

# Flood-hit people in dire straits

Commence relief work immediately

WITH the water of the major rivers like Brahmaputra, Jamuna and Padma flowing below danger level, there has been a marked improvement in the flood situation in northern districts. Even so, in absence of any tangible effort from the government to provide relief, the flood-affected people of those districts are passing their days in great distress. Hundreds of families in Kurigram, Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Rajbari, for example, have been waiting in vain for weeks for succour from the government. But whatever they have received so far by way of relief is insignificant to meet their needs.

One simply fails to understand why the government repose to the flood, which struck the region more than two weeks back, has been so lackadaisical. Thousands have been passing their days without basic needs for survival like food, drinking water, fodder for animals and medicines to protect them against water-borne diseases.

It is worthwhile to note at this point that the flood has not only dislodged people from their homes, it has also damaged the crops in the fields. In particular, transplantation aman paddy over about 150 thousand hectares in 19 districts is about to be damaged by the flood. But how can what is still left of the crops be saved unless flood-affected people, a large proportion of whom are peasants and farmhands, are helped out of their present predicament?

Before things turn disastrous, the government must act fast to meet these urgent needs of the flood-hit people.

# Death of an uncared for patient

Is this medical profession?

A patient leaps to his death from the premier public hospital in the city because doctors there couldn't care less about his condition. We mourn for Nurnobi. That his family rushed from one department to another in the vain hope to alleviate his pain whilst hospital staff didn't live up to their medical ethos is negligence at its height. From what has been printed in this paper, we understand that Nurnobi had been suffering from stomach pain for a month and a half. That he was denied treatment because apparently there was no seat available in the concerned department is hardly an excuse for not treating one whose condition was critical grave.

Nurnobi was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital at the dead of night but reportedly, there were no medical staff available in the relevant department. He was told to come back in the morning when concerned doctors would be available. Nurnobi spent his last hours in pain and after he could tolerate it no more decided to end his suffering by plunging to his death from the 8th floor of the haematology department. His death was unnecessary. The excuse given by doctors and nurses that Nurnobi could not be treated as he had not been admitted is a lame and shameless one. Will the health ministry wake up from its slumber and do something about the culture of impunity with which public hospital staff run these institutions? Or must Nurnobi represent merely another case of "unnatural" death due to abject negligence of doctors and hospital management.

# Uranium market in Dhaka!

ABDUL MATIN

VICTOR Lustig was a very smart guy. He once sold the Eiffel Tower to Monsieur Poisson, a scrap dealer, claiming to be the owner of the most famous tourist attraction of Paris. When Poisson realised that he had been cheated, he was too embarrassed to inform the police. Lustig was lucky. He tried to do it again but luck didn't favour him this time. It was reported to the police. Lustig landed in jail and died there.

It is not known if anyone ever tried to sell the Ahsan Manzil of Dhaka but eleven smart persons were trying to sell what they claimed to be imported uranium. They are in police custody now. They used to show a video footage of the product to prospective buyers against a deposit of Tk 50,000, while for inspection of the goods, they would take 'security money' of Tk 50 lac. The price of the product was claimed to be Tk 50 crore.

To prove the genuineness of the product, the accused persons used a metal container, protective gloves and supposedly a radiation monitor. They also had a leaflet in English and Russian, cleverly linking the material with the current deal on the Rooppur Nuclear Power Project. Police sent the recovered material to the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission for testing. The test results are not known as yet.

The material appears to be white in colour. Uranium is not white in any form. Uranium ore is either grey or yellowish. Natural uranium is sold in the form of a yellow powder, called yellowcake. It is enriched in the form of hexafluoride, a silvery gas. Uranium dioxide or carbide is black. Uranium metal is grey or silvery. The recovered material is, therefore, unlikely to be uranium.

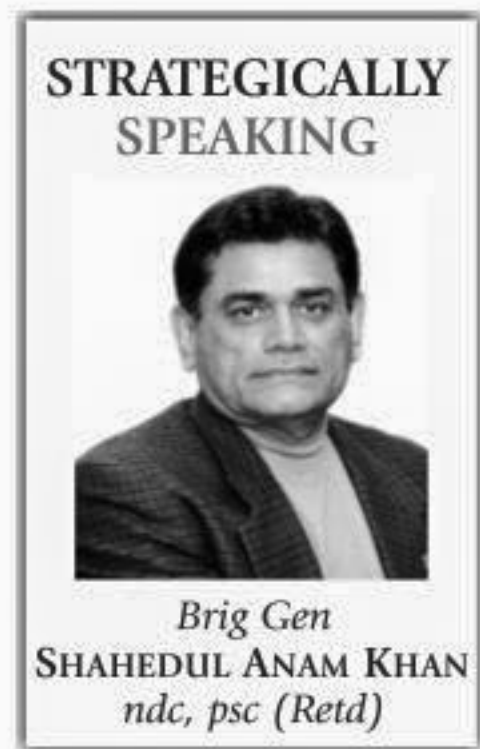
Enriched uranium is a highly secured item and is under safeguards by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It is not available in the open market. Several international protocols need to be signed to procure enriched uranium. A nuclear power reactor requires 80-100 tonnes of 3-5% enriched uranium. An atom bomb requires several kilogrammes of 'highly enriched' uranium. Few pounds of natural uranium have no practical uses.

Pieces of uranium ore are sold online as collector's items at \$5 to \$10 per piece. Currently, yellowcake is sold at about \$31/lb. The price of the recovered material could not be more than few thousand taka even if it was natural uranium.

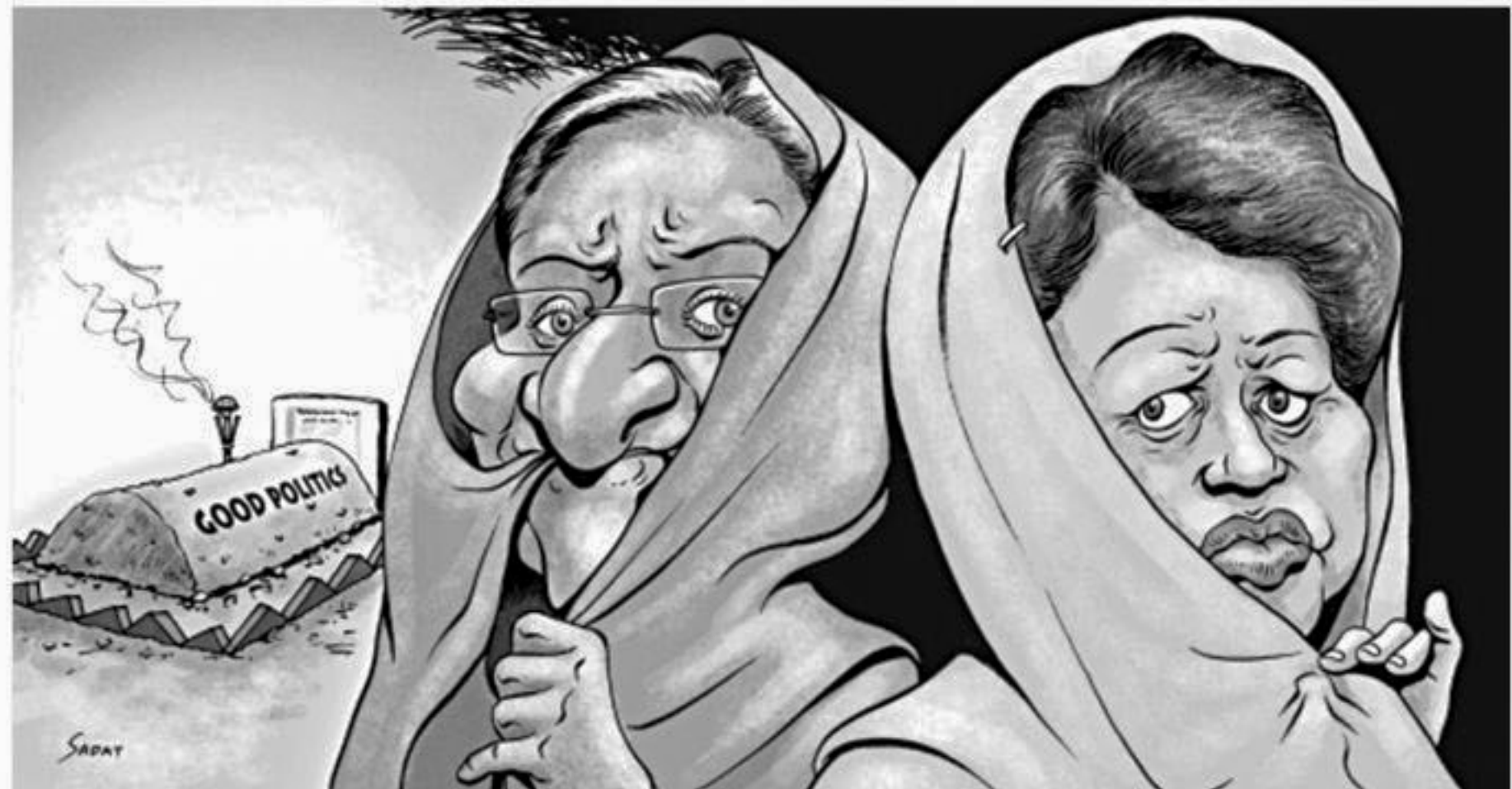
The eleven people in custody must have realised like Lustig that smartness does not always pay, particularly while dealing with fake products.

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

# The downside of AL's BNP strategy



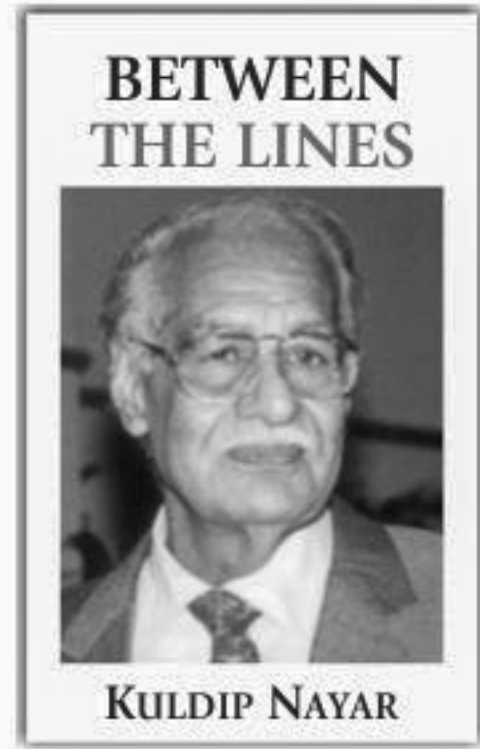
AL's election strategy, to keep the BNP out of the parliamentary election, has paid off, and it seems that the party has no qualms about heading a government bereft of moral mooring. And the fact that it has no plans to hold any preterm election has been haughtily voiced by many of its influential ministers. And having neutered what was left of other opposition parties, pseudo and real, and taking some of them on board (most of them had become so politically inconsequential that for them joining the AL bandwagon was the only means of dis-



playing their existence), the AL wanted an opposition—free dispensation for the rest of its tenure, except for the fact that the BNP was still in its way. Thus we see the two-pronged AL action on the BNP—political and legal. And both to ensure that the party no longer remains a viable political force let alone a credible opposition.

The point is how sound is the AL strategy vis-à-vis the BNP. Let us review the party's BNP policy.

AL's plans regarding BNP will draw full marks as a brilliant military strategy. A military commander does not allow a defeated foe, or an adversary in disarray, the chance to regroup. He does everything to ensure that an opposition which is in a state of disorder, is divested of leadership and it denied any opportunity to either think or pass on its plans to the subordinates. That is exactly what the AL is doing, and doing it with a great deal of success, if not panache, given what one has seen so far of BNP activities post 5th January elections.



General Raheel Sharif, to request him to assist. Nawaz Sharif thought that he could get away quietly with a civilian Prime Minister seeking military help. But the army has issued an official press release to state that the Prime Minister made the request which the army chief did not accept. The army's explanation was that traditionally its role in a democratic setup was to defend the country, not to run it.

In fact, Prime Minister Sharif has brought this misery upon himself. His mis-governance has alienated the people. They want him and his brother, Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif, to quit and hold mid-term polls. Instead, Nawaz Sharif had a resolution passed by parliament to back him. It does not help the situation because both of his opponents, Imran Khan of Tehreek-i-Insaaf and Qadiri of Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT), are from the civil. Some leaders opposing to Nawaz Sharif have demanded a mid-term poll. Their thinking is that the people must once again decide whether they want Nawaz Sharif, who has lost luster or someone else should run the government.

Whether the fresh elections would throw up any other who is acceptable to Sindh, North Western Province and Baluchistan, apart from Punjab, is in the realm of conjecture. Yet the once-hated military would get sanction from the people to run the administration if polls were to be held. Whether or not world opinion accepts it, the military appears to be the only unifying factor. However, it is reluctant to intervene as the meeting of army commanders has revealed.

Still what has happened in Pakistan is a soft coup. The army is at the centre of whatever is happening in the country. The mood of the people was to see the back of the army. But in the current situation, the question what is the way out. Pakistan has faced such a situation many a time before. Willingly or unwillingly, the military has ruled the country for 37 years, half of the period since its independence.

No democratic country wants the army to rule it. A few opposition leaders were candid enough to say that the army should have a role in the country's governance. However, leading political parties are not prepared for it. Still the question that confronts Pakistan is the type of polity it should have to have all on board, including the military.

General Zia-ul Haq, who did the greatest harm to Pakistan's democratic system as a martial law administrator, said that probably a Turkey-like model which recognizes the military role in governance would

Very few will contest the fact that as a party BNP is trying to find its feet. Regaining the morale of the party cadres, and more importantly, salvaging the confidence of the grassroots workers on the leaders, which was so badly dented during the party's anti-election programmes, where the party leaders were seen by its workers to be interested only in saving their skin, has become a priority. No wonder we hear of preannounced programmes whose date keeps changing. Perhaps the BNP think tank has done a postmortem of its January election strategy and it would not be misplaced to suggest that within the BNP the jury is still out on its decision to boycott the election.

Although the BNP has been able to hold a few rallies and meetings recently, some of those, like the one in Suhrawardy Udyan, were allowed on certain conditions. And one programme was disallowed on the grounds of prime minister's security. The idea is to give as little space to the BNP as possible so that it cannot demonstrate its capability as a political party.

However, what is proving perhaps even more harmful at the moment for the BNP than the shrinking of its political space is the legal bind that the party finds itself in. Nearly all its top leaders have been indicted on

charges relating to violence during last year's agitation programmes; its acting secretary general has been booked on more than a dozen counts. Some of the charges are ludicrous but instead of going on to the streets or whatever little of it is allowed by the AL, the BNP leaders will have run between bail and jail with little time in between for their workers. This will eventually make the party a political non-entity.

But disarming the BNP is a shortsighted strategy and although that might fetch short term dividends for the ruling collation it has some serious portends for Bangladesh. Nothing can be worse than politics sans opposition. It will degenerate not regenerate democracy in the country. One wonders whether the ruling coalition has considered as to who would fill the void that the absence of viable opposition will create. Are we not alive to the fact that extremists and religious groups are waiting for just such a chance to grab. Recall how these groups had exploited the animosity between the two major parties. The recent killing of a religious figure is not a stray incident. The killers have their sponsors who might emerge in the garb of innocuous political elements to occupy the vacuum. These will need the combined efforts of all the secular parties to combat. Otherwise we will all be dragged down to the depths including the AL.

The writer is Editor, Op-ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star

# Pakistan in siege

THERE was time when the people in Pakistan came to the streets to defend their democratic system from the onslaught by the military which wanted its say in the country's affairs. Today, the same people want the military to intervene to save whatever is left of the democratic structure in their country. This was visibly seen when the popularly-elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif met the Chief of Army Staff,

General Raheel Sharif, to request him to assist. Nawaz Sharif thought that he could get away quietly with a civilian Prime Minister seeking military help. But the army has issued an official press release to state that the Prime Minister made the request which the army chief did not accept. The army's explanation was that traditionally its role in a democratic setup was to defend the country, not to run it.

In fact, Prime Minister Sharif has brought this misery upon himself. His mis-governance has alienated the people. They want him and his brother, Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif, to quit and hold mid-term polls. Instead, Nawaz Sharif had a resolution passed by parliament to back him. It does not help the situation because both of his opponents, Imran Khan of Tehreek-i-Insaaf and Qadiri of Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT), are from the civil. Some leaders opposing to Nawaz Sharif have demanded a mid-term poll. Their thinking is that the people must once again decide whether they want Nawaz Sharif, who has lost luster or someone else should run the government.

Whether the fresh elections would throw up any other who is acceptable to Sindh, North Western Province and Baluchistan, apart from Punjab, is in the realm of conjecture. Yet the once-hated military would get sanction from the people to run the administration if polls were to be held. Whether or not world opinion accepts it, the military appears to be the only unifying factor. However, it is reluctant to intervene as the meeting of army commanders has revealed.

Still what has happened in Pakistan is a soft coup. The army is at the centre of whatever is happening in the country. The mood of the people was to see the back of the army. But in the current situation, the question what is the way out. Pakistan has faced such a situation many a time before. Willingly or unwillingly, the military has ruled the country for 37 years, half of the period since its independence.

No democratic country wants the army to rule it. A few opposition leaders were candid enough to say that the army should have a role in the country's governance. However, leading political parties are not prepared for it. Still the question that confronts Pakistan is the type of polity it should have to have all on board, including the military.

General Zia-ul Haq, who did the greatest harm to Pakistan's democratic system as a martial law administrator, said that probably a Turkey-like model which recognizes the military role in governance would

strengthen the Pakistan system. The Turkish constitution lies down that the army can intervene if and when democracy is derailed. But it was rejected by the popular elected leaders.

Today, the army is acting as a go-between to convey the viewpoint from one political faction to another. It is considered a neutral party. There is enough evidence of this at Islamabad as the popular cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan is calling the shots. He has declared that his men—who are protesting in the streets of the capital itself—will not leave until Nawaz Sharif has submitted his resignation. PAT's Qadri, a fundamentalist, too has joined the chorus to get rid of Nawaz Sharif.

Contact with the people is the basic requirement of democracy. And Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has maintained it through public meetings. His stance is that whatever they are doing tantamount to defending the institutions to sustain democratic and constitutional machinery in. Pakistan is no exception. Not long ago, Nawaz Sharif was pulled down by the army from prime ministership. His call on the army chief now to intervene is a full turnabout. But he does not realize that the army will have no hesitation in staging a coup as and when it feels or whenever the situation demands. That is the reason why Nawaz Sharif brings in parliamentary democracy in his statements to underline that the role of the army can, at best, be only temporary.

Even then, the intervention by the armed forces is becoming too often in Pakistan. The people are getting used to it and associating stability with the military's governance. This feeling is anti-democratic in content because the discipline of soldiers tantamount to authoritarianism, in contrast to the people's participation in a democratic society.

One feels sorry over the spectacle in Pakistan. People there are no different from those in India. But mis-governance at the top made the army to walk in once. General Ayub Khan, then the army chief, took advantage and imposed the martial law. His rule lasted for eight years. And once the army took over, its influence stayed even after the troops went back to the barracks. Since then the situation in Pakistan has remained influx. In fact, the strong methods used by the army were responsible for East Pakistan to secede, giving birth to Bangladesh. Unfortunately, both Pakistan and Bangladesh, however democratic in declaration, are essentially at the receiving end of a telephone call from the military headquarters. Still whatever has been retained in the form of elections gives democracy a flicker of hope.

A retired military army official has predicted that Nawaz Sharif would come back with a reduced strength if a mid-term poll were to be held. Nonetheless, it would be a sad end to the people's rule because a democratically elected Prime Minister has been asked to step down by people like Imran Khan who has only 38 seats in the house of 342 members, including 60 reserved seats. But how long would it take for the elections to be held or in what shape they assume is anybody's guess. Until then, the democratic setup in Pakistan is in siege.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist

# LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

## “People obey law, influentials break”

The photo taken by Rashed Shumon and published in your front page on September 2 deserves appreciation. We often discuss this issue when we're stuck in traffic jam. Unfortunately, we have never protested such anomalies. We don't even know where to file a complaint about such malpractice.

We hope TDS will report more on such unlawful happenings. And the authorities will take action against these law breakers.

Jahangir Khan  
On e-mail

## Safety tests for Vitamin A capsules

On August 28, 2014, The Daily Star and other prominent dailies and other media outlets reported that in a suo moto rule, an HC bench of Justice Hassan Arif and Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman said the government should not distribute vitamin A capsules in any national health program without adequate clinical testing for safety and integrity. We presume this ruling was driven by the need to pro-



PHOTO: STAR

tect children from adulterated or substandard products, in this case imported vitamin A capsules. Several media outlets have framed the honourable justice's ruling as a call for 'clinical trials', which we suggest is an unintentional misuse of a specific scientific term. A "clinical trial" refers to an extensive evaluation of the public health impact of vitamin A itself – a research question that has long been answered by large clinical (community) trials across South Asia. Recognized by the UN Agencies as one of the most cost-effective public health interventions of all time, vitamin A has been shown to reduce childhood mortality, blindness and hearing loss from ear infection. Vitamin A supplementation programmes are underway in over 70 countries, with children under age 5 receiving a single vitamin A supplement twice a year. In Bangladesh, the government's national vitamin A programme is completing its 40th year of operation, longer than in any other country of the world, protecting the sight, lives and hearing of many thousands of young children each year.

We encourage the ministries concerned to act rapidly to establish the necessary testing and quality control benchmarks to meet this need, allowing this valuable programme to continue without disruption.

Dr. Alain B. Labrique, PhD, MHS, MS &  
Prof. Keith P. West, Jr., DrPH, RD  
Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University

## Political rallies and traffic jam

The rallies and meetings held by different political parties bring the traffic to a halt and create long tailbacks which take hours to clear off. This is a total waste of thousands of man-hours and thousands of litres of petrol. Traffic jam is already a major problem in Dhaka. The political parties should understand this and should never make the traffic situation worse by holding such rallies and meetings. There are political parties all over the world but none of them make people suffer the way our political parties do.

Aminur Rahim  
New DOHS, Mohakhali  
Dhaka

## Comments on news report, “JP may quit govt,” published on September 1, 2014

Masum

These people are making fun with us.

Molla A. Latif

It is due to its chairman's inane utterances that the party is being misapprehended. Otherwise, it has got ample opportunities to prove its existence as a strong political party and opposition too.

Abdur Rahman  
JP is a laughing stock.

## “A policy of hypocrisy” (August 30, 2014)

Truth finder

This government can do anything to make their power secure.

Dev Saha

No institution should get unrestricted, boundless power. That would be a recipe for power abuse. Maybe a delicate balance of power needs to be maintained among the judiciary, the executive and the legislative branches of the government.

Sayed Rahman

For a democratic country, independent and healthy judiciary is a must. So, whatever we do, we must ensure independence of the judiciary.