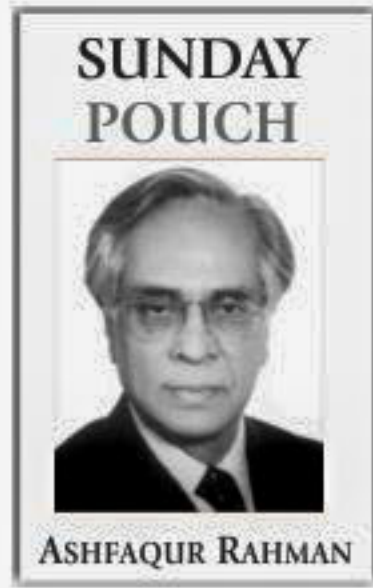


CHARLIE HEBDO
**'Your freedom ends
 where my nose begins!'**



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

CHARLIE Hebdo, a French satirical magazine printed from Paris, is again in the international news. This January, it published objectionable cartoons caricaturing our Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). This has inflamed passions across the Muslim world. It also led to twelve people including two French policemen being gunned down. The killing was a heinous act that is condemnable and cannot on any count be supported. This, however, is not the first time that Charlie Hebdo has done so. In 2006, its decision to reprint inflammatory cartoons of our

assassins were killed by the French police soon after. Now that the tit-for-tat was delivered by the French authorities, it is time to understand why the three assassins were keen to stop Charlie Hebdo in its tracks. Were they justified or did they go overboard? There is no denying that the initial mayhem was wrong. These three had no right to take the lives of the cartoonists, the editor and the policemen. But the moot question remains. Why did Charlie Hebdo lampoon the Holy Prophet (pbuh)? Its answer is that the satirical magazine had been caricaturing whoever it found convenient, including Jesus Christ as well as Jews and French politicians. So, Charlie Hebdo thought it was not doing anything wrong by ridiculing the Prophet of Islam (pbuh). It said that this was continuing an old French tradition of free

Muslims being in prisons in France. The important point is that Charlie Hebdo has no business to trash any religion or community just to continue a French tradition. The matter of free speech is dear to all people around the world. All communities have precious history of their own sacrifices, including giving up their lives to protect free speech. It is not just a French tradition only. What is clear is that the freedom to speak should not impinge on the right of other individuals to hold and cherish some of their sacred beliefs. No one should have the right to punch another person on the nose. Because that is the point where an attacker's right ends. The attacked then has the right to counter punch. Charlie Hebdo has been punching the nose of Muslims, Jews and Christians repeatedly. In fact, it is taking liberties arrogantly in areas

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PHOTO: AFP

Prophet (pbuh), which were originally published in a Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten*, was described by the then French president as a 'manifest provocation.' The magazine continued to provoke the sentiments of the Muslims and the result has been this tragedy now. Two days back, an op-ed by former Danish Prime Minister Anders Foch Rasmussen was printed in a local newspaper. He supported Charlie Hebdo for its "right to free speech" and for printing what it considered to be appropriate. It was, unfortunately, not a correct stance taken by a learned person. In fact, it showed the moral bankruptcy which many are suffering from. The sad killing of some employees of Charlie Hebdo, which included the editor as well as the principal cartoonist, was followed by quick reprisal. All the

speech which began immediately after the French Revolution in 1789. What kind of conclusion can the world draw about France and its treatment of French Muslims, who are the largest in number in the European Union? Some 60% of France's present prison population of 68,000 are Muslims, as mentioned in a French parliamentary report last year. If this is so, Charlie Hebdo is working hard to prove that it is the teaching of Islam's Prophet (pbuh) that has led followers to commit crimes in France. This is utter nonsense, and French leaders should take steps so that the world does not get this impression. It is the increasing marginalisation of Muslim immigrants that is the cause behind so many Muslims being criminalised there. It is the failure of the French policy in creating an inclusive society that is reflected in so many

where it is not legally or ethically allowed. Pope Francis only this week pointed this out while answering questions about Charlie Hebdo. The French mainstream should take note and should not allow Charlie Hebdo to repeat the mistake. Already, the magazine has repeated the folly by printing a 'survivor' issue, which seems to have been sold out many times over. In their enthusiasm to celebrate their right to free speech they have overlooked the fact that they have trampled over the right of others who do not share their view. In the 21st century we cannot feel proud of our perceptions which were relevant in the eighteenth century. The writer is a former Ambassador and a commentator on contemporary issues. E-Mail : ashfaq303@gmail.com

Politically charged statements of law enforcer chiefs

Are they officials of the republic or surrogating a political party?

THE recent politically charged statements made by chiefs of law enforcement agencies give us much cause for concern, for they signal that instead of maintaining independence as per their mandate, law enforcement agencies are now toeing one particular party-line. The BGB chief declared that, BGB members, whose directive is to guard the borders, will now take to the streets of the country to maintain law and order, using lethal weapons if need be to kill perpetrators of violence. Meanwhile, the police IGP commented that Khaledia Zia's demand for rallies is disrespectful of the law, and strongly criticised talk show guests who castigate the government for its anti-democratic practices. The Rab chief, asserting that strong measures will be taken to counter terrorism of anti-liberation forces, iterated the AL party-line that that election would not be held before 2019. These statements, which unabashedly echo the government's political position, raise urgent questions about whether the law enforcers are servants of the republic or of a particular political party. The mandate of law enforcers is to protect the republic in a professional, impartial and independent manner. Given the blatantly partisan comments, are we to assume that law enforcers have now become the mouth-piece of the government? We must not forget that independent law enforcement is a basic principle and requirement of democracy and rule of law. While we welcome strong measures to deter violence on the general public, we cannot condone arbitrary arrests, shootings and suppression of the opposition in the name of maintaining law and order. That is a violation of constitutional as well as human rights.

Salinity forces livelihood changes Southwestern coastal areas hit hard

AGRICULTURE has been hardest hit, with practically all the area in Mongla and surrounding coastal areas rendered off-limits for farming, primarily due to shrimp farming that uses brackish water. Shrimp remains a lucrative business as the catch is a valuable export item to European Union and the United States. That said, the cost of allowing shrimp industry to prosper in the south has been the sharp fall in production of paddy. With more and more land being diverted to shrimp farming, the dominant crop Aman and to a lesser extent, Aus and Boro, grown traditionally have plummeted in the face of deliberate saline water retention on farmland for shrimp and the congestion of canals putting a squeeze on freshwater supply. As per Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data during fiscal 2013-14, the area for Aman production was 5,020 acres with rice output estimated at 6,277 tonnes. High salinity, both manmade and as an after-effect of cyclone 'Aila' has resulted in a 75 per cent reduction in paddy output in many areas of Satkhira. Even saline-resistant crop varieties have failed to do well. According to Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI), the level of salinity in the affected areas is beyond the tolerable limits of saline-resistant rice varieties. Not only has this made a change in livelihoods for the bulk of farmers in coastal areas, the effects of brackish water to sustain shrimp industry is threatening the survival of both plant and livestock.

Lack of dustbins prompts littering

RIDWAN QAUIUM
WHEN one needs to dispose of trash in public areas in Dhaka or in any other city in the country, one will have to walk for quite some time before finding a dustbin or a designated waste disposal area. However, most people do not want to go through the trouble of carrying their trash until they find a dustbin to discard it. The lack of dustbins at regular intervals is prompting the public to litter, making the cities unclean and unhygienic. To make it easy for the public to discard trash, many cities around the world provide dustbins at regular intervals in public places. To ensure that the public is aware about the negative impacts of littering, many cities regularly conduct social awareness campaigns against it. Children in schools in primary level are taught to discard trash at the proper areas. Besides providing dustbins at regular intervals and conducting social awareness campaigns, many cities have also imposed fines for littering. The above collective measures against littering encourage the public to discard trash in proper waste disposal areas, and also make it easier for the authority to keep the city clean. In this era of recycling and sustainability many cities have also provided separate bins for biodegradable waste and recyclable waste. This on one hand raises awareness about recycling and the environment among the public and on the other hand it makes it easier for the city authority to separate the trash, making recycling more efficient. Due to lack of campaigns to raise awareness against littering and absence of dustbins at regular intervals in public places in Dhaka and other cities, many people have got into the habit of littering. Some households even discard their trash through the windows. Open trash due to littering has made our cities look and feel unpleasant as it pollutes the air, water and soil, and also spreads diseases. A few weeks ago, an organisation arranged a countrywide clean up activity where thousands of volunteers participated in more than forty districts to clean up the open trash in their surroundings for two hours. The volunteers also tried to raise awareness among the public against littering. However, this type of clean up activity to raise awareness against littering among the public in the long run may not be successful if dustbins are not placed at regular intervals in the cities and if fines are not imposed for littering. Therefore, to prevent littering and to ensure a healthy environment the city authorities, with support from private organizations, should provide dustbins at regular intervals and also consider imposing fines for littering in places where dustbins are located. The writer is a transportation engineer working in Thailand.

Formula for a legal non-partisan caretaker government

ABDUL MATIN
EVERYBODY is talking about the talks but not many people suggest what the leaders should talk about. The positions of the government and the opposition are clear. If the talks take place, one party will demand an immediate election under a non-partisan caretaker government. The other party will insist that the next election will be held as per constitution in 2019 and under the present government. If both the parties stick to their points, the talks would collapse like they did in the past. In that case, the present confrontation with accompanying violence, arson and killing will continue until we mutually annihilate each other. This will be one way to solve the problem. The other way, a saner one, will involve a compromise in which both the parties should agree to make concessions on the basis of reciprocity. No party should expect to have the whole cake. Without this spirit, there will be no justification for talks. I want to be frank here. I have no legal background. While making the proposal, I am guided simply by my common sense and a genuine desire to have peace in the country. It bled in the past and it has been bleeding profusely now. Is it not enough? It is the desire of each and every citizen of the country that the bleeding and the stalemate must stop NOW. As I understand, there are two main issues: (i) demand for a non-partisan caretaker government and (ii) the schedule of the election. The government abolished the caretaker government following a judgement of the Supreme Court that had declared it to be illegal because the constitution does not permit any unelected government to rule the country. That's fair enough. Is it not then possible to legalise the caretaker government by indirectly electing the non-partisan members of the caretaker cabinet as members of parliament like the thirty female MPs are elected? In that case, there should not be any constitutional bar to have a caretaker government. If the concept is acceptable, the government and the opposition will each submit a list of 10 non-partisan persons to the president at least 120 days before the dissolution of the parliament. The president would pick five from each list. The ten desired changes. The caretaker government will be in office for three months to hold the election and resign after the election when a new government is ready to take over. Once legalised, the system can continue for a long period. If the government accepts the provision of the elected caretaker government, it will be a big achievement for the opposition and a major concession by the government. The opposition should, therefore, reciprocate by conceding the other demand for an immediate election and allow the present government to complete its full term. The non-partisan members of parliament may be selected from retired judges of the Supreme Court, retired professors of universities, retired senior civil servants and military personnel, members of the civil society, heads of NGOs, renowned professionals and cultural/literary personnel with no known political affiliation. The proposed formula can form the basis for a dialogue between the government and the opposition. Once the two main issues are settled, other issues like abandonment of the path of violence and prolonged abstention from the parliament, de-politicisation of the administration, reduction of corruption, and improvement of the human rights situation etc. can be resolved gradually. The talks should be moderated by the Speaker of the parliament or by any other person acceptable to both the parties and attended by the two top leaders and their advisers so that decisions can be taken promptly during the meetings. This appears to be a fair deal which should be acceptable to both the government and the opposition if they have the welfare of the country and its people in their hearts and souls. The writer is a senior nuclear engineer.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
 letters@thedailystar.net

Save the country from destruction

On talk shows, many participants often say that "one party wants to remain in power and the other party wants to go to power." I cannot agree with it. The present government came to power in a devious way, after staging many dramas. They also declared that within a short time an inclusive election would be held. But one year has passed and now the government is saying that there will be no election before 2019. So it is clear that it wants to cling to power at any cost, caring little how it affects the country. On the other hand, to come to power, the other party must have people's support. Without people's verdict in their favour, they will not be able to form a government. It is impossible for them to come to power in any other way. The country is heading towards a perilous future. The party in power must abjure its desire to remain at the helm and the BNP must shun the path of anarchy to save our beloved country from destruction. Nur Jahan Chittagong

New, committed political parties wanted

Bangladeshi politics is by and large nothing but family dominated drama of poor taste. Most of the so-called leaders' time and energy is wasted by infighting among themselves. Autocracy is garbed as democracy in our country. Some politicians lack the dedication. There are a few noble exceptions and hence their political life is short. We badly need some new options that can stop this trend. What about a 'Citizens' Party' whose sole objective will be trying to meet the citizens' need? Any committed comers? Befuddled Bangali On e-mail

When Bangladesh is burning....

With loss of lives, burnt buses and other vehicles, explosion of crude bombs and cocktails here and there, Bangladesh is being torn to shreds by the BNP blockade and the government's intransigence to stick to its own position. The most damaging aspect of the blockade is total halt of communications from the districts to the capital. Just before the blockade, my uncle had a heart attack and his wife was frenetically for a transport for two days to come to Dhaka from Dinajpur for his treatment. And finally when she could finally avail a police guarded transport and reached Dhaka, my uncle had expired. And this is just the tip of the iceberg; imagine people's predicaments all over the country. Will Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina not come to an understanding when Bangladesh is burning? A. H. Dewan Dhaka Cantt. Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Khaleda's adviser shot in Gulshan," published on January 14, 2015

Rezaul Karim
 Such kind of action will not save this illegal regime.

"20-party to toughen blockade, AL to resist" (Jan. 14, 2015)

Akhtar
 Let the law enforcing agencies do their job. The government should take necessary action to stop the violence.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed
 Democracy is now a big joke in the country.

"Education in disarray" (Jan. 14, 2015)

New Generation
 What is not in disarray now around us? We, the common people can face discrimination and other unkind acts; but who can resist?

"Where are we heading to?" (Jan. 15, 2015)

Snr Citizen
 We are a laughing stock for the world, surely heading towards destruction!