

Wrong demarcation of Turag

Boon for land grabbers

GOING by newspaper reports and according to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), the demarcation of Turag River was faulty. Consequently, the width of this crucial river has been narrowed. Environmentalists claim that 50 million square feet of water has been left out of demarcated area, whilst BIWTA states that this area may be even greater. The end result of such callousness is that in certain places, the width of the river has come down to about 100 feet. The work on placing demarcation pillars commenced in 2010 and it has cost the national exchequer Tk. 80 million. Allegations have arisen that the process did not follow court ruling of 2009 which had directed authorities to remove illegal structures and erect pillars.

Whatever may be the case, we are now faced with significant narrowing of the Turag River at various points. Again, though the High Court had directed that pillars be erected 150 feet away from riverbanks, this directive has largely been ignored. We understand that there has been disagreement among the various bodies on pillar erection sites. Amidst all this confusion, unscrupulous land grabbers are engaged in filling up the river, which amounts to an estimated 198 acres.

What is surprising to note is that BIWTA has a list of some of the largest perpetrators engaged in land filling around newly-erected pillars. The question here is, why are the authorities dragging their feet on this issue? The piecemeal eviction drives concerned authorities conduct every now and then are obviously no answer to dealing with this menace.

Probing HSC question leakage

It couldn't hit the bull's-eye

THE probe body formed to find out the causes and the culprits behind HSC question paper leakage this year has come up with, among others, a curious suggestion to stop question leakage. It is that future public examinations be held without any time gap between them. Oddly enough, the probe committee has not been able to shed any light on how the question paper leakage could take place, or who might have been behind the crime. Evidently, the probe has failed to hit the bull's-eye.

The suggested way of holding public exams has nothing new in it as, in the past, it was actually the practice. One wonders what has prompted the probe body to relate it to question leakage. The exam time spread is an issue peripheral to the problem at hand. It is hoped that the education ministry, which has concurred with probe report, would enlighten the public further about how they are going to stop future question leakage with the recommended measure.

Among other recommendations made by the probe body included having the question papers printed from presses other than the Bangladesh Government (BG) press. Clearly, this points to its lack of trust in BG press's integrity in the matter. If the investigation body has any basis for its suspicion, why didn't it go the whole hog and home-in on the potential holes in the organisation through which leakage might have occurred and recommend ways to plug it? This is unacceptable.

Leakage of question paper has called the very system of public examination into question. The government can ill-afford to take a half-hearted approach to address it.

World Cup-onomics

SEEMAB HAMID

THE World Cup has seemed to captivate the young and old alike in Bangladesh. The energy can be felt everywhere, from painting the street walls with a favourite team's flag to wearing a team's jersey in all part of daily life nowadays.

The streets can portray a perfect example of this. While passing by most of the city's shops or restaurants, we can see that they have displayed a variety of ideas to grasp the customers' attention. The windows of the shops are decorated with flags, and numerous shops and street-vendors sell jerseys and flags. I found these retail activities to be quite similar to that of the key festivities of Bangladesh, for example, the Bengali New Year or the religious festivities.

I am quite certain that these World Cup related activities do have a positive impact on the economy; however big or small the impact is a different matter altogether.

Let us take a look at the sales of jerseys. It is safe to assume that the fans buying these are spending additional money for them since the clothing becomes more or less redundant after the world cup. This no doubt means that sales are going up, with more revenue and profits.

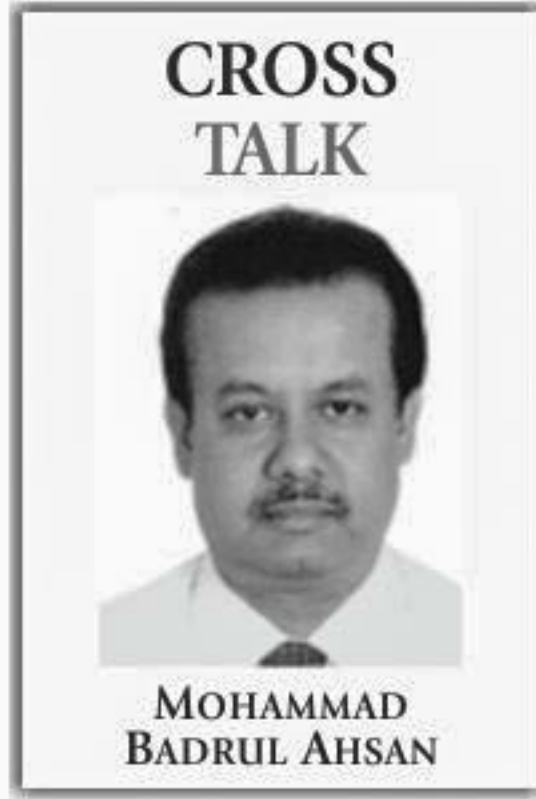
The restaurants, hotels and lounges are also trying to cash in on the World Cup games. Most cafes are providing big screen and sound systems, thereby attracting many people inside them. As a result, sales go up. I have also noticed that a lot of cafes have come up with innovative drinks and desserts -- each one customised and dedicated to a particular team!

The flags galore in Dhaka city cannot be missed. This no doubt involves a lot of economic activities from start to finish, for instance, making, supplying and selling. Flags and jerseys are not the only goodies this time, we also find watches, shoes, footballs, clocks, hand-bands and other accessories that have the themes of our favourite teams.

The marketing gurus are also using the World Cup as one of their key marketing strategies. The shopping malls are offering free jerseys and footballs if a certain amount of money is spent. Same goes with electronic items as they are using the World Cup related bonanzas to sell their items.

The writer is a finance student and a football aficionado.

Shameem Osman and his dog-whistle politics



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

CROSS TALK
SHAMEEM Osman, the rowdy lawmaker from Narayanganj, may not be familiar with the above term but that's exactly what he did on June 26 when he compared journalists with dogs and called their employers thieves. Dog-whistle politics is a type of political messaging that employs coded language, appearing to mean one thing to the general population but has an additional, different or more specific resonance for a targeted subgroup. The term is derived from an analogy to dog whistles, which are built in such a way that their high-frequency whistle is heard by dogs, but is inaudible to humans.

The problem with this particular politician is that his whistle has been one shrill yelp of stupidity that has been heard by everybody but himself. First of all, the man got confused in his message, because he got carried away with his political angst and mixed up between audiences. It's hard to tell whether journalists or their employers were his targets.

Let us say, Osman wanted to kill two birds with one stone since both groups apparently have got his goat. He has reasons to dislike journalists, even to hate them with passion, as they have always been breathing down his neck. It also appears that he has visceral disliking for some of the newspaper owners, whose integrity and honesty he has openly questioned.

But by saying what he did, he has only convinced us further that he is one helluva callous man. He has made himself more questionable than the people who have been target of his wrath. His most recent outburst has only raised eyebrows as to whether this one lawmaker does his thinking through his brain or through his brawn.

It's obvious that he lost his cool when he blew his top. It's obvious that the journalists had pushed him to his limit. They drove him crazy by doggedly reporting his every move. If you ask me, the man had every reason to get upset and think the journalists were dogs.

Why did Osman curse the owners? I suppose he was trying to shake the tree to its roots. You see, he is a type of individual who would love to have the world in his hand. Given a chance, he would like to have a tight grip on everything in this country like he does in Narayanganj. People get abducted and killed. There are torture cells where people are beaten to pulp. Smuggling thrives. Drug dealers rise. And this one man

allegedly has his fingerprints on everything that went wrong under his watch.

Former British prime minister Winston Churchill once said that he was fond of pigs because dogs looked up to humans, cats looked down on them and the pigs treated them as equals. That tells you why the parliament member from Narayanganj is so unhappy with journalists. He expects them to look up to him. He wants them to eat out of his hand, sit at his feet and play fetch with him.

As much as I am ready to understand why this man behaved the way he did, I am not sure for the life of me why anybody should demand an apology from him. Benjamin Franklin has advised that one should never ruin an apology with an excuse. If the lawmaker is forced to apologise it will only give him an excuse to think he must have said something right to tick off everyone.

By saying what he did, he has only convinced us further that he is one helluva callous man. He has made himself more questionable than the people who have been target of his wrath. His most recent outburst has only raised eyebrows as to whether this one lawmaker does his thinking through his brain or through his brawn.

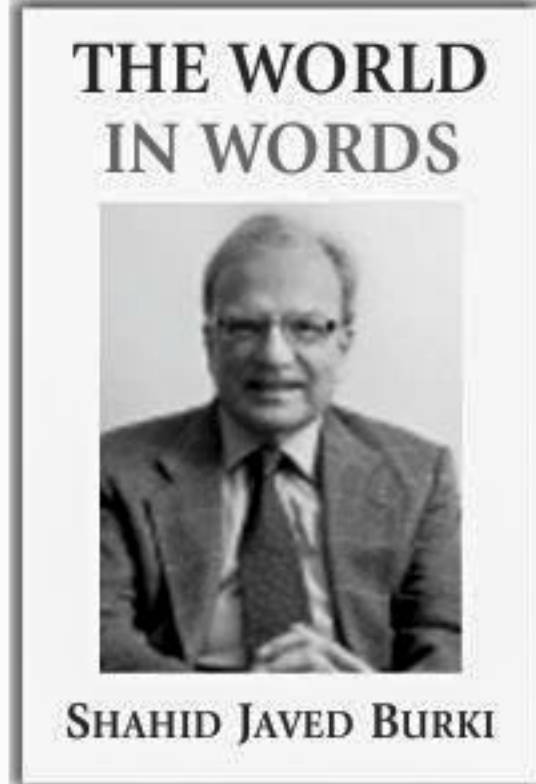
It'll also show that we're taking this flimsy man damn too seriously. The apology even runs the risk of proving him right, because it shows that the journalist community has been looking up to him. This is what Churchill has warned us against. Dogs look up to others.

Why should everybody get so worked up just because one man has ranted like hell? Some members of the media have asked for the arrest of the lawmaker. If we start arresting people for insulting others, all the prisons in this country will overflow with prisoners.

We've made a mountain out of a molehill. Instead, we should have ignored him and left him to stew in his own juice. Sooner or later, he'll realise he has been his worst enemy and journalists have only tried to give him a heads up.

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

Pakistan's war at home



SHAHID JAVED BURKI

THE WORLD IN WORDS
LAST month, after years of indecision, Pakistan's military launched a full-scale military operation in the North Waziristan Tribal Agency aimed at eliminating terrorist bases and ending the region's lawlessness. In particular, the army wants to clear out foreign fighters who are using the territory as a base for various jihads around the Muslim world. But, by triggering yet another refugee crisis, the operation risks spreading the terrorist threat to other parts of Pakistan, including its largest city and commercial centre, Karachi.

Operating from sanctuaries established in the tribal agency, various terrorist groups, in association with organisations elsewhere in the country, have already attacked Pakistan's four neighbors -- Afghanistan, China, India, and Iran. Of the region's foreign fighters, Uzbeks belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan have recently become the most visible threat, taking responsibility for the June 8-9 attack on Karachi's Jinnah International Airport, in which 30 people, including all ten of the militants, were killed.

In launching the North Waziristan operation, General Raheel Sharif, Pakistan's new Chief of Army Staff, stated that his forces would draw no distinction between supposedly "good" and "bad" Taliban. The former, including the Haqqanis -- named after Jalaluddin Haqqani, who led the Islamic resistance against Soviet forces in Afghanistan -- had been trained and equipped by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's main security agency.

Following the United States' invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Haqqanis created a sanctuary in the North Waziristan Tribal Agency. The ISI countenanced this in the hope that the Pashtun group would later act as Pakistan's proxies in Afghanistan after US combat troops depart at the end of 2014. But the Haqqanis, it appears, did not keep to any such bargain, and allowed their Uzbek guests in North Waziristan to launch the Karachi airport attack.

This conflict, however, will not be easy to contain or manage. Pashtuns, the main ethnic group on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, are engaged in a bitter struggle in both countries to assert what they consider to be their legitimate political and economic rights. Karachi, hundreds of miles to the south, will not escape the fallout from the North Waziristan operation.

The military, which planned to flush out the main militant hideouts with air strikes, and then send in ground troops, instructed residents to leave the area beforehand. Some 350,000 people have already fled, creating a humanitarian crisis on a scale similar to that in 2009 when the military broke the Taliban's grip on the Swat Valley.

The movement of so many people is likely to have a profound effect on Pakistan. According to a report by the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees, released just five days after the assault, at the end of 2013 there were 51.2 million forcibly displaced people in the world, six million more than the year before, and the largest number since World War II.

Pakistan plays host to more refugees than any other country, with 1.5 million registered in the country, in addition to an estimated 3.5 million internally displaced people.

As has been the case on previous occasions, internally displaced people from North Waziristan are unlikely to remain in the camps set up for them in adjoining districts. Many will head for Pakistan's large cities, particularly Karachi. The city's population of 20 million already includes around six million Pashtuns, more than the number in Kabul and Peshawar combined.

Indeed, Karachi is sometimes called an "instant city," having grown 50-fold as a result of several waves of migration since Pakistan gained independence in 1947. The first wave, of around two million people, arrived in Karachi when eight million Muslims fled



India for Pakistan. The second wave included Pashtun construction workers who helped build the new commercial capital. The third wave comprised refugees displaced during Afghanistan's war against Soviet occupation. And the fourth began in the early 2000s, following the US invasion of Afghanistan, which also gave rise to Pashtun resistance on both sides of the border, and contributed in turn to Islamic extremism in the tribal areas.

The current displacement from North Waziristan, therefore, can be seen as part of this fourth wave. Even if the army succeeds in clearing out the militants, some of the internally displaced people, bearing battle scars, will end up in Karachi. They will be in no mood to lay down their arms if the municipal authorities fail to develop inclusive political institutions that give minority ethnic groups a fair political voice. In that case, the long-term consequence of the military's North Waziristan campaign may well be more violence where it can cause the most damage.

The writer, former finance minister of Pakistan and vice president of the World Bank, is currently Chairman of the Institute of Public Policy in Lahore. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2014. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Need to monitor Ramadan price hike

With the arrival of Ramadan, the kitchen items have become costlier. Cucumber is selling for taka 100 per kilogram, while Brinjal is also equally expensive. The prices of other essentials have also increased for no apparent reason whatsoever. This happens every year. People of fixed income groups are hard hit by soaring essentials' prices. The ministries concerned should strictly control price hike of the daily necessities. And there is no alternative to regular market monitoring.
Zabed Wali
Chittagong

Whose formalin test to trust?

Recently the government conducted anti-formalin drives at various checkpoints of Dhaka city to stop the entry of formalin-tainted fruits. In doing so, they destroyed thousands of tons of fruits. A few days later, we came to know from a Prothom Alo report that several government organisations like BSTI, Department of Agriculture, BRRI etc., conducted laboratory research on fruits collected from various markets and found that not majority of the fruits, but only 40% are tainted with formalin.

Last Saturday in our Consumer Law class, we arranged a programme to test whether fruits are contaminated with formalin or not. We conducted the test with a newly invented formalin tester, about which the Prothom Alo published an article a few months back. It is a kind of liquid and one needs to use only one drop of it to test whether a food item contains formalin or not. Thus we tested mangoes, bananas, blackberries, apples, oranges and tomatoes which were collected from different markets of Dhaka. Unfortunately, all these fruits were found to be formalin-tainted. Only a single mango, collected from one's personal orchard, was found to be formalin-free.

We are so confused about different versions of test results. We request the government and the media as well to kindly tell us the truth.

T. M. Abeer Hasan
Department of Law, BUET

Comments on news report, "Apologise, now," published on June 30, 2014

Hardreality

Shamim Osman will offer an apology?! That's not possible even in dream. Mr. Osman is above everything. Accept this reality. Our honourable PM has approved this.

Molla A. Latif

Yes, when a rude fellow like him has the support of the Prime Minister, he will see dogs everywhere around him.

Abul Kashem

This is the outcome of our PM's open support for the Osman family in parliament.

Aasfisarwar

A man who admitted that he never says please, do you think he will apologise? Please show some courage, take him to the court. There are hundreds of compelling reasons in support of this view, despite the fact that he is backed by our PM.

Akhtar Shah

Remember what Gaddafi called his own people 'Sewer rats'! I wonder where Gaddafi is now!

Nationalist

Why cannot the journalists file a defamation case against him instead of demanding an apology which this uncouth person will never deliver?

"Unusual scene at Sangsad" (June 29, 2014)

Hardreality

Was our Prime Minister making jokes? Where is the stand of opposition party with respects to extra-judicial killing, forced disappearance, scope of whitening black money, attack on minority people, widespread corruption and many more? So stop trying to fool people, because you cannot.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Is Jatiya Party opposition or ally of the ruling party? They have ministry portfolio and PM is claiming JP is doing well as opposition in the parliament unlike BNP. We want to be sure whom JP belongs to.

Nationalist

A puppet opposition with no ethics! Shame on Bangladesh's ruling party for installing a dictatorship in the country and very saddening to see that none can do anything about it.

SM

"The people, the youths and future generation are now observing how democracy is being practised. The present opposition is making constructive criticism of the government, instead of opposing anything for the sake of opposing in parliament," PM said.

Yes, the youth are observing how political parties run for power without people's support.

Aasfisarwar

When 'A' team and 'B' team of the same group represent in a game or parliament, they are birds of the same flock.