

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY MAY 11, 2017, BAISHAKH 28, 1424 BS

## Charge sheet against a child!

Police investigation process needs review

WE are dumbfounded by the Mirpur police bringing a case to the court where an 11-month old baby Rubel, and Arifur Rahman who had been dead for 3 years at the time of occurrence, have been charge-sheeted for vandalism! The irony here is that the police came to the conclusion after having conducted a probe that took eight months to conclude. This whole incident would not have come to the attention of the court had Rubel's father not produced the child; and now we are left to ask some serious questions about how the police investigate cases in our country.

It is a matter of satisfaction that the court has taken cognisance of the extraordinary circumstances of the case and ordered the Investigating Officer (IO) to explain his actions. However, we would like to know what the police administration of that particular station has to say about a case being drawn up against an infant and a dead person. Any investigation is supposed to follow set procedures and this case is an example of the perfunctory manner in which many cases are probed. The mother of the infant has demanded exemplary punishment for the IO involved and we have to agree with her feelings.

Of equal importance is the fact that the police failed to verify that the other accused had died of stroke three years earlier. The IO must be made to answer for his callous behaviour. This case should be a wakeup call for the relevant authorities to re-examine the way police cases are investigated. All those responsible for such farcical systemic distortion, willful or otherwise, should be held to account.

## Public disposal of garbage

Another health hazard!

IT is bad enough that the piling of garbage on the sides of roads all across the city has now become regularised. But the burning of garbage on the wayside of Sadarghat-Gabtol Road on the Buriganga in broad daylight, as seen in a photograph published on the front page of this newspaper yesterday, simply takes the level of mismanagement by city planners a step further.

All the smoke and stench diffused from burning garbage on the side of the road is not only undesirable, but is harmful to public health. Why then is garbage being disposed like this? Aren't the authorities at all concerned about the consequences of this on public health?

Dhaka is already suffering from astronomically high levels of air pollution. 37,000 Bangladeshis die every year from diseases related to it, according to the World Health Organisation. Doctors say that the number of patients suffering from chest and respiratory diseases because of air pollutants are also on the rise. Whereas the authorities should proactively work towards reducing air pollution under such circumstances, what we shockingly see is the exact opposite.

Why should the public have to deal with such incompetence? What are city planners doing to address such mismanagement in disposing Dhaka's wastes? These are questions that the authorities need to provide answers to. Furthermore, they must also immediately ensure that the piling and burning of garbage on the waysides is stopped.

# When in doubt bring Ershad out

NO STRINGS ATTACHED



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

YOU have to hand it to the former general/president. Nobody can really match the age-defying flamboyant showstopper like Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad. His latest stunt to come up with the biggest alliance ever, comprising 58 organisations, mostly religious based, has certainly given much meat for media persons covering the political beat. Never mind that out of the 58 'parties', most of which are fairly unknown, only two of them are actually registered and therefore have any legitimacy to take part in elections. It's the thought that counts.

Things have been a little prickly for AL after citizens' groups and the media have vehemently criticised the unexpected rendezvous with religious groups whose 'tamarind ideology' is in direct contradiction to the ruling party's stated ideology which is supposed to uphold the values of our Liberation War. Apart from making absurd concessions like changing words in textbooks to make them sound more Muslim and removing works considered classics in literature because they were authored by non-Muslims, the ruling party has held meetings with this extremist group that believes women should not work and the country should run under Sharia law. Only four years ago the same people had tried to hold the capital city hostage and were successfully driven out by the government forces, much to the relief of Dhaka's residents. Also, let's not forget some of the demands made by this group. Besides the call to 'free all arrested Islamic scholars and madrasa students', the group wanted the government to declare Ahmadiyyas as non-Muslim, ban 'free mixing of men and women and candlelit vigil' 'stop setting sculptures at intersections, colleges and universities', scrap the women's policy and the education policy (replacing it with Islamic education) and go after NGOs that might be trying to 'convert' people. The AL's indulgence towards this group may be just for political expediency but as the saying goes, 'when you play with fire there is always the possibility of getting burnt.'

Oh sorry, did we forget to mention the date when all this happened? This was in May 2013, not May 1813, and now it is May 2017, with the group not moving an inch from its medieval expectations and getting quite a lot of unexplained leeway from the government - for instance, an unusual delay in the probes of 58 cases filed over the May 5-6, 2013 mayhem during which Hefajat men set fire to hundreds of shops, vehicles, police checkpoints, looted and vandalised shops, including those having Islamic books. Violent clashes with the police occurred and 13 people were killed, including three

policemen. Hefajat 'slightly' exaggerated the figure and put it down to 2,000 of its own members being killed, though they could not give the names of the 1,990 dead members nobody could find.

But all that is stale news, for the moment. The AL is showing its seriousness about the next parliamentary polls (which we hope will be slightly different from the 2014 elections in which 153 seats were bagged uncontested by the ruling party). It is concentrating on the seven city corporation elections as a warm up, prepping exercise for its members. Perhaps, the embarrassing win of BNP candidates in three mayoral posts had a little bit to do with it.

BNP, meanwhile, is behaving like a fallen saint desperately trying to get his halo back by making all sorts of lofty

claims that they think will beguile the public. They say they will put an end to 'autocratic practices within the democratic system' and 'might' amend Article 70 of the Constitution so that lawmakers can show they have a mind of their own and cast votes against the party mantra (except in certain cases) when they feel they should. The idea that BNP members may actually try to diminish the power of their rather formidable party chief is quite a joke as is the party's constant tirade about the corruption of the ruling party, as if the whole saga of Hawa Bhaban, the unofficial headquarters of all government deals during BNP's tenure, was just a figment of the imagination.

Unfortunately, with its own pathetic track record regarding corruption and its stubborn clinging to the Jamaat, the BNP is not really offering anything new to the public, save a change from the existing rule. This is probably where the AL may be

Feeding) cards because a local government representative and his family have decided it would be far more beneficial (for them) to sell the rice for a profit. Let's talk about migrant workers; TIB says that around 90 percent of five lakh workers had to pay bribes at different stages at the concerned ministry and bureau, hiking up the cost of the visas manifolds. Saying that the TIB claims are baseless and motivated hardly solves the problem of exploitation that we all know these workers are plagued with. The culture of everything being up for sale - a position in the police force, a case to be filed or not taken, an arrest to be made or not, a vehicle license or a birth certificate, a passport renewal or any kind of official paperwork - has taken on Herculean proportions, and nobody (read government) seems to know what to do about it.

Then again all that pales in comparison

good ones left) and making sure the train to development is back on the tracks. So where does good old Ershad, the apparent saviour of democracy come in? Well, he claims his goal is to contest the next elections and form a government with his medley of a coalition. The inclusion of at least 34 religion-based organisations is, no doubt, the age-old religious card that politicians use to ensure votes from chunks of the population. His tenacity is commendable as are all the hats he is made to wear, depending on the convenience of others. His would be the most diverse resume anyone could have - former autocrat, opposition party chief, advisor to the prime minister and now the leader of a mystery coalition consisting of more than 30 religion based organisations that may pose as a proxy opposition in the next elections.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Opinion and Editorial, The Daily Star.

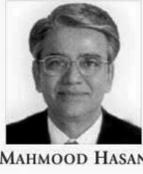


IMAGE: STAR

## France rejects ultra-nationalism

### What's next for Emmanuel Macron?

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

THE rise of ultra-nationalist populist parties in Europe has been a threat to European unity. The French presidential election came at a time when the EU was staring disintegration in the face.

Disenchanted with untrustworthy and corrupt politicians, people rejected the mainstream established parties in the first round and went to the second round to choose between two unconventional candidates. They saw an alternative in Emmanuel Macron, who won the election with 66 percent votes against 34 percent for Marine Le Pen, to be the eighth president of the Fifth Republic. Macron's victory was a reprieve from Marine Le Pen's populism.

There was deep anxiety all over Europe about who would secure the Elysée Palace after the second round of the French Presidential election of May 7. It was great relief all over Europe, particularly in Brussels that centrist-liberal Emmanuel Macron would be the next leader of France. The charismatic Macron, at 39, is the youngest president of France.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker heaved a sigh of relief tweeting: "Happy that the French chose a European future". Brussels was even happier as there would be no threat of Brexit. Both the Socialist Party and the Republican Party were pleased at the result. Liberals in Europe were exuberant that the far-right candidate was rejected by French voters.

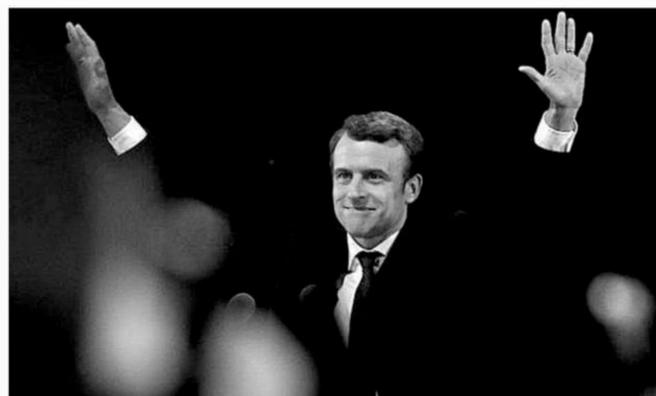
However, there were two leaders - Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin - who were apparently not so happy at the outcome. The congratulatory messages for Macron coming from Trump and Putin were certainly subdued and run-of-the-mill official texts. Interestingly, former US president Barack Obama, endorsed Macron, because, as he stated, the "success of France matters to the entire world".

Macron will have a difficult task

reunifying the deeply divided French polity. His victory was based on wide media exposure and the social media network. Though France is famous for the French Revolution, Macron is not a revolutionary but essentially a traditional centrist.

Popularity of any French president is linked to the economic wellbeing of the people. Macron's success as president will depend on turning around the moribund French economy. His strong pro-Europe policies, globalisation and free market approach, and pledges to strengthen the Eurozone, flexible labour

government. Lots of polarisation is underway in French political circles as France goes for the two-round legislative elections (June 11 and 18) to elect the 577-seat National Assembly. Party leaders are busy trying to form coalitions either to join the President-elect or to oppose him. For instance, Francois Baroin, head of the Republican Party's campaign for the legislative election, has offered to serve as Prime Minister under Macron in a cohabitation government. Former Socialist Prime Minister Manuel Valls also wants to join REM and serve under Macron.



A reassuring win for Europe.

laws to cut down unemployment, slimmer bureaucracy, reduced corporate tax, etc, may bear fruit - but these will take time.

The French Constitution provides for an unusual mixture of presidential and parliamentary system of government. The president and the Parliament are elected separately - making it difficult at times for the president to get a loyal Parliament. When the president and the majority group in Parliament, forming the government under a Prime Minister, belong to opposed political persuasion, it results in cohabitation - an awkward power-sharing arrangement.

These are defining times for France and the future will depend on Macron's

majority, it will make it easier for Macron to choose his Prime Minister and get the reform related legislation through the National Assembly easily. According to polls, REM is likely to get majority in the legislative elections.

Without a majority in Parliament, REM will paralyse Macron into being a dummy president. Cohabiting with any opposing majority parliamentary group would be frustrating for Macron and end the reforms that he wants.

However, it would be naïve to think Marine Le Pen's National Front (FN) has been eliminated from the French political scene after the May 7 defeat. Actually, FN has made a firm footprint in the French political landscape. Losing the election has made her a strong opposition leader. Le Pen is certainly not going to waste her popularity. She has pledged to transform the party, rename it to scrub off its xenophobic and racist image and become a new political force to win voters' support. FN already has two deputies in the outgoing Parliament.

Le Pen is trying to build on her 34 percent vote and get as many seats as possible in the National Assembly. FN leaders consider that 11 million voters is substantial support for the party to make a strong showing in the parliamentary elections. FN spokesman Jerome Riviere warned that the French public will regret their decision for not electing Le Pen, and will be disappointed with Macron within weeks. FN leaders hope that if they emerge as a large parliamentary group, it will help Le Pen's chances to be president in 2022.

After the Brexit referendum and Donald Trump's election, the European Union faced the danger of disintegration as the appeal from ultra-right parties gained momentum in Europe. But the defeat of the ultra-right in Austria, the Netherlands and now France will definitely have an impact on the German elections coming up in September, 2017.

One has to wait to see how France votes in the legislative election, which will determine the direction of the Fifth Republic under Emmanuel Macron.

The writer is a former Ambassador and Secretary.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Standardisation of answer scripts

The pass rate of SSC examinations has fallen this year by 7.49 percent due to the new evaluation process. Examiners trained by the government now have to prepare standard answers to the questions, which are to be consulted while they evaluate students' answer scripts.

Although it has influenced the overall pass rate, the impact will be positive in the long run. It will encourage students to employ critical thinking and creativity while answering questions. It will train them to write answers that are concise and to the point, instead of overlong ramblings full of irrelevant information, and rid them of their dependence on memorised notes.

We appreciate this initiative by the government to improve the nature of learning in the country, and look forward to seeing it adopted by academicians from the grassroots to the national level.

Shaker Riaz  
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### Ignoring court orders by government agencies

This refers to a news report titled "DB asked to submit probe report June 7" published by The Daily Star on May 8, 2017, regarding the alleged killing of publisher Faisal Arefin Dipon in October 2015.

Several news reports have shed light on government agencies and institutions flouting court orders, including high court orders. Cases in point - the deaths of journalists Sagar and Runi; and the rape and murder of a college student inside the Comilla Cantonment area. Law enforcement agencies have failed to submit investigation reports for either cases. One wonders whether ignoring or disregarding repeated court orders amounts to contempt of court, and what action the court is going to take against them.

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