

## PM's anguish over political violence

Act to remove the cause of it

We share the PM's distress over the current spate of violence stemming from opposition activities particularly in the last few weeks. It is heartening to hear that she would rather have peace than the prime minister'ship.

We are all very upset too at the recent deaths and we welcome the PM's sentiments, it being wise and timely. However, the important thing is how to stop the ongoing turmoil. And in this respect we feel that a good deal depends on the PM if the country is to be spared further violence and deaths.

We fully agree with her that the opposition must abjure the path of violence and desist from such programmes that engender hostility, but we feel that she, on her part, could have done much more to prevent the current situation from coming to pass. It was the PM who took the initiative to call the leader of the opposition for talks, and it is her who should have gone the extra mile and professed another date after her original offer was spurned by the leader of the opposition. Being the PM it was for her to act in a statesmanlike manner behooving the office she is holding.

It would not be remiss to say that the political impasse, of which violence and deaths are the most unfortunate outcome, has been brought upon us by the actions of the ruling party, particularly by the prime minister's position against the caretaker government. Arrests of senior BNP leaders do nothing to validate the PM's articulated quest for peace.

## ACC's remit curtailed

Can't sue public officials on its own

We are taken aback by the legislation requiring the anti-graft body to seek permission of the government before proceeding against any public official alleged to have committed corruption. This amendment to the ACC Act has been bulldozed through a voice vote in parliament. In the process was totally ignored the criticism that the proposal for such a change had drawn over the last two and a half years. Even the concerned parliamentary committee had recommended against such a move. Whereas the anti-graft body was envisaged to be an effective instrument capable of acting independently against the corrupt, it has been gradually stripped off its teeth.

Bureaucracy is the public face of the government having considerable public dealings including handling of development projects and delivery of services. It has also to do with expenditure of public money and utilisation of budgetary allocations in different sectors.

The provision for the ACC to seek government permission before suing any public official has serious implications: First, it is discriminatory to treat them separately from other potentially corrupt people. Secondly, protecting them may amount to shielding corruption in higher places.

The overarching fact is that there is no point in having an ACC in the likeness of the infamous Anti-Corruption Bureau of the earlier days which was nothing but an

## Intriguing puzzles!

ABDUL MATIN

HERE are some intriguing puzzles which have no acceptable solutions. One of them is the old chicken or egg puzzle. Which one came first? Different people offered different arguments in favour of both the chicken and the egg but none of them is acceptable without reservations.

For ages, ancient philosophers were puzzled by another question. Which one is more useful to us, the sun or the moon? An unnamed philosopher gave an interesting answer. He said, "The moon is more useful to us as it gives us light during the night when it is normally dark while the sun gives us light during the day when it is always bright!"

Now, I come to a serious but recent puzzle. This is slightly mathematical but no knowledge of mathematics is necessary to understand it. What will happen if two non-venomous snakes of equal length start eating each other from the tail at equal speed? I first put the question to a child. He replied with great excitement, "I know the answer. I saw a cartoon of two snakes eating each other from the tail. They formed a ring that got smaller and smaller and finally vanished in the air with a bang!"

"Is this scientifically feasible?" I asked a professor of physics. He said, "As mass can neither be created nor destroyed according to the law of conservation of mass, where did the masses of the two snakes go?" That's a good question.

I went to a professor of zoology who opined that snakes do not eat from the tail. They always eat from the head. So the question is a fallacy. Later, I put the question to an expert on strategic issues. He said, "By all probability, one of the snakes will give up at one point and flee away." "What will happen if none gives up?" I asked. He said, "Other animals may try to mediate and advise them to come to a compromise. If they are wise, they will probably agree to compromise."

"What will happen if they don't agree?" I asked a veterinary physician. He said, "Sooner or later, the snakes will immobilize each other." "What will happen next?" I asked being impatient. "When both of them will be immobilized, it is most likely that another predator, perhaps a bigger one, will swallow both of them together?" He answered.

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed and asked my last question for clarification, "Can you name a predator that can swallow two snakes together?" "Please, ask me no further question." He left me hurriedly and my question remained unanswered.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

## Why hound the opposition with election at hand?

## KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

**N**EITHER the hartal called by the opposition, nor the arrest of five BNP leaders by the government makes sense. The 72-hour hartal that the opposition BNP-led 18-party alliance had called in the afternoon of Friday surprised many, because the last two spells of shutdown spanning 120 hours had already tried people's level of tolerance to its limits. But even if that hartal or shutdown lacked sense, the government's decision to arrest senior opposition leaders was inexplicable and could not be supported by any earthly reason.

It is hard to comprehend what kind of exigency drove the government to arrest very senior opposition leaders, who are sitting members of parliament and former ministers, with ridiculous allegations of breaking cars, carrying out arson attack and attacking police! And that the arrests were a thoughtless act became evident from the fact that the court deferred the hearing for the cases until next Thursday as the cases brought against them were not supported by necessary documents. Then, what purpose did these arrests serve other than providing the opposition with the justification to extend its three-day hartal for another 12 hours.

What does the government aim, if it has any, to achieve by these arrests and hounding other opposition leaders who are now on the run?? To foil, what appears to be, the opposition's plan to render the administration dysfunctional and then compel them to give up the path of hartal? Do not then all these actions by the government fly in the face of the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent statement at a meeting that the opposition leader does not understand the language of democracy? Is then arresting opposition leaders on flimsy grounds and denying them the constitutionally granted democratic space to meet, hold rallies and organize processions the real 'language of democracy'? We are flabbergasted.

And then consider the timing of the arrest. Even the day before the prime minister had assured the FBCCI leaders that the option of dialogue was still open at the general secretary-level of the two parties. The opposition leader also gave similar assurances. Foreign diplomats were also given signals about the prospect of dialogue from both the sides. But then what happened in the meantime that changed the entire political landscape to compel the government to go for such drastic action? Can the government, the PM, in particular, now convince the world at large, not to speak of the opposition, that it is sincere in its offer of talks with the opposition to resolve the contentious issue of election-time government? And what has the government to say to the people about this volte-face? Oddly though, some ruling party leaders, ministers as well as leaders of ruling alliance are resorting to too-familiar

rhetoric to explain away such action by the government. A senior left leader of the ruling alliance Rashed Khan Menon, for example, told an audience in Dinajpur that if hartal and talks can go together then why can't arrest and talk also take place at the same time? There is more to Mr. Menon's remarks. Its rhetorical aspect aside, what an argument from a leader with a long career of struggle against authoritarianism and autocracy! No doubt he has sufficient reason to be annoyed with and critical of hartal, a political weapon that the opposition has been using at the slightest excuse. But to support the arrest of opposition leaders! What then is left of the culture of showing the minimum respect to one's, even the worst, political opponent? To think of what an abysmal depth our political culture has descended!

Now after the arrests of the senior BNP leaders, the police are now gathering in strength around the residence of BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia. The government said it was to protect the opposition leader from the attacks by certain quarters. But the question is who those possible attackers are? Has the opposition leader sought any such protection from government or that the latter had a myste-



PHOTO: STAR

rious and sudden change of heart so much so that it rushed to beef up security around the opposition leader's house?

The watching public is certainly not a bunch of fools to believe that. On the contrary, it only helps to substantiate the rumour doing the rounds that the government's real motive is to put the opposition leader under house arrest and not to protect her from any attack. If anything, by such political gimmicks the government is only further muddying the atmosphere of a dialogue with the opposition.

One cannot also fail to notice that when the ruling party has started to sell nomination papers and is in an electioneering mood, the police have arrested some senior leaders of the BNP are in hot pursuit of the others.. Does not it all give credence to the growing suspicion this is a deliberate plan to compel BNP to boycott the elections.

The government must come clean with the public about all these questions pestering their minds for long. Otherwise, we would also be forced to conclude that the suspicion in the public mind that the government is heading for holding a unilateral election is true.

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## A tale of two corporations



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

**T**WO years since the formal division of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) into DCC North and DCC South, city residents are yet to see the benefits. On the contrary, what limited municipality services there were previously have steadily gone down the drain. Beyond the administrative division of roles and responsibilities of the city administration on paper, nothing

much has happened. Indeed going by newspaper reports of late, the development works associated with a megacity the size of Dhaka have gone largely into limbo. Dhaka city's management, or lack of it, could one day become the subject of case studies that business graduates in universities will study in not too distant a future.

City corporation officials maintain with significant confidence that the division of the city in two has done

city like Shantinagar, Mouchak, Malibagh, Shyamoli, Mohammadpur, Jatrabari, etc. - all heavily populated residential areas of Dhaka. The city's 15 million or so residents produce a lot of garbage. Hence, when garbage cleaning or when anti-mosquito drives become erratic because projects like 'Clean Dhaka' no longer function, outbreaks of 'dengue' and other health hazards become the norm of the day.

So why is all this happening? We were under the impression that DCC North and South would go a long way in improving our collective lives. The city has been bereft of elected councilors for years. Indeed, the city's mayoral elections are not even talked about anymore. Hence, what had previously been under the purview of elected officials, i.e. getting various certificates like trade licenses, etc. must now be obtained from the regional offices of the two city corporations. This phenomenon has merely opened up new areas of graft. The fact that there are no elected representatives to look after the interests of the city dwellers, there is basically no recourse to solving the various problems of the residents like hygiene. Indeed, a very basic amenity like the large metal dustbins that is commonplace in many parts of the city is no longer visible in many other parts.

The end result of these "missing" dustbins is that mountains of garbage accumulate on roadsides that stink to the high heavens and become the breeding grounds for all varieties of mosquitoes and other disease-carriers.

Far from improving lives, the division of DCC has made life intolerable for residents from the point of view of availing services. In the midst of all the chaos and fury of dangerous national politics, we have chosen to ignore our cities. The price will be very heavy for that since approximately 10 per cent of the country's population is concentrated in Dhaka. Indeed, Dhaka has already earned the title of the world's most unlivable city. The rate at which we are going, it will be a dead city in our lifetime, which is such a pity of course, given its glorious past.

The bottom line is that it does not really matter whether the city is divided in two or twenty. As long as policymakers keep playing politics about having two 'kings' instead of one in the city rather than concentrating on qualitative improvements, this is how things are going to be. Today, we have two sets of administration which automatically translate into double the corruption. Where the plan had been to simplify bureaucratic processes, the hard truth is that the reality has merely gotten murkier with parallel governance in one single city. The cost of doing "business" has increased, as has confusion, i.e. which body will look after what area of city development is anybody's guess. As for getting services paid for in municipal taxes, that remains a distant dream.

wonders for its development. Reports and surveys by institutions like the World Bank and media point to a less rosy picture. Consider the lack of services residents must put up on a regular basis. Street lights in many areas do not work which serve as a boon for the criminally-inclined and doom for the helpless residents who do not own a car. Most roads are in disrepair, regardless of locality. Many major road development projects are stuck either in red-tape or not taking off due to a combined lack of finance and coordination between state agencies. As highlighted recently in a report in a Bangla daily newspaper, many vital link roads have become largely unusable due to lack of maintenance. These include the link between Gulshan 2 and Tejgaon Link Road, the main road connecting Mirpur 10 with Mirpur 14, Nawabazar - Gabtoli link road, etc.

To make life even more uncomfortable for residents, the lack of work on upgrading the city's drainage system (despite expending millions annually on that need) has made water logging a near-permanent fixture during the rainy season. This is especially true for certain areas in the

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## LETTERS

## TO THE EDITOR

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## The nightmare we are in

For the past few months, I have been in a lot of stress because my O-level exams are near at hand. My friends and I are all in a race every day to go from school to coaching. Recently, this came to a halt when the 60-hour and 84-hour hartals were announced. I see in the daily newspapers the horrifying pictures of policemen being beaten like animals, vehicles being torched, innocent civilians being beaten just because they were spotted by these so-called "activists". I think I could be next... If a policeman cannot protect his own life, how can he protect mine?

I am a person who is really interested in the Liberation War, why it happened, what happened during the war. Freedom fighters' sacrifices, their undying love for the nation helped us to become free. I believe, if the martyrs of the liberation war could somehow know what the current situation of our nation is, they would actually be reluctant to sacrifice their lives back then. If their souls are watching us from the heavens above, then they are surely crying for us.

Salman Khan  
On e-mail

## Preposterous proposition

The article of Syed Noor Hossain titled 'Save Bangladesh from man-made disaster' published in TDS (October 28, 2013) caught my attention. He said the problem with CTG is that the Supreme Court verdict has recommended its abolition. Based on the judgment, the present government passed the 15th Amendment. He further discussed PM's statement that election will be held in the light of the constitutional amendment, just like in any other country. This means parliament will not be dissolved and the PM will remain in power until the end of the election.

This is so preposterous. How could other countries be compared with ours? No other country observed 173 days of hartal... sometimes non-stop 72 hours, killed people with logi-baita, destroyed public properties. In other countries politicians do not speak so disrespectfully about each other. There politicians are not harassed, and not subjected to imprisonment or disappearance. So it would be wise not to give reference of other countries.

Nur Jahan  
Chittagong

## Bring Sohel Rana to justice

More than six months have gone after the devastating man-made Rana Plaza tragedy, which killed around fifteen hundred innocent lives and left around 3000 people crippled for the rest of their life. Sohel Rana, the culprit behind this mass killing, has been put into prison but there is no update about this brutal killer's current status. A couple of days back, there was a piece of news that said there is no development in ACC's investigation into his illegal wealth. One thing I fail to understand is why this rotten criminal was not put under speedy trial. He not only killed hundreds of innocent people but also destroyed our country's image worldwide. I urge the government to bring Sohel Rana to book immediately under speedy trial, which will partially give solace to the souls of the victims and help regain our image abroad.

Khandaker Zia Hasan  
Special Correspondent  
Weekly Jagoraj Canada



STAR

Comments on news report, "Solution-brokers in depths of despair," published on November 10, 2013

## Abul Kashem

By dishonouring 90% people's opinion for a CTG to hold the election, present regime tries to move forward with restoration of one-party rule again.

## Aleksandra

If BNP talks on behalf of 90% of the population, why is BNP punishing these people through calling undemocratic hartals? Can't they find any other alternative to hartal to punish the ruling party, but not the 90% of the population?

## Shahin Huq

If the western diplomats stick to their policy of ingratiating India, then they should keep away from our problem. All know very well that this government is a totalitarian one and has lost public support. A stage-managed election to retain her in power will throw the country into a deeper crisis.

## Nds

US appears to have taken the noble mission of teaching us what constitute the essential elements of democracy; it is no doubt good for us. Let us wait and see how much time our leaders take to learn it. But from all appearances, it is pretty sure that the learning time is not going to be a short one. The question is would the people meanwhile continue to suffer?

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