

Attack on media continues

An ominous sign

WE are outraged at the attacks on journalists of different media outlets by the BCL over the last two days. Reportedly, on Sunday, some ruling party men swooped on the journalists—who were performing their duty covering the ongoing student movement—with sticks, iron rods and machetes. What is more appalling is the fact that this happened in the presence of the law enforcers who, reportedly, played the role of silent spectators. Not only that, the police even detained two photojournalists of a photo agency.

This, we repeat, is a violation of the media's constitutional right to free expression, press freedom and the right to information, and is totally unacceptable in a democracy. In this regard, we are also alarmed to learn that Shahidul Alam, an internationally acclaimed photographer and a social activist, was picked up from his home by the police on Sunday night and charged under section 57 of the ICT Act.

The government's resistance to free flow of information is becoming increasingly sterner. What is even more worrisome is the fact that the so-called ruling party cadres are singling out journalists of particular newspapers among those covering the incidents with, we fear, very sinister motives. Targeting the photojournalists, and preventing them from doing their work has made very obvious the administration's effort to conceal the violent methods it is applying to suppress a popular demand. It cannot be lost on the policymakers that in this day of modern technology, nothing can remain unobtrusive, certainly not for long. Unfortunately, the image of the country has suffered, not because of what the students have done but because of the way the government has handled the issue.

First coal, now rocks disappear

Will 'system loss' be addressed?

THE Maddhapara Granite Mining Company Ltd. (MGMCL) is the second state-owned company to suffer from missing resources in so many weeks. MGMCL has been suffering from years of poor record-keeping and little or no oversight when it comes to how much stone was being produced in its quarries, and now we are being told that stone worth Tk 55.24 crore has gone "missing". How does one lose 360,000 tonnes of stone? This is yet another classic case of poor management where regular inventory taking is unheard of and which has allowed for siphoning off of precious hard rock. Obviously, things have not come to this state in a day.

The commercial operation of the mine had been under a Korean company since 2006 and this was later given to a Belarus-based company in 2013 for a six-year period. During the Korean company's stint, a discrepancy had been found where 106,000 tonnes of stone was unaccounted for. We would like to know why that incident didn't act as an eye-opener for the authorities that something fishy was going on. The five-member probe committee submitted its findings on July 2 and MGMCL's board has claimed that the shortage has been caused by system loss, absence of weighing scales at crushing and sorting plant, washing away by rainwater and other reasons. Why is there such apathy in putting in place checks-and-balances and good management practices in state-owned enterprises when it comes to producing resources such as rock, or coal for that matter? All the explanations given thus far shy away from any talk of theft, and if indeed it is "system loss", precisely when may we see a change in these practices is anybody's guess.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Meet demands of the agitating students

The ongoing student movement demanding road safety has been welcomed by everyone. It came in the wake of years of unsuccessful attempts and policy failures by the government to control the traffic system and rein in the chaotic and corruption-ridden transport sector. Every day, we have reports of fatal incidents in some part of the country because of unfit or unregistered vehicles and incompetent drivers who are either underage or unlicensed. There was totally no accountability in the sector. The deaths of two students recently marked a tipping point for the aggrieved student community, who were bolstered by support from the general public to launch a protest that has rocked the government. For some days, the students took up the task of traffic management, checking the licenses of drivers, registration of unfit vehicles and bringing some semblance of discipline in the roads which were previously unthinkable.

But this cannot go on forever, however noble the purpose, and the government must build its capacity to manage traffic and the transport sector itself. I think what the government should do, instead of taking piecemeal initiatives to quell the situation, is meet all the demands of the students, which are legitimate and reflect the aspirations of the general people. The transport owners and workers shouldn't be given any chance to play dirty politics with such a movement.

Khondaker Shahirul Islam
Gulshan, Dhaka

Violence is not the answer

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

WE have witnessed the most unprecedented things in the method that the government has employed to suppress the demand for safe roads, a demand not only of the students who have been out on the streets for the last seven days but a common call. And once again it has used its student arm and employed violence to do so. On Sunday the target was the students on the streets but yesterday it was several private universities that were laid siege upon by the police with the activists in support.

Regrettably, action of the BCL stands in stark contrast to the PM's concern for the safety and security of the young students. They were subjected to violence, not by the so-called third party, but by her own party cadres.

One of the predictable reactions that has become the hallmark of this government is to employ cadres to snub, chastise, browbeat, intimidate, and bully any party or group to submission to a point so that the group is forced to redact its position, or withdraw whatever they were demanding. This expedient has been used several times before, lately against the quota reformists; now the party's student wing has been inducted as an auxiliary of the police in quashing the demands of students, demands that echo in full people's desire to see a chaotic misgoverned sector, that is responsible for causing more deaths than any other single factor, including epidemics and natural

Action of the violent group stands in stark contrast to the PM's concern for the safety and security of the young students. They were subjected to violence, not by the so-called third party, but by her own party cadres.

disasters, cured fully.

The reaction of the students to the death of two of their schoolmates on July 28 was only natural. It was the outburst of people at the end of their tethers, their exasperation enhanced by the most insensitive, cynical and crass reaction of a minister who, despite clash of interest, being a minister, enjoys the best of both worlds—being the head of the transport workers' association as well.

Nobody encourages vigilantism, but it would be a gross injustice to accuse

state agency, tasked to maintain law and order seeks the help of the ruling party's student wing to snub students railing against the chaotic transport sector. The police measures to tackle what was a peaceful agitation has set a new precedent, given the open call to arms by the police to anti-movement activists to join them. Yes, the movements on the roads were hampered, particularly in the capital. But it is not the first time we have been subjected to such a situation. The Shahbag movement is too recent to

forced to keep their sets in their pockets or, if it were a woman, in their handbags. The media was made special target of. They were gone after selectively and beaten mercilessly. The aim was not only to suppress the agitation but also suppress news of the police action getting out.

We ask, can the measure employed by the government cure the cause that forced the students to brave the sun and rain to make their point? And certainly the anti-movement activists cannot be the response to a genuine demand, a demand



Armed with sticks, iron rods and a machete, alleged ruling Awami League men attack freelance photographer Rahat Karim in front of the Police Box at Science Lab intersection in Dhaka around 2:30 pm on Aug 5, 2018. PHOTO: STAR

the students of mob justice. They were doing a job that the policemen and the BRTA authorities should have been doing. It is true that nobody was spared their scrutiny, but were it not for them, would one have ever come to know that even vehicles of some senior officials run without relevant documents or that their drivers do not have license? Has anyone stopped to think that while during the five or six days that the students were on the streets most of the private buses and trucks were off the streets of Dhaka. That is because they are the main defaulters.

It is a very ominous sign when a

fade from our memory, but even that was endured with equanimity by the general public because it was for a good cause (till it became hopelessly politicised). But we saw no police action to clear the busiest intersection in the capital.

The spectacle we witnessed in several parts of the capital in the last two days was nothing short of a battle of sorts, with police and its auxiliary cadre pitched against the students. The target was not only the agitating schoolboys and girls but also the innocent passers-by who were faulted and set upon for carrying their mobile in their hands,

that even the prime minister has acknowledged as genuine. The measure is temporary palliative at best, but is likely to prove counterproductive for the government in the long run. For one thing these activists have been poised as direct foe of a common public cause and identified as a coercive arm of the state. This has emerged repetitively, most recent in their action against the quota reformists. The ruling party will do well to call off such activists should it want to prevent the matter turning worse.

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An architectural gem at the political heartland

THE GRUDGING URBANIST



ADNAN MORSHED

WE know the 1960s in the then East Pakistan as a decade of political agitation. Bangalis fought for self-rule. Streets were filled with activists demanding political emancipation.

The decade was also a "golden age" for architectural development in the country. One of the architectural gems defining the period was located at the heart of the political landscape. The Greek architect, planner, and theoretician Constantinos Apostolos Doxiadis (1913-1975) designed the Teacher-Student Center (TSC) during the early 1960s.

Many architectural opportunities came forth in East Pakistan during the period of 1958-1968, the so-called "Decade of Development," that benefitted from the United States' technical assistance to Pakistan. The United States allied with Pakistan as part of its Cold-War era foreign policy to create a geostrategic buffer against the socialist milieu of the Soviet Union-India axis in South Asia. Under the purview of a technical assistance programme, the United States Agency for International Development (the USAID was created in 1961 during the presidency of John F Kennedy) and the Ford Foundation provided support for building educational and civic institutions in East Pakistan.

Since there was a dearth of experienced architects in East Pakistan, the government sought the services of American and European architects for a host of buildings that were constructed during the 1960s. Among these architects were Louis Kahn, Doxiadis, Richard Vrooman, Daniel Dunham, Paul Rudolph, Stanley Tigerman, and Robert Bouhigy.

Doxiadis designed multiple institutional complexes, sponsored by the Ford Foundation. Among them were the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development in Comilla, College of Home Economics in Dhaka, and the Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka. However, it was TSC that arguably captured the imagination of the people and, given its central location, became an emblem of Dhaka's architectural modernity.

Located at the historic heart of the University of Dhaka, TSC exemplifies a

modernist architectural sensitivity toward spatial needs for tropical climatic conditions. It blends local parameters of space-making—particularly the indoor-outdoor continuum and generation of space around courtyards—with international-style visual expression of building forms.

A deeper understanding of TSC entails the development of the architect himself, and his design strategy prior to this project. Doxiadis was born in 1913 in Bulgaria to Greek parents. Early in his childhood, he was influenced by his father who was the Greek Minister of Refugees, Social Welfare, and Public Health. In 1951, he founded Doxiadis Associates, a private consulting firm of engineers, architects, and planners that

planning. He hoped that such an approach would create a synergy among the organic context of the locale, data-driven theorisation of planning, and universal values of harmonious living.

Doxiadis evidently tried out his "theories" of ekistics at TSC and other works in Bangladesh. Upon the approval of Doxiadis Associates' final design for the Teacher-Student Center by the Dhaka University authorities, the construction of the complex began in March 1962. The 3.7-acre site of TSC is located at the meeting of Bakshi Bazar Road and Mymensingh Road, with the Suhrawardi Udyan (park) on the east.

Access to the site is from the north, where three streets meet to form a major urban node and the geographic centre of



grew rapidly as an international practice with offices in five continents and projects in 40 countries.

Doxiadis created the Athens Center of Ekistics in 1963, although he had introduced the concept of "ekistics" back in the 1930s. As he later explained in his book *Ekistics: An Introduction to the Science of Human Settlements* (1968), ekistics was conceived as an objective, comprehensive, and integrative approach to all principles and theories of human settlements. Criticising the top-down planning model of the first half of the twentieth century, Doxiadis employed the notion of ekistics to promote a multidisciplinary, inclusive, and bottom-up approach to architecture and city

the sprawling campus of the University of Dhaka. It is a historic gathering place of students and the public during national celebrations, such as Liberation Day, Independence Day, the Language Movement Day, and Pohela Baishakh (the first day of the Bengali year). The horizontal building block to the north acts as a transition from the urban hustle and bustle to the verdant interior of the complex.

The buildings are aligned with the east-west axis to take advantage of the prevailing breeze from the south or north. The three-story Student Union Building is rectangular in plan, 158 by 37 feet, and composed of a reinforced concrete frame and non-load-bearing brick walls. It is a trendsetting building

as it employs a double-roofed structure to minimise heat gain by allowing the cool breeze to pass through the two layers of the roof. Providing a protective canopy for the building shell, the upper roof has a wing-like formation with rainwater drainage in between.

The auditorium, rectangular in plan, is 170 by 85 feet and is covered by a reinforced concrete parabolic vault, a pioneering construction technique in the country. The auditorium has a level floor with removable seating, and a spacious stage with dressing rooms. The airy cafeteria features a high ceiling, and overlooks the sprawling courtyard in the north. It consists of two segments placed on either side of a linear green mall. The western wing of the cafeteria contains a large games room, dressing rooms, showers, and toilets that serve the swimming pool. The eastern wing houses the main eating area and a kitchen with necessary auxiliary spaces.

Covered walkways, supported on steel columns, weave the major buildings and green spaces together. Functioning more like a continuous loop of linear pavilions rather than corridors, the walkways are the social spine of the entire complex. TSC is one of the first buildings in Bangladesh to employ a pavilion theme in non-residential architecture. Extensive use of brick *jalis* (or latticework) in the buildings ensures visual privacy, while providing natural ventilation. Considered a sensible response to the needs of tropical climate, Doxiadis assembled the buildings and courtyards in a lush tapestry of organic fluidity and special interconnectivity. The whole complex feels like a miniature city, perhaps, offering a spatial programme (although in a much smaller scale) antithetical to the recently completed projects of Le Corbusier's Chandigarh or Lucio Costa's Brasilia.

Over the years, TSC has become part of a national narrative in which many of the pivotal student movements took shape around this historic urban node. Furthermore, TSC is also celebrated as a verdant and breezy urban space, a rare liberating experience in this overcrowded city.

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