

## Delinquent drug administration

### Woeful state inexcusable

TIB'S report on the state of the country's drug administration presents a dismal picture of the way the Director General Drug Administration (DGDA) is being run. We are not prepared to believe that the pervading corruption in the organisation has occurred overnight. May we ask why the DG has not taken measures to stop the malpractices knowing that some DGDA staff members have been engaged in all manners of malpractices?

Part of blame devolves on the ministry of health too for what the drug administration has come to represent -- a den of corruption -- for lax supervision. It must not be lost upon the ministry that the drug administration is not like any other directorate. Any lapse in implementation of rules and orders or instruction related to the drug sector has far-reaching impact on the lives of millions in the short and long term.

By allowing fake and spurious drugs to be produced and marketed the conniving officials of the DGDA and the errant drug producers have put the state of the nation's health at serious risk. No further delay can be brooked in arresting the situation. The relevant ordinances and rules are dated and need updating but that should not have required a TIB report for the ministry to wake up to such gross malfeasance activities of the DGDA. Its manpower shortage should be immediately made up. And last but not the least, the spurious drug producers and those who have put our health at serious risk deliberately in collusion with them must be made examples of.

## Mindless urbanisation

### Need for a clear vision

WITH a rapid economic growth and highly unfavourable land-population ratio, urbanisation has become an inevitability for Bangladesh. But what is going on in the name of urbanisation can be termed as visionless, unwieldy and mechanical development. This unfortunate fact has been re-confirmed by an eminent architect who is in the town with other world famous architects to attend a conference titled "Engage Dhaka 2015."

The mechanical outlook of city development has made the dynamic city space a concrete jungle afflicted with traffic congestion, lack of basic services, overpopulation, pollution, health hazards etc. Disorganized rebuilding and unplanned transformation has left little space for emotional and cultural growth of the city dwellers, particularly the children. It has also a devastating impact on the ecological, environmental and hydrological system.

The focus should be on building the city space in a planned way where city dwellers will have civic rights like pedestrian passage, parks, playgrounds and plazas, apart from the basic services, and top priority should be given to walking to ensure trouble free urban mobility. That's why the government needs to work on a functional pedestrian system which will be complemented by mass rapid transit.

To remain competitive, Dhaka should be built into a better connected and more livable city. It will happen only when the government will move with a clear vision of urbanisation. We fully endorse the idea of urbanism as ensemble of buildings, spaces and other physical facilities in a city which ensures collective living with a decent social and cultural bonding as well as economic vibrancy.

# RANGAMATI RIOTS

## Looking back to go forward

DEVASISH WANGZA

### Another ethnicised riot

The Rangamati riots of January 10-13, 2015 are yet another incident of ethnicised violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The district administration prohibited unlawful assemblies and imposed curfew. There was some property damage and injury, but no large-scale violence. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) held a meeting with local leaders on January 12, which was followed by a "peace rally" by people from different ethnic groups.

### The district administration and security forces' role

As antidotes to an imminent, on-going or just-concluded riotous situation, these measures were perhaps justified and rational but not from the standpoint of prevention and deterrence.

### Un-learning history and applying invisible policies

We are not learning from history. Otherwise, the report and recommendations of the Inquiry Committee of the September 2012 Rangamati Riots would have been discussed for all they are worth. But references to the past were discouraged. The officials can't be blamed. They are merely following "policy." But neither the government nor the major ruling party (or other major parties) has a CHT Policy. Then how do policy-makers guide CHT officials? Unfortunately, such guidance all too often consists of commissions and omissions in high-level directives that are overwhelmingly unwritten, often haphazard, sometimes self-contradictory, occasionally arbitrary, frequently reactive and, inevitably invisible to the public.

### Impunity again: Whither deterrence?

The aftermath of the September 2012 Riots in Rangamati—overshadowed by the more infamous Ramu incident of the following week—exemplified a continuing trend, that of impunity. The rioters went undetected and unpunished. The case of the attackers of the CHT Commission members of July 2014 is essentially similar. The impunity to the rioters and arsonists of May 20, 1992, was even more blatant. While punishment to law-breakers is not the only remedial measure, by undermining the real and potential value of deterrence through punishment, the state's message to would-be rioters effectively amounts to saying, "Go ahead. You can riot again. No one will punish you."

### Distinguishing rioters from private defenders

In any process to punish the real rioters, we must distinguish the attackers from those who sought to defend their lives, bodies and property in accordance with law. The defenders were Rangamatidwellers who took up defensive positions within their localities. Both in 2012 and last week, armed rioters were seen moving about within the town's thoroughfares, away from their places of residence (outside of Rangamati?). Having ordinary citizens invoke the Right of Private Defence signifies their lack of confidence on state-led security measures. It was disheartening to see pre-teen boys carrying sticks to "defend" themselves against attackers (real or imagined)!

### Pahari perceptions of Bangali bias

Eyewitnesses of the September 2012 incidents told me that rioters armed with

knives and sticks that openly passed through major thoroughfares of Rangamati in daytime and committed violence were "Bangalis." There were similar allegations on last week's incidents too, but the number of the rioters in the latter case was smaller. This is a very widespread belief within the Pahari community. For the sake of long-term peace, ethnic harmony and stability, this allegation needs to be looked into and the truth or otherwise uncovered. If indeed there were Pahari rioters, they too need to be identified and punished.

### Pahari-Bangali peace alliance

Most Rangamati-dwellers, Pahari and Bangali alike, are law-abiding and peaceful. Both in September 2012 and recently, many Paharis and Bangalis jointly exposed false rumours, stood by each other and even provided shelter and safety to members of the other community. It is therefore clear that peace-loving Rangamatians can unite, irrespective of ethnicity, and isolate the violent elements.

### Recommendation on independent commission of inquiry and multi-ethnic police

I wrote to the DC, being legally mandated to advise him. Firstly, I suggested that a Commission of Inquiry be constituted, and secondly, that police from different ethnic, linguistic, religious and birthplace backgrounds, including



women be deployed (women often bring their unique peace and integrity dividends). I stressed that the commission should be high-powered, independent and impartial, and with adequate authority backed by penal sanction, such as by establishing it under the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1956.

### Previous inquiry commissions on the CHT

Independence and impartiality can be ensured through persons of expertise and integrity. The commission could be led by a retired judge of the Supreme Court and include civil society members. In the past, Supreme Court judges were appointed as single-member Inquiry Commissioners (Logang, 1992 and Nanyasor, 1993) or as heads of multiple-member commissions (Kalpana Chakma, 1996).

### The invisible reports

A long-standing malaise in the CHT is to not make public the reports of Inquiry Commissions and to refrain from acting upon their recommendations. Therefore, the commission's terms-of-reference must be appropriate and its report made public and acted upon.

### Multi-ethnic police

It is widely believed that having multi-ethnic police would (a) facilitate intelligence gathering; (b) provide insights into relevant social, cultural and ethnic

dynamics; (c) help prevent ethnic discrimination; and (d) instil public confidence about the neutrality of the government and the police.

### Allegations of biased security action versus professional and non-discriminatory conduct

In the case of the May 1992 incidents, I had heard of several allegations about "pro-Bangali" and "anti-Pahari" conduct on the part of the almost 100% ethnically Bengali security personnel (police, military and para-military). I heard of fewer such allegations for the September 2012 events (the District Police now included a few Pahari personnel) and, so far, none for last week's incidents. On the whole, the conduct of the police, military and BGB in last week's case was regarded as restrained and efficient, and hence, commendable. However, we must not expect security personnel to act like saints in all cases. They are human beings behind their uniforms. Training and departmental discipline may deter unlawful and discriminatory conduct, but not always. Therefore, the need of an ethnically mixed police force, including Paharis, remains.

### Law and order under the District Councils and police-military cooperation

The District Councils Laws of 1989 provide for the management of law and order and the appointment of local



police from the different ethnic groups by the concerned councils. The law, however, has not been acted upon. Such policy neglect needs to be reversed. The army, along with the BGB, can and should be deployed, where necessary, to aid the police. But in the ordinary case, prevention of riots ought to be treated as an ordinary policing matter. It is the police who are trained to handle such matters, not the military.

### Examples of ethnically mixed policing

There are examples in numerous countries, such as UK and USA, where racially mixed police were deployed to quell race riots, with positive results. I saw Pahari-Bangali police in Tripura State, even though insurgency by a few indigenous guerrilla groups was then still continuing.

### The way ahead?

I hope that the pessimistic prognosis I have hinted at will be proved wrong and the midnight slumbers of Rangamatians will not be shattered by the screech of sirens and loudspeaker announcements, and parents won't have to clumsily and hesitantly define "curfew" and "Section 144" to their pre-teen children.

The writer is the Chakma Raja, Chief of the Chakma Circle, a barrister (an Advocate at the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh) and a member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Politicians, not leaders

All our politicians have one thing in common. They all love to hold the country hostage. They take the people to be fools; they think people believe whatever they say. They choose the easy way out. Politicians in the government do not have to do much except uttering a few words of 'wisdom' while sitting in their armchairs. Those out of government also do not have to do much. They simply say, 'Hartal' or 'Oborodh', and go home and sleep. Instead of having an impact on the government it punishes the people. People would like to see them influence policy of the government but not by depriving the people of their right to live. But that would mean hard work, getting out of their homes, standing in the sun and rain. Politicians are not supposed to do that. It's the duty of the people to do the dirty job of going out on the streets, get arrested, get burnt and get killed. I wonder when the politicians of my country will learn to lead.

Shahjahan Hafiz  
 Gulshan, Dhaka

### An individual can bring about change

I was pleased to read that the Freedom Fighters of Bangladesh presented a special Certificate of Appreciation to Sir Frank Peters in recognition of his efforts to eradicate corporal punishment from our schools.

The horror of corporal punishment still continues in many classrooms throughout the country. The persistence of Sir Frank Peters is unmatched and he's dealing it with logic, compassion and commonsense.

His writings have proved that he has the best interests of Bangladesh at heart and that he is truly a friend of this country. Other than the wisdom and logic that can be found in his writings, perhaps the greatest lesson I've learnt from him (and I tell my children) is never to give up and that one individual can bring about a change without any help or support from the rich, non-active organisations.

Many people from time to time vocalize about this issue, but once said it's soon forgotten and there's never any follow-up, but not Sir Frank Peters. In his passion to rid the school system of corporal punishment, he refuses to let go his grip and demonstrates great compassion in doing so.

I thank him on behalf of many families like mine and I wish his admirable campaign great success.

Tania Matin  
 Badda, Dhaka

### Paris mayhem

We condemn in the strongest terms the attack on French journalists by terrorist in Paris and mourn the death of 17 French nationals.

However, dubbing the terrorists as 'Islamists' who are actually misguided Muslims is not correct. It only alienates the moderate Muslims who are in the majority.

The inability of the West and US media to understand and appreciate the differences between Eastern, Middle Eastern culture and Western culture is regrettable. In our culture Prophets, famous personalities, social reformers, parents etc. are held in very high esteem, irrespective of religion. They are considered as 'out of bounds' for cartoons, lampooning etc. In the name of freedom of expressions, some irresponsible section of the western media is hurting the sentiments of more than 1.6 billion Muslims constituting around 25% of world population. And if that is championed as freedom of expression, then exercise of this freedom ought to be done very carefully. We do not want to see any further repetition of the Paris mayhem.

Dr. SN Mamoon  
 Dhaka

## AL should honour its promise

SHAKHAWAT LITON

AL has upheld a popular phrase that says promises are made to be broken. In the run-up to the January 5 elections, the party had promised to take initiative to create national consensus on basic issues such as upholding democratic process and ensuring uninterrupted development. The promise was very significant in terms of the mode of the January 5 parliamentary election and the then political turmoil.

For creating the national consensus, there was no alternative but to open talks with all political parties and civil society organisations. But, the policymakers of the party and the government seem to have forgotten the pledge. They may think that holding talks with BNP will weaken AL's position as the rival party will argue for early election. So, they may think appropriate use of force would make the BNP incapable of raising a strong street agitation. This strategy may succeed for the time being, but it will not create an atmosphere congenial for upholding democratic process. It will rather deepen the crisis and widen the division between the parties.

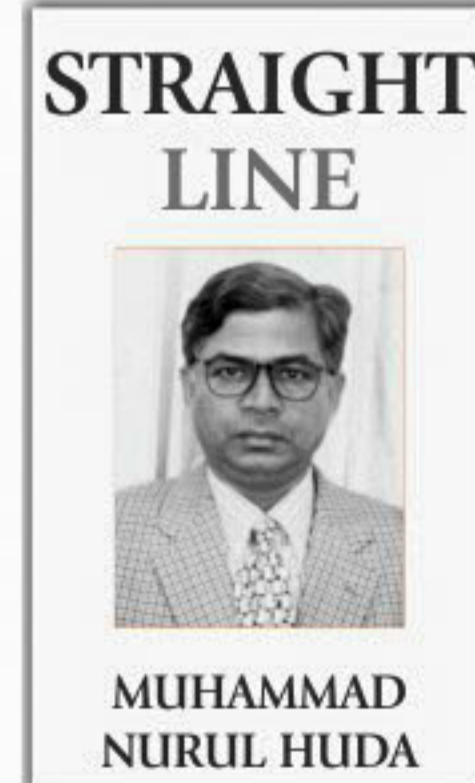
The AL-led government's reluctance to deliver on the electoral pledge to improve the political situation was also evident in its last tenure in 2009-2013. The AL, in its electoral manifesto titled "Charter for Change," had promised to inculcate decency and tolerance in the country's political culture and formulate a code of conduct for political parties. But neither the AL nor its government had taken any step to deliver on the pledge, which was made in the wake of bitter experiences of the political turmoil that led to declaration of emergency in January 2007. Failure to deliver on the promises had worsened the confrontational culture in politics. The result was the January 5 one-sided election.

To get rid of the current political crisis, the AL high command should bank on their electoral pledge made before the January 5 election. In the talks, the AL may say that it could consider the BNP's demand for holding the next polls under a non-partisan administration, but for this the BNP must wait for another four years to let the present government complete its term. This strategy may help AL to retain state power for three or four years.

We often claim that we follow the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. In the Westminster system, there was a long political strategy exercised by the successive governments since 1945 to hold the general election earlier than the scheduled time to test people's mandate. The average length of time between general elections since 1945, according to a BBC report of January 2014, has been three years and 10 months. The present government in Bangladesh can take lesson from this practice to come out of the current impasse.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

## The Charlie wave



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THOUSANDS of demonstrators have used the hash tag Je Suis Charlie (I am Charlie) on the streets of Paris and other European cities to show their solidarity with the fallen cartoonists who were most brutally murdered on January 7 by Islamic fundamentalists. While sympathising with the grieving French people and condemning the dastardly attack it is indeed difficult to unreservedly declare one's affinity with the philosophy or the modus operandi of the Charlie Hebdo magazine. The points are clear—should there be unfettered freedom for a satirical magazine to indiscriminately hurt the sentiments of practitioners of a religion?

The magazine in question prides itself on protecting and defending freedom of opinion without recognising that exercising unbridled freedom is actually prejudicing the rights of others. It does not take note of the reality that in Europe no criticism of Jewish religion is tolerated. In fact, 80 year old cartoonist Maurice Sinet had to lose his job in Charlie Hebdo magazine for refusing to apologize for allegedly insulting Jewish religion. So, if satirising Jewish religion is not acceptable what is the justification for hurting Muslim religious beliefs and sentiments?

The issue is whether printing news or cartoons that carry the potential of causing death of many is responsible journalism. Publishing of instigating news or spreading hatred, quite clearly, should run counter to the principles of responsible journalism. It is interesting to note that while demonstrating nonchalance in the face of terrorist threat many European magazines have reprinted and are reprinting the old cartoons lampooning the Prophet of Islam (pbuh). The mainstream media in UK did not publish those cartoons. Understandably, such discretion has been exercised to maintain balance with reality.

The BBC editorial guidelines urged exercise of caution

and consideration in the display of religious symbols and photographs, particularly those that might cause insult. It is well known that the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) cannot be depicted in any form or shape. Therefore, one could ask if there is a deliberate effort to create an inflammatory situation by hurting one's faith by republishing the same cartoons that caused hundreds of deaths a decade ago.

One can recollect the brutal murders of 77 young men and women by a radicalised Christian youth in Norway in 2011. This terrorist carried a political declaration that was extremely anti-Islam. The whole of Europe apprehends the rise of unprecedented anti-Islam sectarian politics. In peace-loving Sweden there have been attacks including arson in mosques in Stockholm. Media Moghul Rupert Murdoch has said that Muslims have to bear the responsibility for the attack in France. In Germany, there are increasing demonstrations against Muslim immigrants. The voices of rejuvenated far-right political leaders are becoming dangerously strident against the ethos of a multi-racial society in Britain.

The unfortunate reality is that the strategy of responsible editorial policy to avoid insult of religion faces real challenges, particularly in the West. The question is, do institutions like Charlie Hebdo make an effort to factor in the historical and social in their work? Does this magazine take note of the arming, training, and remote controlling of the mercenaries and beheaders by the West?

Is the religion of Islam a planned target in post-Cold War Europe? Should a supposedly tolerant society continuously caricature the prophet of its minority population and still boast of its democratic credentials?

The mayhem in Paris must be condemned without hesitation and in an unqualified manner. However, there should be distinction between mourning and championing Charlie Hebdo as a bastion of free speech. Ridiculing explicitly a fundamental fabric of Muslim culture is unabashed cultural incitement and thoughtless journalism. The discerning minds shall have a problem with Charlie Hebdo.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

### Comments on news report, "India won't interfere in Bangladesh's internal affairs," published on January 13, 2015

#### New Generation

We sincerely believe that the assurance is nothing but diplomatic. We want to be hopeful.

#### Dev Saha

Democracy can't be imposed from outside. We should grow up and learn how to build good democratic institutions for a sustainable democracy.

\*\*\*\*

### "Terrorism: What's Islam got to do with it?" (January 13, 2015)

#### ATM Shirajul Haque

Very well written article. We all should have a clear idea about Islam. Probably our lack of knowledge is creating opportunities for wrong interpretation.

#### Aftab Sheikh

Very true and informative. Hope Muslims understand Islam and practice the moderate path. Many thanks to the writer.

#### Tapan Hoq

Thank you for writing this timely article on Islam and terrorism. It is eye-opening.