

# Good sense must prevail

## Interns should shun agitation

PATIENTS, their attendants, nurses and even journalists have drawn the wrath of internee doctors in recent days. In about every case, the untoward incidents started from a mere tiff which ultimately snowballed into full-scale brawls and clashes leading to work abstentions and strikes in different hospitals of the country.

In the major hospitals including the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH), Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH) and Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College and Hospital, the public health service suffered as a result of sporadic work abstentions during the last one month enforced by doctors or nurses following quarrels between interns on the one side and patients' attendants, nurses, or journalists, on the other.

And in many cases, journalists were at the receiving end, simply because they happened to cover those incidents.

And as late as last Monday, nurses of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College and Hospital called a seven-hour work abstention protesting interns' beating of a nurse at the hospital.

It goes without saying that as a result of these incidents, doctors are now facing an image crisis. But one gets the impression from the view expressed by the general secretary of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) to the BBC that the media is responsible in some degree for the situation. This is most unfortunate.

Being dignified members of a noble profession, doctors should be able to respect people working in other professions and allow them to perform their jobs.

Sanity must prevail. Sooner the doctors would be able to get rid of their misconceptions about the media, the better would it be for both the professions.

# Thailand situation

## Military calling the shots?

A valid question since the Thai military stepped into the scene following the removal of Prime Minister Yungluck by an order of the highest court is when will Thailand return to normalcy and a democratic order? Whilst the army has denied that this is a coup, with press restrictions in place and movement of people being regulated under Martial Law, it is natural to wonder if that is indeed not the case. That Thai politics is in crisis is beyond any doubt. It goes as far back as 1998 when the ousted PM's brother Thaksin Shinawara had been at the helm of government. He had introduced the controversial subsidisation of rice, the move making him a hero in the rural heartland but costing the economy dearly.

Thaksin has been in exile since his ouster and now his sister is out of power. Will it solve the problems associated with a deeply divided country with royalists and big business on one side and rural populace on the other? The "Red Shirts" versus "Yellow Shirts" movement has already thwarted snap elections and made it impossible for the caretaker government to rule. In the past, the King exercised great moral authority. Can he do it again? Now that the military are here, will it help pave the way for new elections? As it is, the interim government has declared an election for August. And will new polls bring peace to this troubled country? In fact, nothing meaningful can be achieved unless the two major contending parties decide to drop the posture of belligerence and come to a negotiated settlement to usher in peace and a democratic process.

# What people think

Friday: May 16, 2014

Do you agree with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia that the government's dilly-dallying over arresting Rab men involved in seven-murder in Narayanganj proves that it is patronising the killers?

Yes

90%

No

10%

Saturday: May 17, 2014

Do you agree with TIB report that the judiciary has been increasingly subjected to political manipulation under successive governments?

Yes

95%

No

5%

Sunday: May 18, 2014

Do you think Bangladesh would be able to continue good relationship with the new government of India?

Yes

38%

No

62%

Monday: May 19, 2014

Do you think 2 ex-Rab officials' arrest will allay the fear of Narayanganj people to speak up against corrupt law enforcers and officials?

Yes

27%

No

73%

Tuesday: May 20, 2014

Do you agree with a CPD study that mainstream political parties, specially the Awami League and BNP are in a race to "grab state resources"?

Yes

93%

No

7%

Wednesday: May 21, 2014

Do you agree with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that her government had ensured free flow of information through enacting the Right to Information Act?

Yes

18%

No

82%

Thursday: May 22, 2014

Do you think rivers in Dhaka and Chittagong will be freed from grabbers following the prime minister's decision to the ministries concerned?

Yes

9%

No

91%

# Who is hiding behind the mask?



**CROSS TALK**

IF understanding the problem is half the solution, the study unveiled last week by the Center for Policy Dialogue has done a heck of a job. The findings have given a list of problems and the suggestions have enumerated a list of solutions. But the accomplished half is now haunted by the ghost of its missing equal. In other words, the problem doesn't lie in those problems and the solution doesn't lie in those solutions. The study is yet another affirmation that this nation can't make up its mind. Should it treat the disease or should it go after the symptoms?

This particular study went after the symptoms. True, the ruling party has monopolised state power. Politics has been criminalised by the deadly race for money and influence. The politicians don't practice what they preach. And, the businessmen have reduced this nation into Pavlov's experiment. Everybody salivates at the clink of coins.

The solutions suggested are relevant. Half the problems would have been gone only if the national parliament had functioned properly. Yes, the political parties should be disabused of private money, which creates the greenhouse effect of moral degradation. It definitely would have been ideal if our ruling parties could segregate ruling from party. Most important is the question of choosing leaders. They can't take us through a democratic process unless they have first come out of one.

James Mathew Barrie, the creator of Peter Pan, writes that every time a child says he doesn't believe in fairies, there's a little fairy somewhere that drops down dead. For us that principle works in reverse. Every time the politicians say they believe in something, somebody somewhere goes missing or gets killed. The real danger for this country is not mistake but mischief.

That has been the sand in our grease. Rights are wronged and wrongs are righted. Murders are mopped out. Scandals are sanitised. Nobody gets punished. If condoning is one side of the coin, the other side has absence of accountability. Between these two extremes, this country is seething with hypocrisy. Everybody is deceitful and nobody is accountable. There is so much crime, yet nobody is culpable.

The CPD study in so many words has touched those issues, but it has touched them through a membrane. It distributed the burden of one whole truth over the load-bearing pillars of its many findings. The monopolisation of power, criminalisation of politics, marginalisation of democracy, and commercialisation of the country are nothing but manifestation of double standard consorting with corruption.

That brings us to the genesis of the crisis. People are regularly propping up fronts to hide their misdeeds. First, the individuals disappeared behind these fronts, eventually taking the institutions with them. The legislative is in a limbo, and the executive is estranged because neither the individuals nor the institutions are what they appear. Identity crisis and credibility gap have turned this country into its own nemesis.

In short, this nation can be compared to a masquerade ball. Everyone is in costume, wearing a mask. Everybody visible is hiding. Everybody dubious is credible. These facts are also true the other way around.

This is where the CPD study failed to sink its teeth. It hit the symptoms alright but missed the disease, writing prescription before diagnosis. If this study has unveiled anything in its unveiling, it's the immense power of packaging that can turn common sense into an uncommon thing.

One of the politicians attending the unveiling ceremony for the study tracked down the source of political malpractices to the military rule after 1975. He said it was if our politics was a clean slate before that time. Another politician gave us a start when he said that the politicians are now busy spreading falsehood as if the politicians before were doing otherwise. Yet a third one said something earth shattering. He said democracy wouldn't flourish if political parties continued to run on the whims of one or a few individuals.

These are three examples of the Liar Paradox. When the semi-mythical seer Epimenides said that all Cretans were liars, he had contradicted himself. Being a Cretan, he was a liar if his statement was true. Again, his statement was false if he was being truthful.

The three politicians spun a web of similar paradox, leaving us confused if they created the system they criticised, or criticised the system that created them. This is where the CPD study withered in its force. It attempted to show us the mask without exposing the face.

That's the problem of our problems. As simple as that, this nation has lost its ability to fight pretensions. All its affairs embody an incessant struggle in which everybody desperately clings to the mask. The solution of the solutions simply lies in finding out the face.

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# Launch accident: A recurring tragedy

MIR TAREQUE ALI

PASSENGER launch accidents in our inland waterways are becoming a recurrent phenomenon. The latest of these mishaps occurred only a few days ago, in which 54 invaluable lives were lost, when Shariatpur-bound launch 'MV Miraj-4,' carrying over 200 passengers, sank near Gazaria in the Meghna river after it was caught in a violent storm. Sadly, as days go by, the news of such tragic accidents fade away from our memory. In most countries that are blessed with natural inland waterways network, this mode of transport is considered as safe, low cost, fuel efficient and environmentally friendly. Unfortunately in Bangladesh, the safety issue in the context of inland waterways transport, particularly of passenger launches, has been overlooked for a long time.

A safe passenger vessel is the most important element in preventing frequent accidents in our inland waterways. A flawless design based on stringent rules and regulations is the backbone of a safe vessel that must be constructed according to the design. The Department of Shipping (DOS) is responsible for inland water safety and the approval of designs and plans of inland ships. The ideal practice is constructing the ship under the supervision of an enlisted panel supervisor, after receiving the approval of design and plan from DOS. However, in reality, there is a tendency among ship owners to go for design and plan approval after the construction of the vessel. In many cases, these vessels are not built properly under the supervision of a panel supervisor. As a result, there is inconsistency between the actual launch and its approved design.

In order to avoid the design fee and the supervision fee, the launch owners put their own water crafts as well as the lives of thousands of innocent passengers in jeopardy. In many instances, the launch owners simply ignore or disregard the safety of the passenger vessel by making illegal and dangerous modifications like changing the length or breadth or height without any prior consultation with a qualified naval architect. Checking the design and plan of an inland vessel is a very special type of job and only a person from naval architecture background is entitled to do this type of special task. Unfortunately, most of the personnel engaged in the design checking process are not naval architects. Consequently, flawless design of inland passenger vessels can never be achieved if this practice continues.

Besides, design checking is usually a time consuming job that also requires supporting software and infrastructures. Therefore, due to lack of qualified personnel and software facilities, it is practically impossible to properly identify or detect the flaws of the submitted designs and plans at DOS. To ensure bug-free design, particularly for passenger vessels, DOS can take assistance from experts, whose suggestions and recommendations can be a great help to guarantee the design of safe passenger launches.

At present, there are only four ship surveyors to survey as many as 10,000 vessels plying in the country. It is thus evident that proper survey is physically impossible with such a small number of surveyors. So, the government has no other choice but to increase the number of ship surveyors and inspectors immediately to deal with the huge number of inland vessels. Moreover, to give special emphasis on the safety of passenger vessels, the government needs to appoint special ship surveyors for passenger launches.

Overloading of passenger vessels is a regular feature, particularly during festival times. Due to absence of prior ticketing system the actual number of passengers onboard is unknown, which allows overloading more easily. Sometimes the authorities issue notices to faulty vessels for stopping operation until made the vessel is made fit. The launch owners succeed in operating their unfit launches in collusion with officials of BIWTA and DOS, ignoring the Inland Shipping Ordinance (ISO) 1976. The most alarming thing is the scarcity of trained, skilled and competent crews for the safe operation of the vessels. Deck Personnel Training Centre (DPTC) has been unable to provide sufficient number of trained deck personnel to meet the current demand. As a result, the ship owners rely on unskilled and untrained crews.

A well-equipped ship model testing centre (towing tank) is a must to assess the reliability of the designs of existing passenger launches. It will also help test modified designs as well as innovative designs (like multi-hull ships) for our inland passenger vessels. Unfortunately, Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering Department of Buet, which is more than four decades old, still lacks a towing tank facility. The university has long been trying to set up such a vital ship model testing centre but the till today that has not happened due to lack of understanding of the importance of the centre to the related ministry.

Almost immediately after every launch accident, the government forms probe bodies to investigate the mishap, and they are usually given a short span of time to submit their reports. However, due to non-inclusion of experts from reputed institutions, most of these stereotype reports do not address the actual cause and at the same time fail to point out the real culprits behind these disasters.

In recent years, our local shipyards have succeeded in building large ocean-going ships for foreign countries maintaining stringent international standards. Conversely, many of our inland passenger vessels are built poorly, not even maintaining the local safety standards, which needs to be put to an end. Modernisation of Inland Shipping Ordinance, strict implementation of rules, increase in the number of skilled and trained manpower, and close contact of DOS, BIWTA and BIWTC with marine experts will definitely improve the safety issue for our inland passenger vessels, and will help Bangladesh become a potential shipbuilding nation in future.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## "We are picking human beings"

Almost everyday, news of unnatural deaths reaches us. Dead bodies are being found in horrible states. In the May 19, 2014 issue of The Daily Star, there was some news like - police recovering the bullet-hit body of a businessman 9 days after his abduction; mysterious death of a domestic help and four of a family with three of them children and people burnt to death by arson attacks etc.

People are becoming sick by living in constant fear and anxiety, life has become unbearable. I remember the lamenting words of a woman after the Rana Plaza collapse. She said, "In Baishakh-Jaistha months, people pick mangoes from the ground, we are picking human beings."

Nur Jahan  
Chittagong

## Create more cycle-parking lots

More than the lack of bicycle lanes, it is in fact want of safe parking areas at most shopping malls, office buildings, apartment complexes and public places that presents itself as the main problem facing city's cyclists. As a result, bicycle theft has become very common. Many would-be cyclists are getting discouraged about cycling.

Bicycle is an environmental-friendly and sustainable mode of transport which is being promoted in many cities around the world especially for commuting purposes. It helps to reduce demand for motorised transport, which, again, contributes to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution. It has also its health benefits.

Creation of safe bicycle parking areas is therefore a precondition for promoting cycling. It would save a lot of space, since one can park about 6-10 bicycles in a space where only one car can be accommodated.

Ridwan Quaium  
A transportation engineer in Thailand

## Prioritise local news

In the last few days, we have seen that many newspapers have been giving important space to the news of Indian election and Modi. Our country has many problems and facing many serious crises everyday but it is a matter of sorrow that without focusing on those, we are focusing on the news of Modi's victory. Yes, of course we want to know the latest international news; but is it worth the effort to give so much importance on a particular news item? Media should prioritise local news more than the news of a specific country's election.

Maya  
Sylhet

## Comments on news report, "Exit: Expected," published on May 20, 2014

**Mofi**

It is unfortunate that the main reason for his removal is HC's order of arresting the alleged RAB officers.

Will our PM and others who are at the helm, ever understand that God has his own course of action? No amount of bricks and strong sacks could keep the dead bodies under the Shitalakkhya river. The dead bodies surfaced and so did the truth. Consequences of all wrongdoings are inevitable.

**Hardreality**

Huh, someone needs to work on the definition of independent judiciary. If the ruling party does not come up with an explanation, then it will be another milestone for the AL to become an autocratic government.

**Mortuza Huq**

May be the conscience of the Additional Attorney General guided him to do what he did in terms of HC orders to arrest the accused RAB officials. The office of the Attorney General is supposed to act in public interest. Even being loyal to government, he might have been trying to save the government from public resentment in this particular case by supporting arrest of these RAB officials. It is unfortunate that government failed to understand the gravity of the situation which might cost them down the line.

**Anonymous**

The removal of the Additional Attorney General is not unexpected as this government is expert to this. Mr. Rahman didn't make any strong arguments against the HC order of arresting the alleged RAB officers and the government was irked by this. So the termination of the Additional Attorney General was obvious.

## "End of legacy-bound politics?" (May 19, 2014)

**NA**

Excellent piece by Syed Fatahul Alim. We wonder when we can take decisions to oust legacy of the two corrupt families.