

## Shootouts are not the answer

*Long-term strategy needed in the fight against drugs*

**W**e are extremely concerned at the rising death toll in shootouts by law enforcers in nationwide anti-narcotic drives. In the last nine days alone, at least 33 alleged drug peddlers have been killed in "gunfights" according to our reports. The details around these gunfights are hazy at best, and there are contradictory accounts by police and family members and neighbours of the deceased, who have made claims of plainclothes men picking up the accused.

While we appreciate the fact that the drug problem is being prioritised, we must say that shootouts are not the answer. Firstly, concerns of extrajudicial killings (as expressed by many rights activists) have begun to surface and the latest incidents of shootouts must be investigated thoroughly. Everyone is entitled to due process under the constitution regardless of the crime they're accused of. The long list of killings in shootouts shows that there is a trust deficit in the judicial process on the part of law enforcers.

Secondly, shootouts do nothing to get to the root causes. We must remember that with the death of alleged drug traders, law enforcers are losing a valuable source of intel which can help them nab the masterminds—the drug kingpins—who are calling the shots. Given the transnational nature of the drug business, cross-border cooperation among law enforcement agencies of the countries involved is needed in order to disrupt the supply chain.

Law enforcers ought to be given clear directives to conduct anti-narcotic drives and they must ensure that due process is followed. Furthermore, the fight against such organised crimes cannot be won without a viable long-term strategy that includes intelligence gathering and enhancing cooperation with law enforcement agencies outside our borders.

## Writing off loans a bad practice

*Strengthen loan recovery mechanisms*

**T**K 48,192 crore has been written off as irrecoverable loans by state-owned and private banks as of December last year. This state of affairs has come in the backdrop of a failure of banks to effectively pursue legal battles in the effort to recover bad loans. According to central bank regulations, banks are required to file lawsuits in the loan default court, Artha Rin Adalat.

The ballooning of bad loans in the banking sector has been caused due to lack of due diligence in giving loans to parties that have not met eligibility criteria and little has been done to improve matters in that area. While bank balance sheets may look good when bad loans are written off as irrecoverable, the fact is that it is still not known exactly what steps state-owned and private banks have taken to strengthen the mechanisms for loan recovery. We would have thought that such huge sums of loans going bad would have called for a rethink about existing mechanisms and perhaps brought in new ideas as to how to go after defaulters more vigorously.

It appears that the whole idea of dealing with bad loans is to simply reschedule it or write it off. What is unfortunate is that the contagion of scams is increasingly affecting private sector banks too. The time has come to take steps to see how the law may be amended when it comes to dealing with parties who default on loan payments because defaulters simply file writ petitions at the High Court level to put on hold efforts by banks to recover these monies. Simultaneously, the central bank should make it mandatory for banks to strengthen their legal arms to combat the rising scourge of bad loans and not simply write off what is essentially public money.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Panthokunjo, a neglected park

Panthokunjo, a public park near Hotel Sonargaon and the SAARC Fountain, is today a neglected place. In the late '90s, it was a beautiful park, but now, it has become a dumping station. There's no gate, no walls, and no caretaker to look after the park.

Parks are a luxury in this city of over 18 million people, but not being able to use existing ones is depressing. Existing tall and beautiful trees still sustain the park's appeal, and maybe that's why a few people still go there. But if this park is not renovated anytime soon, it will lose its remaining visitors.

Zahir Hyder, Paribag

### Reforming Dhaka's bus service

The Daily Star on May 12 published a letter titled "Bring buses under one banner" by Serajul Islam. I'd like to lend my support to the idea, which was a brainchild of Annisul Huq, the former mayor of Dhaka North.

In no country in the world is the public bus system in such a shambles. The authorities should take steps to bring all buses—except of course unfit ones—under a single entity like the Greyhound in the United States.

It will reduce congestion, and the unhealthy competition on the road, and thus, the risk of accident. If any accident happens, it will be easier to hold a single company to account.

Engr. GM Akram Hossain, Mohakhali

# Forster's third democratic cheer

## Mahathir (as a symbol)?

### KAUTILYAN KRONICLES



IMTIAZ A HUSSAIN

**E**m Forster, a lone-wolf democracy crusader between the two world wars, confronted as unpalatable a European playground as many African, Asian, and Latin

American countries striving to convince others of their democratic claims face today: an uphill battle in which the institutionalised forces against democracy, such as extreme rightists/leftists and militarism, were usually at least as strong as those forces institutionalised to establish democracy, if not more. In one of his capstone commentaries, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951), he extolled the two virtues: admitting variety, and permitting criticism. He often stopped short of spelling out a third, at least in that volume.

Mahathir Mohammad's victory in Malaysia may symbolise what that third institutional circumstance may be today, particularly across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, but no less relevant for populism-driven mature democracies drifting in the wrong direction: sanctifying watchdogs.

In Mahathir's case, it is not just the corruption that evicted Najib Razak from the democratic fold, but also a personal about-turn in becoming an unflinching democracy practitioner from having been the authoritarian moderniser so eulogised in his part of the world (as in Indonesia, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand). At 92, another reversal from Mahathir is unlikely, which is not the same as saying Malaysia will not back-track to its authoritarian past. But Mahathir deserves two different cheers: for modernising Malaysia, without which a democratic mindset might not have matured sufficiently among voters to challenge institutionalised corruption and a monolithic party once wielded by Mahathir; and attracting a youth not even born during Mahathir's previous tenure, thus blindly plunging into the unknown behind a candidate who became the world's oldest elected official.

If corruption sealed the deal against Najib, as evidence increasingly confirms, then tackling it successfully, at least in this first round, must be the fresh air democracy supporters globally want to breathe at this juncture. It is a practice

with no national, cultural, racial, religious, political, or social identity, with the only safe measurement yardstick being the length, breadth, and depth of its prevalence—in other words, the relative strength of those two forces: corruption-controlling versus corruption-encouraging institutions.

With democracy having a very bad press today in both mature and fledgling democratic countries, given the outbursts of populism, adventurism, brinkmanship, and bluff everywhere, Mahathir's victory could serve as the springtime of a global democratic revival. Najib aside, South Korea's Park Geun-hye languishes in jail, as does Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil, while Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, Pakistan's

the back of a convincing majority vote; or even a democracy ceasing to be, as possibly in Egypt, Mexico, and Nicaragua, among others, where the military, corporatism, and demagoguery, respectively, strangle a democracy desirous population. Resurgent democracy in Malaysia should be morale-boost: both veterans and the youth may have different lifestyles and mindsets, but they worked as one. With Mahathir releasing his own nemesis, Anwar Ibrahim, from jail, democracy may get off to a resounding start as new constituencies (his supporters) come out of the cracks.

External vigilance may be the price of liberty, as John Philpot Curran, Thomas Jefferson, and Wendell Phillips, among



**How much must we forgive past transgressors, like Mahathir, even in their hour of triumph, if they deliver the democracy magic, even if briefly?**

Nawaz Sharif, and South Africa's Jacob Zuma typify the corrupted culprits on the ropes. With corruption outlasting communism as the real cancer corroding democracy, the time may be ripe for eliciting that third democratic "cheer": the ballot box may be delivering poorly in some cases, as with Donald J Trump in the United States, where only an electoral college rule pushed him over the finishing line; or delivering mixed messages, as in a Germany so torn between progressives and populists that one of the most admired European politicians cannot coherently form a government; or a Philippines where murdering alleged, rather than actual, drug-traffickers is now a norm; or a hitherto secular India sliding towards religious fanaticism/fundamentalism on

others, noted, but nowhere is it more in demand than to sustain democracy. It is not Mahathir's age *per se*, but the coalition which led to his victory. Birds of too many feathers may be the hardest flock to keep united for long spells, yet is a feature most consistent with democracy, given Forster's first two cheers. Setting aside such clichés as "After Mahathir, the deluge" (essentially reaffirming the first Forster "cheer"), work must be quickly done to streamline the various groups for long enough to resolve the 1MDB (Malaysia Development Berhard) crisis legally (not politically), then punish Najib, not out of vendetta, but for breaches of law. All these must be done against the inevitable growth of countervailing party interests (Forster's second "cheer"). The maturity the third democratic "cheer" requires

may be the most pivotal *a posteriori* element, as much for Malaysians, as for Brazilians, Israelis, Pakistanis, South Africans, and South Koreans on the line today, as well as those headed for their own election, including Bangladesh and Iraq this year, or Algeria, Greece, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa next year, among a host of others. That may be a very unpredictable bunch; but if Mahathir could upset the tables, so can these countries: if not now, someday soon, given the message we hear.

Ultimately, corruption-correction before democracy is devoured must be matched by how smoothly the democracy learning-curve blends with the obvious punishments meted out in transitional countries after epochal moments. We remember how, after the Arab Spring fizzled in all but Tunisia, Egypt returned to military rule, and Syria moved towards outright genocide with its authoritarian tools, much like what Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi is doing in Myanmar for a different reason with her democratic instruments. The blunt question boils down to how much must we forgive past transgressors, like Mahathir, even in their hour of triumph, if they deliver the democracy magic, even if briefly? The equally blunt answer should be to go the full nine-yards: that is, completely. A complete transformation from dictatorship to democracy represents the very heart, mind, and soul of the third democratic cheer, since democracy alone supplies the most *forgive-and-forget* atmosphere among all governmental types.

Democracy still remains far removed from the resurgent 1990s, when the fourth large-scale outburst (or "wave") in modern history took place. We have rarely been as close to triumphing over terrorism since then as now, and with the likes of Kim Jong-un also shedding some of his dictatorial attachments, democracy must still reckon with three jeering constituencies while celebrating its three cheers: populism in advanced democratic countries; democratically elected mavericks of the Rodrigo Roa Duterte/Benjamin Netanyahu types, since this is a game requiring that maturity; and precipitously hinging foreign policy imperatives to the domestically-driven propensities and prospects of democracy. Democracy is not dead by a long shot, but its silent soldiers must speak now, or they might have to hold their tongues forever.

Dr Imtiaz A Hussain is the head of Global Studies & Governance Program at Independent University, Bangladesh.

## Green Climate Fund: Still a work in progress

### POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

**T**HE Green Climate Fund (GCF) was created under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to channel USD 100 billion a year starting from 2020 onwards, which the developed countries have pledged to provide to developing countries to tackle climate change through both mitigation as well as adaptation activities. The Secretariat of the GCF is located in Korea and the GCF Board has equal representation from developed and developing countries.

One of the first and most laudable decisions that the board took early on was to decide that they would allocate half their funds for adaptation projects and half for mitigation, and also prioritise the adaptation funds for the most vulnerable developing countries. However, they are still struggling to meet these targets.

Limited (IDCOL), which is involved mainly in mitigation activities such as solar energy projects, and the second is the Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), which supports mainly adaptation projects. Both NIEs are now in the process of applying for funds but have yet to receive any.

This situation of inordinate time spent in getting accreditation is also the case for many other developing countries, and so earlier this month, the government of Bangladesh, through ERD, decided to host a three-day workshop for South-South knowledge sharing with the NDAs and NIEs from the South Asian countries. Thus the gathering had NDAs and NIEs from Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka who shared their experiences of getting accreditation and getting projects together. The GCF was also invited to send two representatives to participate and listen to the experiences of the national entities. To the credit of the GCF, they did attend the event and took careful note of what they heard.

I will summarise below some of the key issues that



**Bangladesh is among countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change. The picture was taken in June 2009 in Satkhira, when cyclone Aila hit the coastal region.**

PHOTO: REUTERS/ANDREW BIRAJ

To be fair, the GCF is quite aware of this issue and has started to provide capacity building support to NDAs and NIEs, which is a welcome development.

The second issue that still causes confusion for those wishing to submit proposals to the GCF for funding both mitigation and adaptation projects, is the need to show a paradigm shift or transformational change as a result of the proposed project. The GCF also do not provide much guidance as to what they mean by this requirement as they want each country to define it for themselves. While such country-driven choice is good in principle, without any guidance, it's just confusing. As the GCF develops a significant pipeline of approved projects, it can be assumed that others will be able to learn from those approved project proposals. This is also where South-South knowledge exchange is important.

The third issue causing confusion relates to adaptation projects where the requirement to differentiate adaptation to climate change from development has already caused two proposals—one from Bangladesh and the other from Ethiopia—to be rejected by the Board of the GCF because they felt the projects were primarily development projects and not addressing climate change.

Again, while it is correct for the GCF Board to insist that it is a fund for climate change, not for development, there needs to be some allowance for development co-benefits to be allowed. Fortunately, both those projects were revised, resubmitted and approved, but the confusion about how to distinguish adaptation from development still remains. The GCF is aware of this and is planning to provide better guidance going forward.

Fourthly, there was the unsolved issue of reaching adaptation funds to the most vulnerable countries and communities as relatively little of the adaptation funds are actually reaching the most vulnerable. Again, this will require some investment in finding and prioritising those countries and communities. The assumption that rules are fair because they apply to everyone equally can result in extremely unfair outcomes if the rules are too difficult for the poorest and most vulnerable to follow.

Finally, the issue of imbalance in GCF funding to mitigation instead of adaptation, despite its decision to have a fifty-fifty balance, is still a recurring problem that the Board and Secretariat of the GCF need to address if they wish to provide half their funding to adaptation projects.

In conclusion, the three-day workshop was felt by all participants to be a success in building a regional network of NDAs and NIEs who will continue to share experiences with each other. Even the representatives from the GCF acknowledged that it was a valuable learning experience for them and promised to share their lessons with the Secretariat. In the end, the bottom line is that everyone wants the GCF to succeed in disbursing many billions of dollars to developing countries for adaptation as well as mitigation, and even if there are inevitable teething troubles, the sooner they are identified and corrected, the better for both GCF as well as the NDAs and NIEs.

Saleemul Huq is Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh.