

# The separation of business and politics

**LETTERS**  
**TO THE EDITOR**  
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## Discipline perpetrators of road accidents

### Stop culture of impunity

**A**ROUND 83 percent of people accused in road accidents are not arrested, according to a recent statement by the Passengers' Welfare Association. In 2013 alone, although over 2,000 cases were filed for road accidents accusing 2,057 persons, only 352 were arrested, highlighting the extent of impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of road accidents.

In an overwhelming number of cases, the culprits get away by conducting underhand dealings, especially when they have the backing of influential people. As Information Minister himself noted, during a seminar, the culture of impunity and networking are a significant contributor to the recurrence of road accidents in the country, and pointed the finger at corrupt government officials and powerful politicians for sustaining this practice.

Additionally, the high extent of corruption involved in obtaining vehicles' fitness certificates and drivers' licenses mean that unfit vehicles and incompetent drivers are allowed to ply the streets with latitude, while those found with improper documentation during drives are let go with a small bribe.

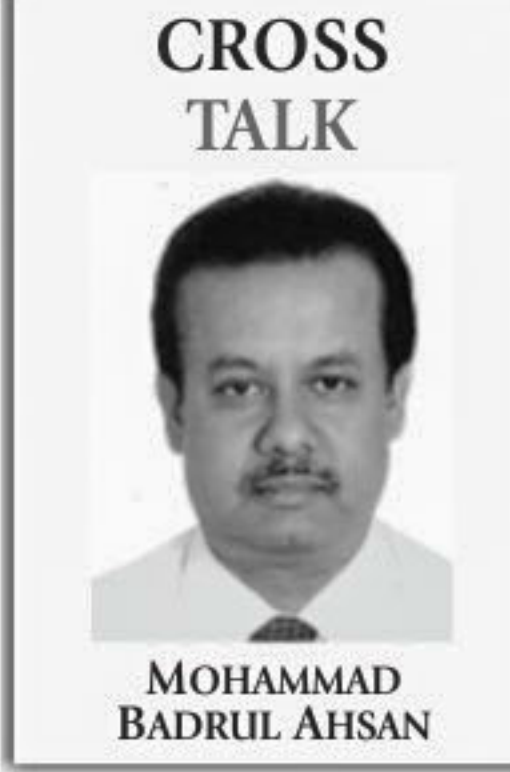
Given that road accidents take the lives of 12,000 to 18,000 per year according to unofficial figures published by the World Bank and the World Health Organisation, there is a serious need to stop the culture of impunity enjoyed by reckless drivers in the country. While we agree with the Information Minister that the media can play a big role in highlighting the negligence and corruption of government officials and institutions, we think that strong measures should be taken by the government to penalise those found guilty of such misdemeanours.

## How long must this go on?

### Arsonists cannot go unpunished

**F**IFTEEN injured and five dead including a child, screamed a headline. Burnt to death, thanks to the hurling of a petrol bomb on a moving bus in Rangpur, which was in a convoy escorted by police and Border Guards (BGB). The blockade being enforced by the 20-party alliance whose primary weapon of choice is the Molotov cocktail thrown at will at moving targets like vehicles on roads and highways is a reality on the ground. With this incident, 190 vehicles have been torched without any regard for loss of life or injury to passengers on board. Those who survived the latest incident will have to live with the psychological shock of flames and burning flesh. What words of solace do we have for the family of Tasiran who died at 11pm after suffering 96 per cent burns? That this was fate?

That is hardly any consolation for the bereaved families of those who did not survive the attack. While we are informed that a case has been filed implicating more than a hundred opposition activists, the sheer sense of terror that has gripped the general populace around the country cannot be underestimated. Dhaka has seen, and continues to witness, the terrible effects of torching of vehicles in broad daylight and the evenings. We are also informed that authorities have given orders to BGB members to shoot at sight arsonists. Although we do not condone a "shoot on sight" policy, arsonists need be dealt with to the fullest extent of the law.



**CROSS TALK**  
**MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN**

**I**N one of the children's verses written by Jogindranath Sarkar, a boy sets out on a grocery trip reciting the items asked by his mother. On the way he finds three other boys having fun playing games, and a fourth one enjoying himself flying a kite. Despite these distractions, he moves on with his grocery list because he didn't want to be late and upset his mother. But when he reaches the store, he's already mixed up in his mind between qualities of rice and fruit, lentil and mustard, and fish and curd. The risk of similar confusion is also staring this nation in its face.

At a time when this country is stuck in the rut of political discontent, everybody is clinging to their grocery lists. The businessmen are worried about business. Parents are worried about the school attendance of

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their children. The commuters are concerned over safety on the roads. The government wants to crush the opposition. The opposition is determined to topple the government.

Everybody is reacting from their respective silos. People are always driven by survival instincts and cannot be selfless when threatened. It also brings the ringing contradiction that this nation is as quickly united as it gets divided. Common interests unravel at the slightest knock of self-interests.

Hence, different people complain for different reasons. The business community screams because political instability hurts bottom lines. Parents are woebegone because kids can't go to school or sit for their exams on time. And commuters scramble for rides between work and home, their grievances writ large on their faces even before they open their mouths.

That gives the bifurcation that exists between citizens and their country. And who can ever blame the former if the latter doesn't cope with their expectations? Businesses have to survive, children have to thrive and life

has to go on for average people whose concept of the country is their corner of the world where they want to live in pursuit of life, liberty and happiness.

Seething under the surface of a common destiny is the discontent of a splintered nation. For decades, it has been trying to apply sterile economic bandage to heal its political wound. Every time political showdown escalates, it's as if it is injurious to this nation only because it hurts business interests. Business leaders rattle off numbers to warn how disruptions in production, delays in delivery and loss of new orders are going to shrink export earnings and foreign exchange reserves. That concern somehow is akin to the panic attack in a needy family when its sole earning member happens to fall sick.

It gives short shrift to the fact that this nation is more than a business proposition. Our governments are also equally confused, never too sure if the source of their power lies with people or profit. Lately, the state minister for home assured armed security and compensation if transport owners agreed to ply their buses during the countrywide siege enforced by the opposition. He, however, said nothing about the passengers who might get hurt or killed if the buses were targeted by miscreants. It's obvious that in the minister's mind, people come after transport in this republic.

The business leaders are now asking politicians to keep business separate from politics. There was a time when religious leaders were involved in politics in the Christian Europe until matters precipitated to such an extreme that separation of church and state was deemed essential. In this country, we are still struggling to keep religion separate from politics. Another separation may not be possible for the same reason a woman can rarely get pregnant when she is pregnant already.

It's the involvement of business in politics that has complicated matters in this country. This is not to undermine the importance of business in national dynamics because the first and foremost function of the state is to guarantee the right to food, shelter and clothing. But the entire thrust of our business community is on forging a politics that should make economic sense. In an ideal situation, it's economics that should have made political sense.

This nation has mixed up its priorities like that boy with the grocery list. When parents are worried, commuters are harried, and common people are stricken, these are definitely genuine signs of trouble. A republic is nothing but a territorial embodiment of the dreams and hopes of its people.

But if this nation is compared to a family situation, business disruptions may lead to loss of income and financial hardship. A loving family can overcome that hardship because its members will care for and cooperate with each other. In contrast, a contentious family squanders its fortune on bad habits and litigations.

Politics can't stay away from business unless business decides to stay out of it.

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## You said – We say

**YOU SAID**  
*"Attack on Reaz Rahman part of Khaleda's conspiracy"*  
 -- Hanif

Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif on Wednesday alleged that the attack on BNP leader Reaz Rahman was a part of Khaleda Zia's conspiracy to create anarchy in the country. The ruling party leader also claimed that BNP activists launched the attack on Reaz, to gain political advantage by creating an unstable situation.

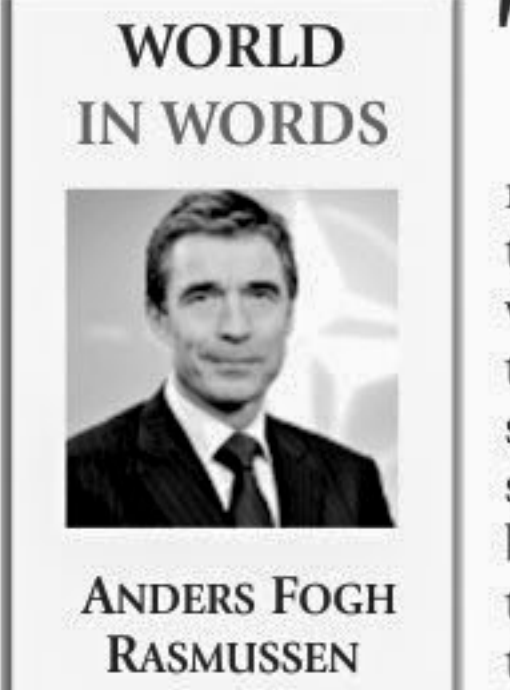
**WE SAY**

The public have been served this fare for a long time. It is surprising to see how quickly the politicians discover not only the perpetrators but also their motives. This is a blame game that the two major parties have been resorting to for a long time as one-upmanship without realising that the public are not quite the fool the politicians take them to be. What if, by the same token, the BNP retorted that the violence being perpetrated now is the work of the AL to soil BNP's image!

What our very intelligent 'political sleuths' fail to understand is that the blame game distorts the line of investigation. And when such statements come from party functionaries or responsible people in the government one cannot be faulted for concluding that there might be actual grounds for laying red herrings.

We still remember how in 2004 the then PM Khaleda Zia had suggested that Sheikh Hasina carried grenades in her handbag and perpetrated the attack herself on August 24 to embarrass the government. Nobody failed to see the motive of the 'looking for shatru's' state minister for home in 2006 when he made that comment following a blast in Mymensingh carried out by religious extremists. He tried to implicate a particular religious community in an attempt to absolve the extremists of the crime and deflect public attention from the matter. And the story of George Mia is fresh in our minds. Blame was also instantly put on the opposition after the killings of Ahsanullah Master and SAMS Kibria. The truth that eventually surfaced was quite different.

Killing of a person or attempt on a person's life is a serious matter which should not be made light of by mendacious statements. It serves not the cause of justice nor assuages the pain of the bereaved family. It does not wash with the public either.



**WORLD IN WORDS**  
**ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN**

**T**HE attack on the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* was an assault on democracy, on freedom, and on the ideals that underpin all free societies. As we face the forces of extremism and terror, we must have the courage to speak up for those ideals and to safeguard the right to say what we believe. But we must also take care to respect the fact that others have the same right.

*Charlie Hebdo* is not the first publication to have suffered for publishing images which some perceived as offensive to Islam. In 2005, when I was Prime Minister of Denmark, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* provoked international controversy by publishing twelve sketches of the Prophet Muhammad. Some Muslims, in Denmark and abroad, accused *Jyllands-Posten* of blasphemy for publishing an image of the prophet. Others said that the



images were an insult to Islam. There were calls for reprisals against the newspaper, against my government, and against Danish interests abroad.

Our response was founded on the principle that freedom of speech is one of the pillars on which democracy stands, and that if you undermine it, you undermine democracy itself. In free countries, every citizen has the right to say what he or she wants, believe what he or she wants, and criticise or mock what he or she wants -- in writing, drawings, or any other form of peaceful expression. Every citizen also has the right to disagree with another's opinions and to express that disagreement in a peaceful, legal manner.

In 2005, during the cartoons crisis, some commentators and politicians in the Muslim world claimed that the right to free speech had been abused and called for an apology and a condemnation of the cartoons, first from *Jyllands-Posten*, then from my government. To be sure, freedom of speech is a right that is best used wisely and

responsibly. But we believed, and I still believe, that it would be neither wise nor responsible to attempt to limit it, and that the correct way to respond to a perceived insult is to present a counterargument, not to mount a terrorist attack. And, in democracies, you can always take the matter to court.

That principle guided us through the 2005 crisis. We did not apologise for an independent newspaper's editorial decisions, despite great pressure from Muslim groups and governments. Nor did we seek to justify the publication of the cartoons. We simply stood up for freedom of speech.

Despite the horror and anger we feel at the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*, we must all hold fast to that principle, because to limit freedom of expression would be to weaken our own societies. The attacks on the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo* were disgusting and despicable, but if we respond to them by abridging the freedom on which our societies rest, we will be playing into the murderers' hands.

Governments must stand up for the freedom of journalists to write what they want and the freedom of every citizen to support or disagree with what they write. And journalists must continue to write and draw what they believe. Self-censorship would undermine their freedom and encourage further pressure on free speech.

In the past few days, some editors decided that the right response to the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre was to republish the magazine's cartoons. Others decided not to. Still others criticised *Charlie Hebdo's* actions. The editors had the right to make those decisions and to express themselves as they saw fit. That is the essence of democracy. The day such decisions are made for fear of reprisal is the day our freedom ends.

For citizens, freedom of speech means having the courage to speak out for what they believe, without resorting to violence -- against journalists or against the representatives of any religious belief. To shoot journalists in cold blood for printing a cartoon is a hideous crime. But so is attacking a mosque or assaulting a Muslim because of his or her faith.

There is a place for debate, even passionate debate, on the deeply moral question of how to balance freedom of speech with respect for religion. But the weapons of this debate should be words, not arms -- the keyboard, not the Kalashnikov. Every one of us has the right to our opinion. None of us has the right to kill those with whom we disagree.

The march of millions in Paris on January 11 was a magnificent expression of solidarity and peace. Every leader and legislator should strive to live up to those ideals as he or she responds to the threat of extremism.

The terrorist attacks in Paris will, one hopes, be a game changer in the defense of press freedom, and freedom in general, because millions of people have realised what is at stake. We cannot take freedom of expression for granted. We must stand up for it and defend it, even -- and perhaps especially -- when we disagree with what is being expressed.

The writer is former Prime Minister of Denmark, Secretary General of NATO and Founder and Chairman of Rasmussen Global. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2015. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

# Free speech for all

## Govt. should take care of people

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called a celebrity over phone during a live TV show to wish her on her birthday. This indicates how caring our Hon'ble PM is. The way she has been taking personal care of lots of individuals across the country speaks well of her sincerity and honesty.

But, since the start of this month, people across the country are getting burned or killed in the name of blockade. This allows ample room to say that the government is careless, in spite of a caring PM.

Entire Bangladesh is bleeding. I urge the Hon'ble Prime Minister, our sincere leader, our symbol of strength, to take care of us all. May good sense prevail and our patriotism unite us. That is the call of the day.  
**Iqbal Ali Khan**  
 Dhaka

## Who is befooling whom?

Why all on a sudden Mr Amit Shah, President of BJP, India should phone Khaleda Zia to enquire about her welfare? The BNP leaders should have realised that someone must have contacted her over phone taking the name of Amit Shah, with an ulterior motive. We are wondering whose idea it was. Did it originate from London or Dhaka or somewhere else? What a shame for the country! Who has befooled whom?

Another thing, in spite of the imposition of section 144, the ruling party arranged showdowns on January 12. The ruling party leaders and the home ministry tried to justify the violation of the law. We, the peace-loving people want to see a prosperous Bangladesh. We don't want to be befooled by our politicians anymore.  
**Tabibul Islam Babu**  
 Drama Worker, Dhanmondi  
 Dhaka

## Whither politics?

The political situation of our beloved country is deteriorating fast. It seems the deaths of common people, the cries of mothers, the burning of buses, the sufferings of the poor...nothing matters to our leaders. The demand of the people for peace is being ignored totally. Who cares about the common people?

The state minister for home affairs said that the government would compensate for any damage of vehicles during blockades. But can the government or any political party compensate for the loss of life? Both the parties should come to an understanding to resolve the political stalemate. I strongly demand for a referendum in order to decide whether the upcoming election will be organised under a neutral caretaker government.  
**Md. Rashid**  
 Department of Statistics  
 Begum Rokeya university, Rangpur

## Comments on news report, "Blockade hits border trade" (January 13, 2015)

**Rezaul Karim**  
 What about the death of democracy at the hand of Sheikh Hasina? What about freedom of speech and press?

**sirajulmo@yahoo.com**  
 Government is failing in its duty to provide safety of life and property of the ordinary people. We want strong law against hartal and blockade and picketing.

## "Khaleda blasts PM's remarks" (January 13, 2015)

**Salim Ullah**  
 How long will dirty mud-sliding continue between these two parties? People already have their back against the wall.

## Another face-off? (January 11, 2015)

**Asif**  
 It's such a pity that both the main political parties of Bangladesh always think of coming to power. Neither of these two parties thinks about the common people, so why should we show our sympathy to these two parties? I wish there could be a party that actually thinks about the common people and works for the development of our country.

**Molla A. Latif**  
 BNP may approach Dr. Kamal Hossain and Moinul Hossain, instead of seeking permission for their meetings to the police to plead in the court for them as both these high profile jurists expressed recently their opinions nullifying the authority of the police to accord permission for meetings. If the court rules in favour of them then there will be no restrictions on holding meetings by anyone anywhere, but the police only will have the authority to maintain law and order. Why creating troubles for the people when problems can be solved in the court peacefully?