

Eid Thoughts

After a month of self-discipline elevating us spiritually, we feel delighted like all others to greet the Eid-ul-Fitr and share the joy of the whole nation wishing it Eid Mubarak — in the same breath. The same to our Muslim brethren all over the world. And, true to the spirit of the day, we send to the members of other communities here and, in the rest of the world, our good wishes springing from a renewed sense of universal brotherhood.

If any one of the sterling gains we have made from the month of Ramadan — in the shape of disciplining us more, sacrificing more for others, feeling the hunger of the poor and giving alms to the have-not — has come to stay, we can then look forward to a better future of our society.

The festivity is seasonal alright, but there is no rational explanation as to why the qualities we have shown will all be lost like dew drops on the lotus leaf. True, we cannot eliminate poverty by a single stroke. But by a turn of the same phrase we feel like asserting that this is exactly the reason why we ought to make a start somewhere. The question is: do we need Eid as an occasion to underscore this point when poverty has been strikingly pervasive and transparent for all to see? We think we do. It is Eid that enables the fortunate few to fathom the true depths of disparities in income generation and distribution across the society. It has been gauged from the buying sprees of the rich or the solvent in contrast to the numberless palms that we saw stretched out for alms. Zakat and Fitra we have given or shall give, as the religion ordains us to do, but it is time we woke up to the urgency for picking up some of our success stories and replicating them to forge ahead.

Plenty of productive economic activities were witnessed during the month of Ramadan leading up to this festive climax. High demands on the market stimulated the process with many, on or below the subsistence level, either participating in it or getting spin-off benefits from it. This specially featured festival economy can be better organised in the future to realise its full potential for generating a little more income to the poor. What we mean by an improved organisation of the economy are planned increases in productivity and supply, ridding the distribution network of toll collection, frequent police raids (happily there were fewer this year), and control of smuggling and black marketing.

We need to be less rancorous in our relationships — across the whole spectrum — precisely between the major political parties, between Prokrichi and BCS (Admn) cadres and between the student fronts on the campus. The principle of live-and-let-live can be so much more beneficial in a survival context than fights carried out in self-righteous indignation.

The messages of brotherhood and fellow-feeling underlined by Eid and the month of Ramadan that preceded it, make us conscious of the progressive tenets of Islam. Fanaticism in any shape or form should be antithetical to any world religion. And hopefully all major religions are standing guard over it. Whatever brings public good and enhances welfare of the people should have full support of a global religion, regardless of time and place.

S Africa Bleeds

South Africa is once again in turmoil. With the death of 50 people and injury to hundreds in bloody clashes between supporters and opponents of political reform in Bophuthatswana, a nominally independent territory in the north and east of South Africa, the prospect of holding the first all-race election peacefully on April 27 looks uncertain. Bophuthatswana's authoritarian ruler, Lucas Mangope has gone in hiding but the white extremists who converged on the black-majority territory from different parts of the country are bent on returning him to power.

Evidently, South Africa's right-wing Freedom Alliance (FA) comprising Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Alliance led by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, and Afrikaner People's Front (APF) or the radical paramilitary Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB) are not the only problems for a smooth transition to majority black rule. A country that has so long retained apartheid had to be manipulated and divided on a number of issues just to get the conflicting forces at each other's throat with the aim to neutralise them. The creation of a partially independent territory within the country is one such trick that has proved to be a boomerang now for president F W de Klerk's plan to do away with a devilish past.

Buthelezi and APF leader General Constand Viljoen may have registered for participation in the next month's election, but it is still premature to assume that they will not pose any more threat to a peaceful conduct of the election. Their co-operation depends on the acceptance of some conditions — better say concessions — both by president Klerk and African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela. They have already been causing enough of a headache for the pro-reform parties and their leaders. Bophuthatswana, specially after the carnage there, will only make matters more challenging.

To appease the FA, Nelson Mandela and Klerk had to make overtures to the alliance. On the question of independence of territories like Bophuthatswana lorded over by authoritarian rulers, there cannot be any compromise because this runs counter to the spirit of the democracy expected to dawn in South Africa for a new beginning for the nation. Now that so many people have been killed, and wounded, it is clear that the disruptive forces are going to capitalise on the situation in an attempt to bring the country back to square one. Here is a point that President Klerk and Mandela must concentrate upon. Sending troops to Bophuthatswana for quelling riots cannot but be a wise decision. The Pretoria government must prove its resolve through action so that other disruptive forces dare not embark on such indiscreet adventurism in future.

BNP and AL at Crossroads: Two Secretary Generals talk to the Star

'We will Request Our Chairperson to give more time to the Parliament'

—Salam Talukder

by M Anwarul Haq and Asiuzzaman

SECRETARY General of ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Abdus Salam Talukder said that his party would follow a new strategy to face the opposition offensive in the parliament from the next session.

In an exclusive interview with the Daily Star the longest-serving BNP Secretary General candidly expressed his view in favour of a major revamping of the party and the cabinet to infuse fresh energy into the party.

"We have lack of cohesion among ourselves in parliament and to overcome this problem we have decided to hold regular meeting ahead of the session everyday from next sitting and will prepare ourselves to face current issues," the BNP Secretary General said.

"We will also request our Prime Minister and Leader of the House to give some more time in Parliament," Talukder, wearing a full-sleeve shirt with a matching jeans pant said.

"We feel that a major revamping in the party and also in the cabinet is overdue. Our party constitution only empowered the chairperson to take decision in this regard. She is also aware of the matter," Talukder said.

About the kitchen cabinet, Salam Talukder said "it is a common practice in this country." The number of Begum Zia's kitchen cabinet varies from five to ten, who usually sit for major decision making, he added.

The secretary general of the party hinted that the next election might be held earlier than the present schedule. He declined to elaborate by saying anything concrete in this regard is yet to be decided.

During the two-hour long exclusive interview he explained the success and failure of his party, factionalism inside the party, kitchen cabinet, BNP's view to present burning issues and opposition demands and replied confidently to other related questions.

About the recent alliance by all opposition parties, he said, "It is an old game. I don't know who will be benefitted from it."

"Hasina is now being paid back in her own coin," he commented about the negotiation with Jamaat.

He said that he had information that the Awami League was a bit flexible about attending the session following the Nazmul Huda episode but two other parties — Jamaat and JP pull them back from attending the session. They are pushing AL into an inflexible position.

"We tried our best to bring the opposition back in parliament," Salam Talukder replied in response to a question whether it was fair to prorogue the House in absence of opposition parties.

He declined to comment on the Speaker's role to break the latest impasse.

About the polls debacle Salam Talukder said overconfidence of the leaders and workers including the candidate was one of the main cause of city polls debacle in Dhaka and Chittagong.

He said that being a ruling party, the central leaders most of whom are ministers gave more time to run government rather than party's political activities although our city organisations were quite strong.

He admitted factionalism inside the party by saying "it is very natural in such a big organisation." But he declined to comment about the extent of factionalism and internal feud.

Salam Talukder said they were on the process of reorganising city units. The powerful standing committee sat twice on the matter and on the third day they will take a decision. The date of the adjourned meeting is yet to be fixed.

He was very critical about the role of the opposition. "The opposition parties are effective in creating impasse in the House."

Citing an example, the BNP Secretary General said that they (the opposition) were insisting for the introduction of bills of parliament secretariat and judiciary, but when the

bills were introduced they lost interest and switched over to other issues that create problems in normal proceedings in the House.

In reply to a question whether the ruling party would take a tougher stand to counter the opposition, Salam Talukder said "we have some responsibilities to make the parliament effective."

Abdus Salam Talukder said his party would not abandon the ongoing reform programmes even at the cost of power and victory in next elections.

"Somebody should have to do the unpleasant work for the long-term betterment of the country," he said in an interview on Wednesday adding that "our people have a tendency not to accept anything new."

"We will continue it with some restraint."



The party will start a massive campaign for 1996 election after Eid-ul-Fitr with special emphasis on publicising the reform programme.

In reply to a question, he said BNP would follow both offensive and defensive strategy in tackling the opposition in parliament and also outside the House.

Salam Talukder said that the government's publicity machinery failed to project the reform programme properly. On the other hand, the opposition scored points from the propaganda against some of the government initiative. "The number of newspaper supporting us is very limited."

He said the people were not informed that the internal resource mobilisation came to zero per cent at the end of Ershad regime which was 33 per cent in 1982 when BNP was overthrown by a coup. Because of this ongoing reform the domestic resource utilisation rose of 27 per cent during the past three years.

"But the programme should be slowed down so that the people can absorb it," the BNP secretary general opined.

He pointed out that Jamaat's support for BNP in the initial stage was not "unconditional." They bargained and got two posts from female quota of 30 MPs.

But he claimed that BNP had never closely associated with the Jamaat. Being a party Secretary General he himself issued a number of press statement castigating Jamaat.

In reply to a question whether the BNP government was planning to constitute a tribunal to try the war criminals, he said "the matter has not yet been discussed."

In retrospect, Salam Talukder said that the then caretaker government could have asked the BNP as simple

majority party to form the government without any delay. If they did so, the question of Jamaat's support could not have arisen, he added.

"If we failed to form the government or run the country then automatically an alternative party would have been invited," he said adding that "most of the country follow it where parliamentary system of government is in practise."

About the issue caretaker government, Talukder said that there is no constitutional scope for such an arrangement. He said when the special parliamentary committee was working out the 12th amendment issue, Rashed Khan Menon and one Jamaat MP proposed to insert the provision but both BNP and AL ruled out at that time.

Now why the AL is agitating for the caretaker government? he asked.

This government did never interfere in the functions of the election commission and in future too the commission would work independently as an institution, he said.

When asked about whether BNP was afraid of facing the opposition regarding alleged corruption charges, Salam Talukder said that there was no scope for general debate on corruption without specific charges.

"If we bring widespread allegations of corruption if the present opposition come to power then what will be the situation," he asked.

It will give a bad impression to the people who would think all the MPs are corrupt. This will bring no good to them as well as us.

"They failed to prove the charges against me," Talukder pointed out.

Replying to another question that the ruling party made the probe body on Majid-ul-Huq unworkable, he said "here we also were ready to investigate specific charges but they demanded to open the Pandora's box — all about irrigation Ministry."

No ministry can function if such terms of reference is entertained. The BNP Secretary General ruled out speculations that Hanif might not get full cooperation from the government as he belongs to the opposition party.

He (Hanif) will get full cooperation and available funds as per government budget, Talukder said.

He, however, admitted that the DCC development fund might be exhausted as the fiscal year was ending.

In reply to another question whether Hanif's mayorship would help the AL in gaining round in the capital, Talukder said "it should not be wise to use mayoral office for party purpose."

When asked about who would be his possible successor, he said a number of leaders are capable to carry on this responsibility.

"But you know it is difficult for me to name anybody," he replied.

He said that he had no aspiration for the post. The party chairperson had chosen him at a crucial time six years ago and so far he carried out his duties almost without any flaw, Salam Talukder added.

"I proved my acceptability to the rank and file and also to most of the leaders," he said when asked about the opposition allegation that feud between him and the Home Minister triggered the gunbattle in Jagannath University College recently.

The Secretary General highly endorsed the prudence of party chairperson Begum Khaleida Zia and said a number of leader would soon be included in the standing committee and in the expanded central body.

Salam Talukder said that some of the party workers violated party discipline and contested for the post of commissioner during city corporation polls.

"Disciplinary actions should be taken against them," he added. He claimed that the BNP was still the largest party in the country which has a firm base in the rural area.

"We are hopeful to win the next general election if we can maintain this situation," the BNP SG said an added "We will invigorate our political activities after Eid."

Regarding his ministry, the LGRD Minister said 40 per cent works under his ministry has already been implemented which would reach to about 90 per cent at the end of the financial year.

The LGRD ministry has a Tk 782 crore budget. Last year his ministry achieved 89 per cent of implementation target, he claimed. His ministry competed with the Ministry of Communication in implementing the projects, he added.

When his attention was drawn about reported rivalry and alleged victimisation of AL MP Mirza Azam, Talukder said "I have no rivalry with him."

'We Want the BNP to Stay in Power for the Full Term'

—Zillur Rahman

by Nurul Kabir

AWAMI League (AL) General Secretary Zillur Rahman (63) yesterday ruled out possibility of any political negotiation with the Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh in future. While commenting on AL parliamentary wing's recent negotiations with the Jamaat on certain issues in the Jatiya Sangsad (JS), he said, the negotiation with the anti-Liberation forces 'not desirable'.

Rahman, who is not a member of Parliament, believe that AL's hob-nobbing with the Jamaat at any political forum — be it inside JS or outside it — would eventually isolate the party from its pro-independence sympathisers.

Replying to a question in this regard, Rahman said that the Awami League would not compromise on its previous demand for a special tribunal to try Jamaat chief Golam Azam as a war criminal.

Zillur Rahman expressed these views in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star, recorded at his Gulshan residence Saturday morning.

Zillur Rahman, while explaining the reasons behind the AL candidates' victory in the last mayoral polls, in the two major cities of the country, said, the people had become disillusioned about the ruling BNP's ability to run the administration.

"In addition to it, handing over of the profitably run public sector industries to the private sector at throw-away prices and unnecessary closing down of a number of industrial units and consequent unemployment of the workers had isolated the government from a significant number of urban voters", the AL secretary observed.

On the other hand, Rahman said, the Awami League had succeeded to identify itself with the cause of the common people which contributed a lot to make the AL candidates win the mayoral elections.

When requested to comment on the pro-Islamic speeches of the AL leaders during the election campaign, the AL secretary said that they did not believe in using religious sentiments for winning the polls.

The pro-Islamic speeches were meant for clarifying our position on religion vis-a-vis the BNP's propaganda against the AL that the latter did not believe in Islam", Rahman said, adding that his party had never ignored Islam as the sacred religious faith of the people.

In this regard, the AL leader observed that the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party

would not be able to mislead the Muslim voters in the next national polls on the alleged ground that the AL was an anti-religious political force.

When asked whether the AL would demand, in the context of its 'increasing popularity' among people, and early national polls, the AL secretary replied in the negative. "We want the BNP to stay in power for a full term", Rahman said. He, however, added that the AL would think of such an option in case 'the BNP misrule' had made it imperative for the nation.

Talking on the question of the next national polls, Zillur Rahman told The Daily Star that there was no chance for the AL to back out from the demand for the elections to be held under a caretaker government.

Replying to a question,



Zillur Rahman said, the autocratic regime of Ershad also referred to constitutional provisions in defence of his unwillingness to transfer power to the democratic forces. "If necessary, we shall take to the street to compel the BNP government to amend the constitution for paying the way for holding elections under a caretaker government", Rahman asserted. He believed that the opposition had no scope for accepting the polls under the BNP when the ministers had always been out to influence the voters by means of making illegal election pledges, even in the local-level polls.

When asked to identify some areas where the government has failed to discharge its duties, especially in terms of people's expectations, the AL secretary said, the BNP miserably failed to change the lot of the common people, especially that of the peasants and agrarian workers. "Rather, the peasants have now been exposed to double misery because of the government's steps to increase the price of agricultural inputs, four times since 1991. As a result, the

peasants have been compelled to sell their products at a price much less than the production cost", Rahman said.

The AL leader also alleged that the ministers were involved in corrupt practices but the Prime Minister had failed to take any punitive measures against them.

When asked why the AL lawmakers did not submit any documents to the Speakers of the Parliament substantiating the alleged corruptions of some of the ministers, Zillur Rahman told The Daily Star, that his party MPs were not in possession of such documents right at that moment. "However, if the discussion on corruption was allowed by the Chair of the House, we could have definitely succeeded to present the necessary documents", the AL leader asserted.

Rahman, in this connection, also said that Tofael Ahmed MP already had 'adequate' documents to substantiate his allegation against the Irrigation and Flood Control Minister, but he was yet to be allowed by the parliamentary probe committee to present them.

When asked whether he was satisfied with the performance of his party's Parliamentary wing in the Jatiya Sangsad, Rahman said that the AL MPs had been trying their best to make the Parliament effective, especially in terms of discussing the issues of public interest on floor of the Jatiya Sangsad. "But the Treasury bench used to hinder the process through ignoring the pro-people issues in the House", Rahman claimed.

Commenting on the last boycott of Parliament proceedings by the Opposition, the AL secretary said, the Opposition had been left with no option but to refrain themselves from returning to the House because "the information minister had hurt the religious sentiment of the Muslim community of the country."

When asked whether the Opposition had missed the opportunity of criticising the Treasury bench, for its reported failure to improve law and order and control the price of the essentials, on the Parliament floor, Rahman said, these issues would be addressed in the House in the next session of the Jatiya Sangsad.

"The Treasury bench should not expect the Opposition to state a departure from its (Opposition's) original stand on a particular issue for the sake of a mere negotiation with the government", The Awami league general secretary concluded.

OPINION

Problems of Industrialization

A vital issue which is widely talked about is investment and industrialization in our country. While most East Asian countries are surging ahead and several South Asian countries are making significant progress we are unable to join the bandwagon. Probable factors which are causing this disappointment are summarized below based on personal experience and information gathered from learned expressions.

1) ATTITUDE OF THE ENTREPRENEURS: To put an industrial unit on the right footing is a process of hardship and often time-consuming. The promoter must prepare himself not to be benefited before the project operates above the break-even point. Lure of short pay-back period should be resisted in favour of long-term stability.

2) ATTITUDE AND CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT/AUTHORITIES: Policies of the government, control of various departments and directorates are detrimental to investment. Frequent expression of desire, to simplify the procedures and establishment of new 'desks' to help the investors are found to complicate things further.

3) PROJECT SELECTION: The sponsor should consider all pros and cons before finally taking a decision. Extensive trading experience in the item selected for production ensures success of the project.

Often a wrong selection based on hearsay success story can be the doom of the sponsor. Much is heard about 'hidden demand' which may be true where there are spare 'buying capacity' but not in a country with the majority under poverty line. Professional consultants should be assigned to undertake proper study.

4) PROJECT COST: For the

eventual success of a project, the initial cost should be as less as practicable. Borrowed part should also be minimized.

During whole of the project's life this initial cost nags on and influences the cost of production. Projects in our condition tend to be sick as the cost of financing is high. Primarily, the rate of interest is exorbitant. The loan part of the project financing is usually high; sometime as high as 90 per cent. This 90 per cent (if so) causes a heavy burden of debt servicing. The project cost increases if the implementation period extends for any reason.

All these factors added to the incidence of over-invoicing jack-up the production cost. We have not yet heard of any item produced in our country that is cheaper than cost elsewhere. Of course, except the ready-made garments where the workers' salary is ridiculously low.

5) LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY: The productivity of our work force in most mills and factories is one of the lowest in the industrial world. In factories where I had opportunity to observe, I saw spare hands are engaged either as 'assistants' or 'covers' for rest period. Engagement of double the required strength is common and instances of thrice the strength can also be found.

The situation develops gradually and innocently. The trade unions, employers, national leaders and most of all the workers should try to understand that if the productivity increases there would be more investment and the scope for further employment would enhance.

6) INDUSTRIAL RELATION: Sympathetic consideration towards the welfare of the employees can help maintain a good relationship. Fair trade union practices can save many

units from turning 'sick'. Trade union leaders are often influenced by factors not directly related to the interest of the project or the employees. Sometimes being outsiders they have little at stake.

7) PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT: Professional management is yet to develop in our country. Lack of confidence on the part of the professionals and lack of awareness on the part of most entrepreneurs are mainly responsible for this situation. Family or one-man unit tend to disappear when the pioneer leaves the scene.

8) EDUCATION AND LITERACY: Inter-personal and inter-organizational communication can be difficult or impossible with the literacy rate so low. Entrepreneurship not associated with learning has only limited reach.

9) POLITICS VIS-A-VIS LAW AND ORDER: Law and order situation remains a big stumbling block towards investment and industrialization of our country. Politicians are responsible and the bureaucrats are incapable of solving this problem. There must be a way out if we are to survive honourably.

10) ECONOMY OF THE COUNTRY: We are in a vicious circle, which is difficult to break. The general poverty keeps the level of consumption low. And the low level of consumption retards industrialization. Many foreign investors do not feel encouraged to invest in Bangladesh when they find out that the domestic market is virtually non-existent.

There are many other components of this despairing mix, but if efforts are made to ease some of these we may hope for a tolerable future.

M A Haq
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To the Editor...

Private vehicle owners and police

Sir, Recently two letters were published in your column describing worries of the private vehicle owners because of activities of the police authority. Innocent private vehicle owners, it appears, have been left to the mercy of police authority.

I would therefore, request the Home Minister to take steps so that no police official can requisition or check papers of any private vehicle without presence of a 1st class magistrate. Further, police authority should announce the procedure of lodging complaints against harassment of

private vehicle owners by police officers.

I also draw the attention of the Inspector General of Police to this sorry state of affairs.

Jaglal Ahmed
Naraincherra, Srimangal

HBFC loanes' plight

Sir, About two/three months ago HBFC announced through advertisement on TV and in newspaper that defaulting loanes would be given substantial relief benefit if they pay four instalments of their original monthly instalment in one time. That their monthly loan instalment will be

rescheduled giving good benefit. Believing this many poor loanes managed to pay the desired 'loan instalments'.

But reply they got was most surprising. The rescheduled instalment shows compound interest on the loan as almost double and in some cases more than double the original loan instalment. A very clever way of financial corruption! If the original loan instalment would have doubled the compound interest, the loanes would have been benefited and regular payments could have been made earlier than proposed by the HBFC.

Abdul Kader
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