

How will we tell the government what we think?

Not torture, really?

Justifying police action uncalled for

WE were informed by the home minister, much to our dismay, that the police do not torture journalists. Apparently what happened during the half-day peaceful protest on January 27 by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports did not tantamount to torture. The lame definition of police brutality by the minister which resulted in two journalists getting assaulted by riot police, visual record of which was aired on national television, leaves us disgusted. We are outraged by this statement because it comes from the minister under whose watch the police operate, and given his sentiments, we shudder to think how the police will behave in the future when tackling any procession of people or the media sent to cover such events.

We may well ask the honorable minister what constitutes police brutality in that case. Now that we have been instructed that when people come into close proximity with the police, they may "collide" and journalists who required stitches in the hospital due to this "collision" can seek no redress because it was all a mere accident? People do not sustain injuries that result in serious cuts that require stitching or bone fractures due to collisions; these injuries take place when law enforcement authorities decide to mete out the law with a heavy hand. The police were out in force on the streets and they contained the protests with a heavy hand. Whereas the home minister could have given us the assurance that this sort of incident would not happen again, he chose to act in the opposite fashion. We are now presented with another example of alternate facts and this is simply no way to earn public trust.

Railway staffer dies saving girl

Railway Authorities should reward his bravery

THE story of Badal Mia, a railway staffer, who died last Friday saving a woman and her 5-year-old daughter from imminent death, fills us with pride. Going beyond his duty, the 55-year-old technical assistant at the engineering department of Bangladesh Railway rushed to help when many others would simply stand by. It is a profound example of humanity's triumph.

But we also feel sorrow; if only people did not take unnecessary risks in order to save a few minutes, Badal Mia's sacrifice would not have been necessary. As citizens, we must realise that taking such risks as crossing a railway line while a train is approaching is irresponsible on our part. From jumping onto moving buses to refusing to use foot over-bridges, we constantly put not only ourselves at risk, but others on the roads as well. In this case, because of this rush, a brave man lost his life.

Let Badal Mia's sacrifice be a reminder for us. We applaud the bravery that he displayed through his act as we offer our condolences to his family. Given the family that he leaves behind, the 18 years he served, and the exemplary bravery that he showed to save the life of a child, we ask that the authorities compensate and provide for his family. He was, after all, the only earning member. Let his act of compassion for a human life be rewarded.



SHAER REAZ

OUR nation's history is strife with examples of our people standing up for what we believe in. From our Language Movement in 1952 to our Liberation War to our struggle for democracy against autocratic rulers, brave souls have laid down their demands and given their lives for it. Now, in 2017, it is shocking that the ruling party finds it in them to crack down violently on people protesting what some think to be a grave threat to our country's greatest natural resource, the Sundarbans.

In 1987, Nur Hossain, a poverty stricken idealist from Pirojpur was shot and killed at Zero Point during the Dhaka Siege, a blockade demanding the end to the rule of Hussain M Ershad. On his bare chest were the words "Down with Autocracy" and on his back, "Let Democracy be free". Reflecting on the tragic death of Hossain, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2012 said "Nur Hossain was standing beside me when we took out our procession. I called him and told him they would kill him for what he had inscribed on his chest. Then he brought his head near the window of my car and said - Apa, you just bless me, I will sacrifice my life to free democracy."

It's quite clear that there is a severe dissonance between what the Awami League says regarding our nation's past struggles and the actions of the party while in power. Last Thursday's protest against the coal fired power plant at Rampal, to be built 14 kms away from the Sundarbans and carrying the heavy consequence of irreparable damage to a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was largely peaceful, till a violent crackdown was orchestrated by the police against activists and journalists. Over the past year and a half, every protest organised by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports has been met with a violent reaction by the government, even though the organisers of these protest marches and sit-ins tried to ensure a peaceful communication of their message. From the police kicking their way into the ranks of a long march all across the country to pelting tear gas shells and rubber bullets at sit-ins in Paltan, the government has been adamant in remaining unresponsive to the calls for dialogue.

Why does the government feel that this violent response is warranted, and the only way to tackle the issue? Perhaps the government has little faith in the vague assurances they give to the general public that Rampal will be safe and environmentally sound. Aside from a lack of transparent, fact-fuelled dialogue between the pro-Rampal government and those speaking out against it, the government has resorted to taking out print ads, hiring public relations

representatives and creating promotional videos so detached from reality that they can have their own genre - fantastical disinformation campaigns. The real facts behind Rampal keep being blurred out constantly, as the Environmental Investigation Agency report, which looks at the environmental impact and overall feasibility of the coal power plant, keeps being modified at will, further raising concerns about the transparency of the project.

With the government so worked up about presenting Rampal power plant project in a positive light and going to great lengths in stretching the truth, one has to ask why the necessary space for anti-Rampal arguments is not being provided as well. The reason anti-Rampal protesters are taking to the streets is because there has

the government after Thursday's incidents has legitimised the violence - Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan's comment that journalists are never "assaulted" by the police, only "shoving" occurs - gives the police, free passes in incidents where they must be held responsible for their actions. This tendency to let the police act with impunity has further choked the voice of the common people, and it is widening the divide between the government and the people it governs.

When there are people who are clearly unhappy with the Rampal decision and their inability to express those views in a meaningful, useful manner take to the streets as a final act of desperation, perhaps the best response isn't to beat them and journalists covering the chaos to a pulp. If Rampal power plant is decidedly safe and is



been no official channel open between the government and opposition to the project, and lack of dialogue has led to a frustrated band of activists who are ultimately forced to call general strikes, long marches and sit-ins. Now that the government has violently clamped down on those methods of protest as well, it is exceedingly clear that the government will not entertain any attempt at calling out the irresponsible decision of building a coal fired power plant next to the Sundarbans. Not only that, the police also seem to be targeting journalists at protests for covering the police action against protesters, which directly challenges the people's right to know the actions of the government.

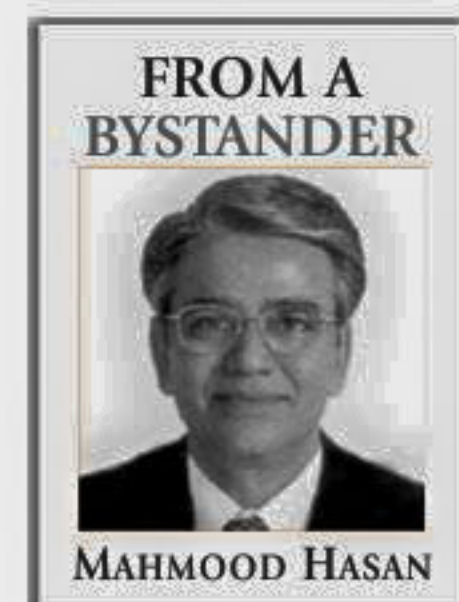
Furthermore, the response to police brutality from

an environmentally conscious decision, then what does the government have to lose in open debate? The truth, if that's what the government is bringing to the table, will see the light of day anyway. If the government is not willing to enter into an open debate, what choice do activists and protesters have other than taking to the streets, invoking the same spirit that Nur Hossain had towards restoring democracy?

In fact, we could all take inspiration from the impoverished son of an auto rickshaw driver - if one man's courage and determination could bring democracy to a nation, a thousand voices asking for the Sundarbans to be saved will be heard as well.

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TRUMP'S "AMERICA FIRST" Who will be second?



MAHMOOD HASAN

FROM A BYSTANDER
 DONALD Trump in his inaugural speech thundered that from now on it will be "America first". He went on to encourage Americans to "buy American and hire American". Trump supporters sporting the trademark red baseball caps watching the event cheered wildly. Many were horrified when they discovered that the headgears were made either in China, Vietnam or Bangladesh. Similar quality caps made in America were more expensive (USD 30) than those made abroad (USD 20). Naturally, supporters chose the cheaper version. So much for Trump's "buy American".

One cannot have any dispute with Trump's "America first" policy. But as the global order changes dramatically, can Trump make America first? As the contours of Trump's policies slowly emerge from his tweets, let us see whether he can put America first in global trade and commerce, or in foreign policy or socially within America.

Global commerce is based on an intricate set of rules arising out of multilateral treaties that made

maximises consumers' utility. How will Trump negotiate trade deals, which are based on non-zero-sum principles?

On the other hand, imposing high tax on imports from cheaper sources would raise the cost of living for Americans and diminish consumer utility. Walking out on TPP, NAFTA and blaming China will not bring back jobs to America, nor will the economic situation of American workers improve. Trump's "America first"

back, he will find it impossible to export higher priced American goods.

Coming to international politics, Trump has demonstrated appalling lack of understanding of world politics. He had promised to "shake the rust off America's foreign policy" with a self-interest approach to world affairs. He recalled 80 contract ambassadors, creating an unprecedented diplomatic isolation, and decided to cut funds to the

D. Roosevelt, who declared, "We cannot live alone, at peace; that our wellbeing is dependent on the well-being of other nations far away".

The sharply divided American polity felt embittered with Trump's inaugural speech laced with superlatives. There was rioting in Washington on Trump's inauguration day. The day after his swearing-in, there were massive protests from women groups across America and many cities around the world. Women activists outraged by Trump's rhetoric and misogynistic behaviour organised rallies to protest his positions on women, immigrants, Muslims, the disabled and environmentalists. Repeal of Obamacare has added 20 million to that group. Protests across America continue.

Trump's obscurantism becomes evident when he talks about illegal voting, knowing well that his populism is not based on popular votes. After vilifying the political class and media, it is unlikely that Trump can govern without stiff challenges from the administration. He moved fast, and within the first week in office issued Executive Orders on several controversial issues, stunning the world. Orders not based on consultations with his senior advisors or facts. He has taken Congress' approval of his decisions for granted, as the Republicans have majority in both Houses. But challenges from Republican leaders, who opposed his nomination, and 60 Congressmen, who boycotted his inauguration, will be formidable. More importantly, can Trump unite the deeply frayed American society, which is known as the melting pot of diverse cultures?

According to some news reports, the effort to impeach Trump is already underway. Two advocacy groups 'Free Speech for People' and 'Roots Action' are hinging their case on Trump's financial impropriety, from owning luxury hotels and golf course, while in office as president. The embattled media will no doubt collude with this movement to pull him down.

Trump comes with a baggage of conflicts, scandals and a vindictive mindset to change the status quo in Washington. It would be interesting to watch how Trump along with his hawkish cabinet makes a pig's breakfast of democracy and the presidency, and makes America "second".

The writer is a former ambassador and secretary.



Donald Trump pictured in a rally in October 2016.

PHOTO: AFP

is essentially a policy of protectionism. It is actually a recipe for trade wars, which he has already started with Mexico. No nation would knowingly become "second" to anyone.

On bringing back jobs, Trump seems unaware about the employment situation in America. Unemployment in America has been lowest since 2010 and stands at 4.7 percent (December 2016). One of the primary reasons of unemployment in US is the rapid development of technology and artificial intelligence. Menial jobs are being taken over by machines. Naturally, there are more blue-collar workers who support Trump and are looking for jobs; tech-savvy high paid white collar jobs seekers are fewer in number and are generally not unemployed.

There is a trend now that manufacturing, that had gone overseas to low-labour-cost locations, is returning to the developed countries, where factories will use robots rather than human workers. Trump may get manufacturing back to US, but he may not get the jobs back. Assuming Trump does get the jobs

United Nations. What is worrying is that he described NATO - the post-WWII military alliance that had contained the then Soviet Union and now Russia from menacing Europe - as "obsolete". Trump has castigated key allies as "free riders", who should pay more for US military protection. He has also threatened to tear off the Iran nuclear deal and provide staunch support to Israel. Building the wall with Mexico and demonising Muslims only reflects his xenophobic instincts.

Trump's isolationist policy will be a clear break from America's traditional bipartisan foreign policy - an abdication from its global role. In other words, America will cease to be the champion of freedom, human rights, democracy, and a committed warrior against climate change. He will also cut billions of dollars that go to different nations as aid for poverty eradication. Trump's isolationism will create a power vacuum that may incite wars in different parts of the globe, jeopardising world peace. Trump probably never heard of Franklin

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globalisation possible. The basic logic of globalisation is based on age-old theory of comparative advantage i.e. global division of labour (David Ricardo) that

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Protests against the Rampal Power Plant must be respected

It was deeply upsetting to watch the police force using tear shells, water cannons, and batons on the activists protesting the Rampal Power Plant on January 26. The state must remember that this isn't a political movement, but a people's movement instigated with the aim of preserving a precious heritage, the destruction of which will have devastating consequences.

Our activists are being persecuted for actions that should be praised. It is unbelievable that the government is ignoring the people's rightful demand for something that will benefit the country. This country belongs to the people, and their wishes must be fulfilled.

Nur Jahan, Chittagong

We need doctors on Fridays too

Doctors do not generally sit in their chambers on Friday in Dhaka city. However, people with busy work schedules on week days prefer to make their medical trips on weekends. Medical emergencies also tend to arise that require urgent consultation with doctors during the weekend. Since there are many retired and non-government doctors in this city, it would be beneficial to the citizens if they adjusted their weekly schedules to keep their chambers open on Fridays.

I request doctors to take this suggestion into consideration, and the Health Ministry to look into this matter of public interest.

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 Anwar Group of Industries