

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

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## Major highways near completion

*But why the time and cost overrun?*

It is good to know that work on two major highways, i.e. Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Mymensingh, being converted to dual-carriageways is near completion. Whilst that is the good news, both projects have been plagued by repeated failure to meet deadlines for completion and the cost escalation has been stupendous. The highway connecting Dhaka to the port city of Chittagong is arriving three years late and project cost has risen nearly 2.5 times to Tk 3,800 crore. And the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway has taken two years more and final project cost is double the original estimate of Tk 904 crore.

We find it disheartening to see that this has become very much the norm in practically all major infrastructure projects in the country. There has been constant delay in implementation due to lack of proper planning. Why couldn't sourcing of various construction materials be done with proper contracts management prior to the start of such major projects? Running out of soil for earthwork, crisis in procuring stones for roadwork and so on, point to a contractor which is either not up to the task of managing such projects or there is a lack of coordination between the contractor and the department looking after highways.

The benefits of these two expanded highways are obvious. It will allow for faster movement of goods and people and facilitate trade and tourism. Yet, at the end of the day, it is ultimately the tax payers' money that is squandered when such essential infrastructure projects continually miss deadlines and project costs are revised upward.

## Champion of Orphans

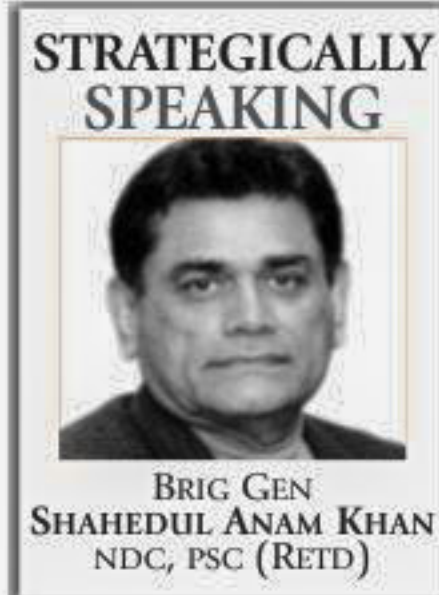
*His initiative should be supported*

A young man named Faridul Islam Farid, who defied all obstacles to get an education, has shown us a sense of commitment to society that should be applauded and emulated. He has chosen to educate the most vulnerable group of society – orphans. With the help of his friends, Farid saved enough money to help support orphans of his locality so that they could be educated. His initiative – Etim Unnayan Foundation now supports 87 children, providing them with education materials and stipends.

The fact that these children have been given a chance to pursue their dreams demonstrates how the altruism and drive of individuals can bring about social change. Farid believes education will help these orphans to be more aware of their rights, citing the example of relatives who grab property they would normally be entitled to.

Children from poor backgrounds are deprived of many basic rights to begin with; for orphans it is even worse. Although there are government-run orphanages in the country, they are not enough to accommodate the number of orphans who are treated with neglect and often have no access to education. Farid's endeavour is laudable but it requires support from the government and society at large in order to reach more such children.

Besides financial support of such initiatives that show the selfless side of many young people, it is important for societal attitudes towards orphans to change. They must be valued as we value all other children and be provided with not only education, food and shelter, but also love and affection which are also crucial for a child's development. As a society we must treat all our children with kindness, respect and generosity.



BRIG GEN  
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
NDC, PSC (RETD)

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

THE script is familiar; the cast recognisable, the performance well orchestrated if not well rehearsed. Some MPs of the ruling party have targeted an editor who, in his most good-natured manner and in an introspective lighthearted mood, made a frank admission at a TV talk show of having made an error of judgement in running the statements of some politicians incarcerated during the regime of 1/11, admitting to acts of impropriety of theirs as well as their top leaders at various times, particularly when they were at the helm of affairs of the country. And these stories were provided by the joint interrogation cell that had interrogated these political personalities, and were carried by almost all newspapers and TV channels of the country in June and July of 2007.

These AL MPs are calling for the head of *The Daily Star* editor for running what they claim to be tendentious stories. The PM's son Sajeeb Wajed Joy called for the editor to be tried for treason on the grounds that he "assisted in a military coup" by running these stories and apparently smeared the current PM. This was followed by several talk-shows participated by some well-known faces demanding banning *The Daily Star*.

I feel we should address some inexactitudes in the statement of Sajeeb Wajed Joy before going further. The editor never, "admitted he published false corruption stories" against his mother Sheikh Hasina. What he said was, and this has been repeated ad nauseam by the channel which interviewed him and set the editor up

for this in the first place, and a web news portal, he made a mistake in not having those independently verified before running them. The veracity of the stories and its contents have never been contested by those who made those comments. His only slipup, if at all, was that he did not have those independently verified. I wonder whether he had the scope or the wherewithal of verifying such statements! However, just to jog the memories of those seeking the editor's scalp, it was not only *The Daily Star* that ran the stories but almost every other major newspaper and telecast over all

ceremony of the Chief Advisor in Bangabhaban. And that is not all; the credit for the change was claimed by the AL as, "the fruit of our struggle." And the caretaker government was given the undertaking that all its actions would be accorded validity should the AL come to power in the next election, which it did. In fact, it is the general view that free and fair elections would not have been possible without the 1/11 government because they brought in a proper voter list, cancelling 1.3 crore false voters. In the final analysis, it can be said that without 1/11, there would not have been free, fair polls which the AL won. So AL

wonder whether all these newspapers should also be banned and all those editors that carried the stories be tried for treason too.

Digs are being made at the editor of this paper for dabbling in politics and we are having to encounter new theories of politics and journalism from various quarters questioning the role of a newspaper in 'politically influencing' the readers. Heavens take pity on us! What are newspapers for if not to help people make up their mind in their choices in every aspect of their life including politics, and that includes the need to choose competent, honest, educated public representatives. This awareness endeavour was well undertaken by the sponsors of the project including *The Daily Star*. And this has gone towards fulfilling the major objective of any newspaper, which is to inform the public and keep the principle of people's right to know in the foremost of a paper's guiding code.

Those who say that journalists have no business to talk about politics, to them I say, one doesn't have to be a politician to talk about politics and what ails it, just as one does not have to be a doctor to comment on the issue of health in the country.

In other democratic countries, newspapers endorse different political parties and candidates without having to apologise for it. Does it mean that they are compromising their honesty and objectivity?

*The Daily Star* Editor had the gumption to admit an error. And he stands out amongst his peers as a man of dignity and honesty. Those who believe in the true essence of journalism and the freedom of the media should applaud his courage. I do, and without any reservation or apprehension.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.

*As for the military coup, history bears out that the intervention of the military came well before the stories were published. A whole series of events, starting from BNP extending the judges' retirement age and ending with President Iajuddin making himself the chief advisor, engendered 1/11.*

major TV channels.

As for the military coup, history bears out that the intervention of the military came well before the stories were published. And there is stark contradiction in this as well as the comments of those in the AL leadership about the issue of 1/11. A whole series of events, starting from BNP extending the judges' retirement age and ending with President Iajuddin making himself the chief advisor, engendered 1/11.

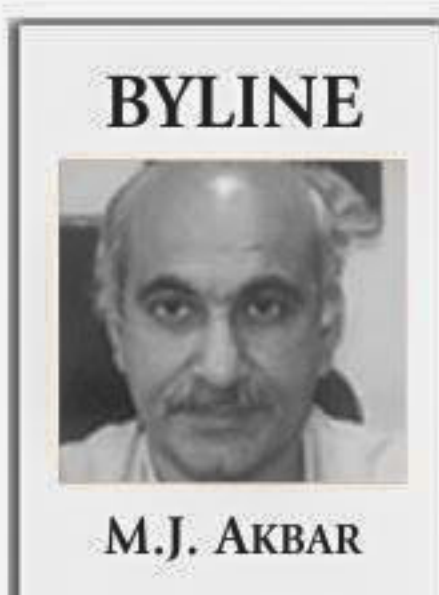
Not only was the change welcomed by the opposition AL, the AL had also validated the new dispensation by their very presence at the swearing-in-

is the beneficiary of 1/11.

It should be made clear that there has never been any attempt by this newspaper, directly or indirectly, to perpetuate the tenure of the caretaker government, on the contrary, it had editorialised very often the requirement of holding the election as soon as possible. One thing that militated against holding the election sooner than it was held in December 2008 was the justifiable demand of the AL for a new electoral roll since the old one was suspected of major interpolations.

As for banning and trying, since almost all newspapers ran the stories, we

# The ears of Astronomy



BYLINE  
M.J. AKBAR

AS an enquiry, science has generally left me perplexed. During first encounters in school, physics was a bit of blank and chemistry intriguing only when it lit a few flames. Mathematics was more welcome, with its logic and assumptions, but anything built on a notional zero can only be considered a philosophy.

And then this week, in the pre-dawn stillness of a hotel room, I casually switched on a television news channel. Science suddenly acquired an enthralling dimension, an elixir from the amalgam of past, present and so many possible futures. In stunned silence, a phrase from literature, which had told me what to expect while reason taught me to reject as beyond belief, took an enchanting reality: the music of the spheres. I heard the ethereal, haunting melody of two black holes colliding a billion light years away, pulled by gravitation. At an intellectual level, Pythagoras had met Einstein. The mystic-mathematician of ancient Greece has proposed that all celestial bodies moved in harmony, that each had a unique hum imperceptible to the human ear. This was music of the spheres, a concept that cast a magnetic spell on poets.

For an individual like me, bystander to the genius of generations and the audacious brilliance of contemporary scientists, the music opened the mind to linkages across the universe that offered a radical new meaning to the essence of existence, time and space. Life is but the passage of time which ends abruptly in a void. What happens thereafter is a conundrum whose answer is available only in the certainties of faith and doctrine, and not the uncertainties of human intellectual endeavour.

But this endeavour has now proved

that there is sound in the universe, in addition to gravity. In other words, elements of human experience do exist in worlds elsewhere. Sound is no longer just a function of one of the human senses but of eternal existence. I can only repeat a statement made by Szabolcs Marka, a Columbia University professor who is on the LIGO [Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory] team, to *The New York Times*: "I think this will be one of the major breakthroughs in physics for a long time. Everything else in

knowledge. It is easy to overestimate the drama of discovery. Scientists repeatedly warn against hyperbole. They take pains over every step: 'painstaking' is clearly a word that comes from a laboratory or an observatory. Lifetimes are lost in the conversion of information into fact, and even fact is acknowledged as temporary, awaiting the next stride into the unknown.

But it is equally easy to underestimate a discovery. Perhaps I am over-reacting in my excitement but I prefer to err on the side of optimism. Surely, the

Our imagination has always been inspired by the promise of time reversal. When Albert Einstein was shaping his ideas, H.G. Wells was penning *The Time Machine*. Indian philosophy has always dismissed time as an illusion, a necessary requirement for belief in reincarnation. LIGO scientists have recorded the warps and volatility of time. Time has more dimensions than our mind can marshal. What next? Where next?

Would it be a descent from sublime to the ridiculous to mention astrology?



astronomy is like the eye. Finally, astronomy grew ears. We have never had ears before."

Think of the profound difference, so eloquently described. Sight emerges from the human eye, and travels as far as human capability. Sound arrives from somewhere else; and now we know that this somewhere else can be a billion light years away. The eye is subjective. The ear is objective.

We seem to be on the brink, once again, of another decisive leap forward beyond the existing frontiers of

excitement of discovery lies precisely in its ability to scatter more questions into the air than it answers on the ground? More than two thousand years of questions separated Pythagoras from Einstein, and a century of relentless effort lay between Einstein and the Virgo Collaboration and LIGO team.

Is the universe, whose extent we cannot comprehend, a well-conceived design rather than a series of random accidents, as much conventional "anti-God" writing argues? Is there existence outside the timelines of this earth?

Astrology does not have the dressing or rigour of science but its hold on our convictions is surely evidence of something more than collective insecurity. The daily or weekly forecasts in media are obviously nonsense but the reverence that the horoscope commands across cultures hints at some back story that has been lost.

I don't know the answers. I only know the questions.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist and author. Currently, he is the National Spokesperson of the BJP and Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand.

## COMMENTS

**"EP worried over rights situation"**

(February 13, 2016)

▼  
**Janati**

The rights situation in Bangladesh is deteriorating day by day; but who cares!

▼  
**Lamia**

We deserve an environment where our freedom of expression is valued.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### An editor's dilemma!

I am not the biggest fan of Mahfuz Anam but there is no denying his contribution. He led a daily from scratch, enabling it to reach enviable heights. Subscribing to and quoting from *The Daily Star* has today become a matter of intellectual distinction. He personifies the excellence of modern journalism. Still no one is above mistakes. Some confess to their mistakes while others hush up, fearing ridicule. Instead of admiring a rare instance of courage of self-criticism, some 'loose canons' boomed out, calling for his exemplary punishment, and even expulsion from journalism!

Damage suits have been filed in sedition cases with claims of crores of taka! It is unfortunate. We, the common people, are opposed to the harassment of an iconic intellectual in this shabby manner! We want Mahfuz Anam to carry on for the sake of excellence, especially by authoring brilliant pieces in incomparable English. And those shouting themselves hoarse should read and learn from the editor of the most read English newspaper of the country.

**Yusuf Azad**  
Chief Evaluation Officer (Retd.)  
Education Board Rajshahi

### Ekushey Book Fair

Ekushey Book Fair is the biggest book fair in the country. Writers, publishers and readers wait for this month all year long. Last year Avijit Roy was murdered when he was coming back from the book fair. We hope no unpleasant incident will happen this year during the fair. So the authorities must ensure security for all -- writers, publishers and visitors.

**Misbah Uddin Sumon**  
Administrative Officer  
Bangladesh Open University



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

### Don't blindly follow alien cultures

Nowadays, the younger generations are following western cultures blindly in the name of "progressiveness". But many of them have forgotten that no one can be actually progressive without knowing and practicing their own culture. Although there are many positive aspects in western culture, we should keep in mind that certain aspects of Western culture may contradict with our values. While family bonds in the West seem to be disintegrating, their culture of individualism and consumerism has often led young people to become more and more self-oriented.

**Md. Abdur Rashid**  
Assistant Manager  
Social Advocacy and Knowledge Dissemination Unit,  
PKSE, Dhaka