegality and betrayal of public trust in law as the protector of human rights.

Military intervention no option

Peace offensive preferable

FOLLOWING August 21's chemical attack on Ghouta near Damascus that killed some 300 people, Western powers led by the US have been seriously considering a punitive action against Syria. US, Britain and France blame the attack on Syrian government, but the latter denies it.

What does the West exactly hope to achieve, if it chooses to embark on military action against Syria? Will air or missile strikes on a few military targets force the regime of President Assad to stop what amounts to persecution of its own people? And, what is the guarantee that it won't degenerate into a larger war drawing Syria's neighbours into the fray and create a situation like that of Iraq invasion in 2003 or of Libya in 2011?

In all probabilities, such a military action will only add further fuel to the already raging flame of civil war that has killed around 1,00,00 people and forced some two million people to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Worse still, the ruling clique in Damascus may use this attack to its advantage and whip up pan-Arab nationalistic jingoism against West. Syria's allies like Iran, Russia and China, who have warned against such military action, would only find further justification to provide increased moral and material support to the brutal Assad regime.

Rather than going for a 'calibrated' military action, the West should make a serious move towards a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. They must engage Syria's allies like Russia and China in such a peace talk, preferably under a legally binding UN resolution, to end the civil war and

Vehicle modification and accident

S.A. MANSOOR

A write-up on the above subject was recently published in a news daily. It is an important issue, but the writer's comments were general and did not help to clarify the pros and cons of the matter.

Ill-designed and over-sized buses or trucks and covered vans are dangerous, more so when driven at high speed. These are the most important factors that cause road accidents.

The registration authorities must fix the maximum gross weight for each van and truck, and the maximum number of passengers to be carried in each bus; as well as specify the maximum allowable speeds for driving on straight roads and at bends and turns. If all these particulars are entered in the vehicle's 'Blue Book,' then it will be very easy for traffic police personnel to check them.

If a bus has seats for 70 passengers, and can safely take 10 people standing; then the permitted number of sitting as well as the standing passengers has to be 80. For long distance (inter-city) buses, it is also important to specify the total weight of baggage that is allowed, both in the baggage hold as well as in the cabin or overhead racks. All such buses must carry a document certifying the number of passengers and the number and gross weight of baggage put in the hold. If any passenger is taken en-route, the conductor must mention the number pf passengers and the amount and estimated weight of the baggage. These simple measures can ensure that the buses are not overloaded.

For trucks and covered vans, there should be an invoice along with the sender's particulars, giving a brief description of the material and the number of packages or bundles loaded, and the gross weight. This will ensure that the truck is not carrying any extra or unaccounted for load.


To control this, there should be police check-posts beside highways and bridges, and the police can ask the truck or van to be weighed if they are not satisfied with the document's authenticity. If it is found overweight, it must be fined on the spot, and not allowed to proceed further until the excess cargo is removed. With strict implementation of this practice, accidents will be reduced.

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The writer is a retired engineer.

Are politicians losing sanity?

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

SOME of them willy-nilly are, by the random comments they have been making. And if they did not rein in there tongues we shall soon have a situation where people would be taking the comedians seriously and the politicians as a joke.

It is not my intention to draw a broad brush of accusation on the entire polity because I believe in what a famous person had said, that ninety percent of the politicians give the other ten percent a bad reputation. We can be more magnanimous and say that in Bangladesh it is probably the reverse where even less than ten percent of the politicians are giving their colleagues a bad name.

On several occasions in the past, we had ventured to comment on the importance of keeping one's tongue under control, particularly for the politicians, more so those that cannot distinguish between courtesy and political riposte. And much as one detests dignifying incivility with a response, the nature of these comments calls for a reaction, because lack of a response will lend validity to the rather insensate, and, in one case, inflammatory, remarks of a minister.

Comments of the said minister, which appeared in the major newspapers of the country, enjoining upon his audience that included teachers and students of a public university, to hunt out from houses and kill those calling *hartal* against, what he said, the war crimes tribunal, makes one wonder whether we are living in a sophisticated society, and if there is anything of rule of law in the country. Any act or speech, which incites people to kill, is a cognizable offence under our law. And not once, but those particular provocative comments have been made on two different occasions by the same minister.

The said minister has gone a step further than some of his colleagues, ruing the fact that he is not the prime minister; otherwise, he had said, Dr. Yunus would have been behind bars. We have lot to thank Providence for the fact that he is not the prime minister. Had that been so, most good people would have been behind bars and rascals and scoundrels would be roaming the streets.

Just imagine what would have been the reaction of the law enforcing agencies and the administration if such words were uttered by someone belonging to the opposition. Are these provocations any different from ones we hear from the Jihadis calling for the blood of those that do not agree with them? Dissenting with a verdict amounts to treason, according to the minister, and thus the dissenters should be put down. In any other country that respects rule of law, such people would have been hauled up before the court to account for their words, or at least admonished by his peers. And not a single word of criticism, let alone remonstrations, neither from the so-called civil society nor the keepers of our conscience and the guardians of our democratic values.

There is also a rush to pronounce people traitors, just like some of our clerics who are fond of pronouncing people *kafir*, just as the same minister, who pronounced our Nobel Laureate a traitor for advocating the need for caretaker government.

In fact, Dr. Yunus' comments have come under fire from



It was poet Iqbal who had said: "Nations are born in the hearts of poets, they prosper and die in the hands of politicians." I am constrained to believe so listening to the angry comments of some of the ruling party politicians which is causing the nation to lose its very soul.

the top rung of AL leadership for making a case for a neutral dispensation to run the next general election. This is nothing new given the highly orchestrated bout of disapprobation that he has received in the past from many ruling party members for making the mistake of winning the Nobel Peace Prize and making Grameen Bank an international icon. But that anyone should question a citizen's right to make a political comment is beyond me. Why should anything that goes against the grain of the ruling coalition's view be considered anti-state? Does one have to be a politician to offer his or her views on political issues? Why should our finance minister resent an economist's political acumen? The best he can do for himself as a politician, and for the country, is to hone his economic acumen further to improve the economy.

It was poet Iqbal who had said: "Nations are born in the hearts of poets, they prosper and die in the hands of politicians." I am constrained to believe so listening to the angry comments of some of the ruling party politicians which is causing the nation to lose its very soul. When that happens, a nation all but loses its vibrant dynamic entity.

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

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

In Syria, America loses if either side wins

ON Wednesday, reports surfaced of a mass chemical-weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs that human rights activists claim killed hundreds of civilians, bringing Syria's continuing civil war back onto the White House's foreign policy radar, even as the crisis in Egypt worsens.

But the Obama administration should resist the temptation to intervene more forcefully in Syria's civil war. A victory by either side would be equally undesirable for the United States.

At this point, a prolonged stalemate is the only outcome that would not be damaging to US interests.

Indeed, it would be disastrous if President Bashar Assad's regime were to emerge victorious after fully suppressing the rebellion and restoring its control over the entire country. Iranian money, weapons and operatives and Hezbollah troops have become key factors in the fighting, and Assad's triumph would dramatically affirm the power and prestige of Shiite Iran and Hezbollah -- its Lebanon-based proxy -- posing a direct threat both to the Sunni Arab states and to Israel.

But a rebel victory would also be extremely dangerous for the United States and for many of its allies in Europe and the Middle East. That's because extremist groups, some identified with al-Qaeda, have become the most effective fighting force in Syria. If those rebel groups manage to win, they would almost certainly try to form a government hostile to the United States. Moreover, Israel could not expect tranquillity on its northern border if the *jihadis* were to triumph in Syria.

Things looked far less gloomy when the rebellion began two years ago. At the time, it seemed that Syrian society as a whole had emerged from the grip of fear to demand an end to Assad's dictatorship. Back then, it was realistic to hope that moderates of one sort or another would replace the Assad regime, because they make up a large share of the population. It was also reasonable to expect that the fighting would not last long, because neighbouring Turkey, a much larger country with a powerful army and a long border with Syria, would exert its power to end the war.

As soon as the violence began in Syria in mid-2011, Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, loudly demanded that it end. But instead of being intimidated into surrender, Assad's spokesmen publicly ridiculed Erdogan, while his armed forces proceeded to shoot down a Turkish fighter jet, before repeatedly firing artillery rounds into Turkish territory and setting off lethal car bombs at a Turkish border crossing. To everyone's surprise, there was

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no significant retaliation. The reason is that Turkey has large and restless minority populations that don't trust their own government, which itself does not trust its own army. The result has been paralysis instead of power, leaving Erdogan an impotent spectator of the civil war on his doorstep.

Consequently, instead of a Turkey-based and Turkish-supervised rebellion that the United States could have supported with weapons, intelligence and advice, Syria is plagued by anarchy and violence.

The war is now being waged by petty warlords and dangerous extremists of every sort: Taliban-style Salafist fanatics who beat and kill even devout Sunnis because they fail to ape their alien ways; Sunni extremists who have been murdering innocent Alawites and Christians merely because of their religion; and *jihadis* from Iraq and all over the world who have advertised their intention to turn Syria into a base for global *jihads* aimed at Europe and the United States.

Given this depressing state of affairs, a decisive outcome for either side would be unacceptable for the United States. An Iranian-backed restoration of the Assad regime would

increase Iran's power and status across the entire Middle East, while a victory by the extremist-dominated rebels would inaugurate another wave of al-Qaeda terrorism.

There is only one outcome that the United States can possibly favour: an indefinite draw.

By tying down Assad's army and its Iranian and Hezbollah allies in a war against al-Qaeda-aligned extremist fighters, four of Washington's enemies will be engaged in war among themselves and prevented from attacking Americans or US allies.

That this is now the best option is unfortunate, indeed tragic, but favouring it is not a cruel imposition on the people of Syria, because a great majority of them are facing exactly the same predicament.

Non-Sunni Syrians can expect only social exclusion or even outright massacre if the rebels win, while the non-fundamentalist Sunni majority would face renewed political oppression if Assad wins. And if the rebels win, moderate Sunnis would be politically marginalised under fundamentalist rulers, who would also impose draconian prohibitions.

Maintaining a stalemate should be America's objective. And the only possible method for achieving this is to arm the rebels when it seems that Assad's forces are ascendant and to stop supplying the rebels if they actually seem to be winning.

This strategy actually approximates the Obama administration's policy so far. Those who condemn the president's prudent restraint as cynical passivity must come clean with the only possible alternative: a full-scale US invasion to defeat both Assad and the extremists fighting against his regime.

That could lead to a Syria under US occupation. And very few Americans today are likely to support another costly military adventure in the Middle East.

A decisive move in any direction would endanger America; at this stage, stalemate is the only viable policy option left.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Two different situations

I have gone through the article "Egyptian tragedy and lessons for Bangladesh" by Barrister Manzoor Hasan. I beg to differ with the author. The intervention by the Egyptian army in ousting the democratic government is the reason for the present political impasse. But the situation in Bangladesh is totally different. Here a democratically elected government is in power and soon it will relinquish its position. Then who will remain in power till a new government is formed through elections is the question of the day. It is too early to predict any untoward incident in the present context. The two main political parties are yet to start any dialogue and if such a dialogue fails then a critical situation may arise. Please do not undermine the people of Bangladesh. They know what to do in such eventualities. Those who never dream of coming to power through popular votes would think of army takeover.

M Shafiqul Karim
Gulshan-2, Dhaka

Whole country is now Hawa Bhaban

In her address at Araihaazar on August 23, the PM told the AL supporters that if BNP comes to power, it will open new Hawa Bhaban to allow corruption. In the backdrop of corruption practiced during her reign so far, she hardly reserves the right to say so. The nation was bewildered to see the railway minister's corruption, whose APS was caught with bribe money worth 70 lakh taka. The share market, Hall-Mark, and Destiny scandals are unforgettable records of corruption. The less said about Padma Bridge corruption the better. The BNP, to be honest, had earned bad name for Hawa Bhaban, but people find that the whole country is now turned into Hawa Bhaban by the AL cadres.

A.H. Dewan
On e-mail

Ominous clouds

If the two main political parties don't reach a consensus as to in which manner the next general election should be held, the ongoing political standoff will aggravate. As the government is passing its last days, it should reach out to the main opposition BNP for holding a dialogue. But PM has been refusing BNP's demand saying that undemocratic and unconstitutional forces must not be given chance to get the state power again. So an ominous cloud is hovering over the political sky centering the next parliamentary election. The government should address this political stalemate immediately so that the next parliamentary election can take place without any untoward situation.

Samiul Rajiul
Bangladesh University of Textiles, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Powered by AL," published on August 26, 2013

Zman7

Kudos to The Daily Star and the writer for this commendable presentation of facts about AL government's amazing success and progress in the power sector. I'm sure the nation is benefiting from this progress, and this excellent report would also be beneficial for the people.

Shahabuddin

People of the country are forgetting the miseries of power crisis they experienced before.

truthprevails53

That is a great achievement of the government. Hopefully, they will do some good work in their last few days in power.

SM

Summit and Orion are JP Morgan and Rockefeller of Bangladesh.

agent_47

This is funny. Did it occur to you that quick rentals are not a sustainable solution? And coal power is the dirtiest energy there is. The world is turning away from it.

Sara

It is widely known that rental power is not sustainable, but at the time of implementation (2010) it was immensely useful since gas reserves were (and still are) too scanty for meeting electricity demands. Coal creates heavy pollution, but let us face the reality -- Bangladesh has very few options... gas reserves are running out... exploration in the Bay of Bengal will not yield enough to meet supply... oil is expensive and will get more expensive... importing LPG is expensive too. So how do we meet our needs?

Souvik

Guys like you won't let the government operate coal mine in Fulbari, won't let them import electricity from India and won't even let them install nuclear power plants. How do you expect the government to solve the power crisis? Power does NOT come from air.

Shahin Huq

These rental power plants should not be regarded as a government success. These are temporary and there are many questions surrounding them.

Asad Uzzaman

"Now power supplies by the Power Development Board (PDB) are hardly less than the demands from customers." Really!! I am an owner of a factory in Chittagong. And yesterday my factory generator clocked 5.00 hours in an 8.00 hour shift from 2.30 to 10.30 pm.