

## Ordeals of public mobility

Reflect disregard for public convenience

**D**UE to the ill-planned construction projects being carried out on many thoroughfares of the city, the mobility of the city-dwellers has almost ground to a halt. Many arterial roads have been dug up for the construction of flyovers, repair and work on the drainage system. However, it appears that the move to alleviate city traffic has led to more suffering in these teething times. Huge piles of bricks and mud are placed on the roads, constricting the space for traffic to flow smoothly on both sides of the roads. The construction work being carried out on Mirpur's Purabi-Kalshi road and the Moghbazar-Eskaton area, in particular, is causing great distress to the people as it encompasses major routes of transport.

The nightmare is worsened, considerably, by the rain which leads to water logging and many of the automobiles stop functioning after hitting the flooded potholes. One must have the wisdom of tapering off extensive work on the projects during the monsoon season. The duty of the planning authorities in this case remains twofold -- firstly, to provide adequate diversionary space for the movement of traffic while the construction is going on, instead of taking up a large portion of the road and that, too, for extended periods of time. Usually the original timeline overshoots, crossing the threshold of public patience. Second, the authorities may consider carrying out the bulk of the construction work at night, when the traffic is sparse, as is the common practice around the world. We hope the government takes the commuters' grievances into account and completes the projects in time.

## Going for gas power plant

Some questions?

**A**T a time when the country is facing acute shortage of gas, the government has just approved the construction of a 400-megawatt gas-fired power project. Indeed, as reported by this newspaper, authorities are in the process of overhauling a 20-year old plant at a cost that is stated to be double its original cost. We are perplexed as to why nearly \$300 million foreign exchange is being expended on a power plant which requires a power source that is in short supply. The other point of contention that has arisen is the awarding of a contract for overhauling a power unit in Ghorasal that is apparently costing the Power Development Board (PDB) \$29.9 million, while the PDB has sought funds to the tune of \$12.6 million for an apparently similar job on another plant.

Taking into consideration that no significant gas reserves have been discovered since Bibiyana, precisely how is the new plant to function at full capacity when it becomes operational? While renovation and overhauling of power plants are routine work, why must work on one project purportedly cost twice that of the other? Even if we were not to get into the nitty-gritty of which company was qualified or disqualified for providing authentic end-user certificates and other matters, the question here is whether or not such large investments in gas-fired plants is judicious.

## Don't miss the triangle of bliss

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

**T**AKE a pencil and draw a triangle by placing the holy month of Ramadan, Quran and Taqwa (God-consciousness) in the three ends and if you decide to fast, recite the Quran, become aware of Allah's diktat in all spheres of your life -- according to the triangle -- then you are most likely to gain an immense spiritual bliss. Fasting was indeed prescribed during the holy month, but the underlying purpose behind it is often overlooked. The purpose, if explained in the light of Sura Al-Baqara's 183rd verse -- "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may become righteous" -- is God-consciousness.

The verse clearly states the importance of fasting in Ramadan with the aim of developing God-consciousness. But what we do during the month usually consists of fasting, supplicating, reciting the Quran (with and without knowing its meaning), arranging and participating in sumptuous Iftar parties, and literally wearing out after saying the Tarawi prayers for the first ten nights. So the month for countless many is somehow squandered without acquiring spiritual bliss. Most of us fail to act as per the correlation of the triangle.

Note that Taqwa is an elevated level of consciousness of the Creator. You don't only fear or love him but put your entire trust in his decree while surrendering yourself. And the one who thrives to achieve Taqwa is called a Muttaqi, actually how much we strive during the holy month to become a Muttaqi is the question here.

One is not likely to work in the line of attaining Taqwa unless the three are interwoven together. So, the one who is interested in achieving Taqwa may ask him/herself: "Can anyone achieve this without the Quran?" The answer is a clear 'no.' The next question is: "What if someone follows the Quran, can't he achieve Taqwa without fasting?" The answer is 'no' again. And obviously the best time to fast is in the month of Ramadan. And reciting the Quran and fasting without developing any Taqwa means that, as a Muslim, you have merely followed a set of rituals for personal gains.

Through Sura Al-Baqara's 187th verse Allah says: "Thus, does Allah make clear His Signs to men: that they may learn Taqwa." Ramadan is not limited to abstaining from food, praying, charity and supplicating only, but to develop God-consciousness to impact your spiritual health. For developing this attribute what could be a more fitting time than the holy month of Ramadan?

Nevertheless, to cut a long story short, attempt the triangle and the bliss will surely follow.

The writer is Current Affairs Analyst, The Daily Star.

E-mail: shahriarferoze@gmail.com

# Unwarranted face-off

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

the government, for that matter, is unnecessary and uncalled-for.

But what was so upsetting about the TIB report? Under title "Private Universities: Challenges of Good Governance and Way out," the report at first dwelt at length on the legal reform and other government initiatives taken so far towards establishing good government in private universities, for example, framing of the Private University Act 2010. It then went on to highlight the commendable achievements made so far by private universities. So, the very context of the reported instances of irregularities and corruption in the private universities under study was constructive and not meant to undermine anyone.

Why has the government to be on a collision course with an organisation engaged in monitoring and publishing research on corporate and political corruption and whose valuable work has been helping the public to have a better insight into how far the criteria of good governance are being met globally in various government, non-government and private organisations? It goes without saying that prevalence of corruption is a vital information indicating lack of good governance in an organisation. The private universities as well as the government may well use this information to improve the situation in this sector of higher education. But far from accepting it in that spirit, the government appears to have been rather upset by the revelations made in the report.

As noted in the foregoing, the TIB report is not against private universities as such. On the contrary, the fact that the research has been largely diagnostic in its approach with suggestions to improve situations in the 22 universities covered by the study should leave no doubt about the questioned 'motive' of the report.

It may be recalled that in the past, the government itself had critically examined private universities so far as their qualities with respect to physical facilities, environment, teaching staff strength and so on were concerned. But those efforts were not corruption-focused like the one by the TIB now under review.

If the government is really serious about combating corruption in both public and private sectors, make those answerable to appropriate authorities, and thereby establish good governance in them, shouldn't it

rather commend bodies like TIB for their efforts? Is it not then strange that far from doing that the government has come down so heavily on TIB? What is still stranger in this case is that the TIB this time has drawn the administration's wrath not for exposing a government body, but some institutions in the private sector. Perhaps, the report wouldn't have irked the government at all had it not mentioned the involvement of the education ministry or the University Grants Commission (UGC) in the affairs of those universities.

The TIB, for understandable reasons, has not caved in in the face of the government pressure. It has rather insisted that its findings on corruption and irregularities in the private universities under scrutiny are supported by evidence.

Things should not have come to such a pass. We believe we are an open, not a closed, society and that the incumbent government also believes it to be so. It can be assumed that the government also believes in the free flow of information, the hallmark of an open, pluralistic and democratic system of government, as opposed to a dictatorial one. Shouldn't such a government, even if it

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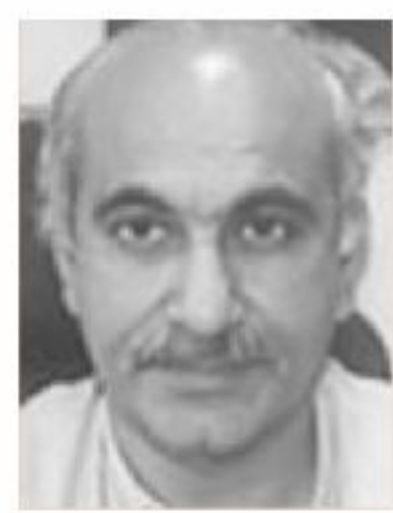
thinks it has reasons to take any critical report about itself, or any other organisation, with a grain of salt, accept it with good grace and then conduct an investigation into it in order to reach its own conclusion on the issue under the spotlight? It is only through this process that it can accept or refute the report in question.

So, why should the question of 'embarrassment' at all arise, as the Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid has resented on the floor of Jatiya Sangsad? If the said report that some of the private universities have become commercial ventures or that alleged illicit transactions of money have become rampant, from getting approval for establishing a university to recruiting teachers, to appointing vice chancellor, pro-vice chancellor, or treasurer, to issuing certificates to students in exchange for money and so and so forth, then it should have actually 'embarrassed' the people involved in the corrupt practices and not the education minister. This is simply bizarre.

The writer is Editor, Science & Life, The Daily Star.

## The absentee landlord

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

except talk, even a mature politician like Digvijay Singh of Congress can let an unmentionable truth slip through the many internal security barriers of prudence. This is precisely what happened when he revealed that his leader, Rahul Gandhi, was not temperamentally suited for power. The reason why this error got traction is everyone believed this to be the case. A mistake can always be amended; and a lie will, exceptions apart, generally die a natural death. But truth will bob back into public discourse no matter how hard you try to slap it away.

Since Rahul Gandhi is not in politics to be a Mahatma, it is legitimate to ask why Congress has decided to invest its future in Rahul Gandhi stock.

When did Digvijay Singh arrive at such a conclusion? Was it before the 2014 elections when hopes were riding high, during the campaign when they got tempered, or after the miserable results? Did Digvijay Singh begin to get this hollow feeling when he realised that Rahul Gandhi was the only leader who took a Sunday off in the midst of such a campaign? Or that Rahul Gandhi simply could not connect with voters?

Depressed Congressmen are asking themselves, since they cannot ask anyone else, whether there is any hope Rahul Gandhi can improve, or even reinvent himself as a political mind with communication skills. So far Rahul Gandhi has opted for radio silence, with antenna grounded. The electoral calendar can probably live with Opposition inertia for a year or so, but a fadeout has significant dangers. If Rahul Gandhi simply does not like the politics of power, and there is no other politics on his horizon, then he might actually prefer the comforts of being supine.

It is hardly a secret that a growing number of Congressmen would be delighted if Rahul Gandhi found a life outside politics, and allow his sister Priyanka Vadra to replace him. Since Congress now belongs to the Sonia Gandhi family -- instead of the other way around -- the party cannot imagine a leader outside the genetic circle. Whispers thrive in the grey area of deniability, which is why they are exciting. Some went to the extent of suggesting that Digvijay Singh's remark was not totally innocent, and could be a prelude to a palace coup that would see the emergence of Priyanka Vadra as the public face and voice of Congress, with Rahul Gandhi relegated to his dream-assignment of party reorganisation.

The crisis within Congress should be familiar to any historian of the zamindari system. We are dealing with the problem of an absentee landlord. It is not only a question of being physically absent from the scene, although there is that too, given the frequency with which Rahul Gandhi tends to go abroad. But he seems psychologically absent even when in India. A leader has to be available to his party colleagues, down to grass root levels, particularly after a colossal defeat. The anxiety in Congress right now is about survival; revival is a later chapter in the story. Leadership is vital as much in victory as in defeat, and you can only lead from the front. Advisers can occupy the sidelines; and the second rank remains in its allotted place, which is the second row. But nothing works if there is a vacuum on the front line. This surely is what is gnawing at men like Digvijay Singh, who have the interests of Congress in their heart.

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Perhaps Rahul Gandhi has bought into the theory of complacency, which has its share of advocates: do nothing for a couple of years, wait for the credibility of the present government to collapse and then offer yourself as the saviour. The catch is that this argument assumes that voters will be complacent as well. The evidence is against such assumptions. There are other parties waiting to pick up Congress space, as they have done in so many states. Leaders like Mamata Banerjee and Jayalalitha survive defeat to fight another day because they never leave the battlefield.

Digvijay Singh spoke to two audiences: the public as well as to the family which has taken possession of Congress. He does not mind the takeover, but he wants the landlord to preside over a harvest. Since the zamindari system is based on a permanent settlement, it is not easy to change landlords. But neglect has driven great estates into insignificance. As a former prince, Digvijay Singh knows this only too well.

The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Bus takes SAU student's life

Shahinur Alam, a first year student of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, died on Thursday after fighting for his life at the Green Life hospital, Dhaka. He was critically injured on the night of June 28 after a bus knocked him down at the second gate of the university. We, the SAU family are deeply saddened at the untimely death of Shahinur.

It is sincerely hoped that the owner of the bus responsible for the accident would compensate the victim's family. It may be mentioned here that a huge amount of money had to be paid for keeping Shahinur under life support at the hospital. At the same time, we would request the authorities concerned to construct a speed-breaker near the second gate of SAU, for which the students and all the campus inmates have been urging the authorities.

Finally, the bus service owners should undertake necessary steps to improve the relationship between conductors and passengers.

Professor M Zahidul Haque

Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

### Courageous in defeat

Thanks to The Daily Star for printing messages from Barack Obama and Dan Mozena on this present Fourth of July. I also thank The Daily Star for the photo and article "A Huge Howard" on our goal-keeper who was tremendously courageous in defeat to the very talented Belgians. I downloaded the "Star-Spangled Banner," our national anthem, from YouTube and sang it and reflected on its last line, "land of the free and home of the brave." I did the same for the "Pledge of Allegiance" to our flag and reflected on its last line with "with liberty and justice for all." One of the constitutional values America shares with Bangladesh is freedom of religion along with secularism which is one of the four pillars of the Bangladesh constitution. Secularism is not against religion, but it means an "even playing field" for people of all religions whether they are Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, or even atheists. This is why I am personally opposed to blasphemy laws which would likely be defined in terms of only what one religion considers blasphemy and would therefore disrupt the even playing field.

Scott Elliott

Working and living in Uttara, Dhaka

### Comments on news report, "Not many Bangladeshis going to India: Khaleda," published on July 1, 2014

Sara

Despite the unjust shootings at the border, illegal migration is possible and presumably exists to some extent. That is why criminals, with or without the support of the authorities, are able to flee to India.

However, after several publicity gaffes over many months starting from The Washington Times article, she finally makes some wise statements.

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### "PM hits back at BNP threat" (July 4, 2014)

Mortuza Huq

While people of Bangladesh and the world know that it was the most farcical election in the electoral history of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina seems to be a great fan of 5 January election. Probably she knows very well by now that 5 January type election is the only way by which Awami League can grab power.

Abul Kashem

Yes, as long as several thousands Shamim Osmans are there in the country, no worries for the Awami League. When the country is flooded with foods contaminated by formalin and other poisonous chemicals, our leaders' smiling faces indicate that they are far from the people.

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### "EC sues Ershad" (July 5, 2014)

Hardreality

Two to seven years of imprisonment for violation of electoral law; is there any remote possibility of Mr. Ershad facing that fate, even though he is the weakest one. The way he ignored multiple notices, it is obvious that he can get away from it. Poor EC! They have the law, but cannot apply it.

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### "Weird solution to question leak" (July 3, 2014)

Hardreality

Going for this solution means accepting defeat yielding to the leakers. Question papers have been leaked so many times, but not a single criminal has been punished. Is it so hard to find out the people involved in the scam? It is more likely that the authorities are unwilling to find them.