

Throttling democratic

FROM PAGE 1
When the AL, in its second term in opposition, started calling hartals we resumed our condemnation of it. We wrote volumes in trying to persuade the opposition not to adopt this anti-civil rights and economy-destroying method of mass protest. To their credit the AL and other opposition parties sensed a growing public resentment against hartals. Over time its acceptability became less and less and we saw a desire among our politicians, however tenuous, to desist from calling hartals.

There was also the issue of boycott of parliament. Again, both the BNP and AL are equally guilty of indulging in this democracy-destroying habit and once again, the media, by and large, has been extremely proactive in building up public opinion against it. Here again we noticed a heartening development when the AL changed its boycott decision and returned to parliament and decided to participate in the activities of all its standing committees.

We recall here Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's own repeated public speeches that urged the AL to return to parliament. She promised the opposition full freedom to discuss any subject of their choice with as much time as they would desire. We welcomed the PM's pronouncements and complimented her for giving the right political signals for some sort of reconciliation in the volatile political situation.

The assassination attempt on Sheikh Hasina on August 21 shook the nation to its very core. The death of 20 political activists including AL's senior leader Ily Rahaman and the injury of more than 200 AL activists stunned the nation and the whole world, prompting an outpouring of sympathy from world leaders that Bangladesh had not received for a long time. The world stood by us at this moment of trial and offered a helping hand to get us out of this dangerous situation. What the world did not know is that our politics had become so rotten that no amount of people's suffering (first the floods and then a rain-induced one) and no amount of weakening of our democratic base will stop them from indulging in the vicious, acrimonious and self-destructive politics that we have been seeing for the last 13 years.

The new mischief was set off by the JCD, the student wing of the BNP, that started propagating in the campuses around the country, within 24 hours of the tragedy, that the events of August 21 were AL's own doing. The response from Sheikh Hasina was to blame the PM for the incident and hold the ruling coalition responsible for terrorism in the country. The battle of lies that followed gradually smothered all rational public discourse on the subject, much to the glee of the terrorists and the alarm of common citizens and the international community.

Given our political culture some element of blame game was expected at the party level. But what we did not expect and cannot accept is the role the government is playing. Everybody in the government including, most regrettably, the PM appears to have forgotten that the government belongs to the nation and not only to the BNP and its coalition partners. Those who

Bribes eat away 3pc

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the climate for firms in Dhaka matched that of Shanghai, Dhaka could reduce its productivity gap by 40 percent and wages could rise by 18 percent.

For Kolkata, the effect is even larger, the surveys find citing that 80 percent of the productivity gap could be closed and wages could rise by 38 percent.

"A good investment climate is central to growth and poverty reduction," said Francois Bourguignon, World Bank's senior vice-president and chief economist.

The World Bank report said improving property rights in China launched a process that lifted 400 million people out of poverty.

According to the surveys, over 40 percent of South Asian firms rank electricity as major constraint to operation and growth of their business compared to less than 10 percent in Eastern Europe and less than 25 percent in Latin America and East Asia.

Losses from electricity outages average over 10 percent of sales in India and over 6.5 percent in Pakistan. Sixty-three percent of the respondent firms in Pakistan lack confidence that courts will uphold their property rights.

"Unreliable electricity supply and other infrastructure, crime and corruption can impose costs that are more than double those of regulation. Together with weak contract enforcement and onerous regulation, these costs can amount to over 25 percent of sales - or more than three times what firms typically pay in taxes," the WB report says.

The development report finds that registering a business takes 35 days in Bangladesh which is 24 days in Pakistan, 50 days in Sri Lanka and 89 days in India.

Resolving a bankruptcy requires 3.2 years on average across the world while South Asia's average is 4.8 percent and India's 10 years, it says.

According to 'Doing Business Database' of the report, India's reforms increased growth from 2.9

Dhaka examines

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Home Minister Shiraj Patil.

Jahangir said he had told the home minister that there were some issues between the two countries and they were not beyond solution.

Jahangir, along with BSF Director General Ajai Raj Sharma, called on Patil to apprise him of the first day's biannual talks between border guards of India and Bangladesh. The home minister expressed happiness over the progress of the talks.

Replied to reporters' questions about India's charge of northeastern Indian insurgents' camps in Bangladesh, Jahangir denied the existence of such camps.

"We do not have even a single insurgents' camp in our territory and the addressed provided by the BSF have been found either to be a cantonment area or headquarters of the armed forces," he said.

In a sarcastic tone, Jahangir said, "Some of the addresses provided by India have even been traced to the Bay of Bengal."

Asked about India's demand that Bangladesh hand over Indian insurgent leaders like Anup Chetia of United Liberation Front of Assam, the BDR chief said: "This is for the Bangladeshi home ministry to respond. We only man the border."

Referring to India's allegation of Indian insurgents finding shelter in Bangladesh, Jahangir said, "This is only a creation of the media. I will take you people in all bordering places and let you trace an insurgents' camp for me."

Asked about the objections raised by the two sides about constructions in their respective territories, the BSF director general said a joint team would assess the situation and seek to address it in three months.

The BDR delegation also called on Indian Home Secretary Dhrendra Singh and Secretary (Border Management) Ashok Kumar Rastogi.

An agreed minute of the four-day BSF-BDR talks is expected to be issued on Friday.

AL, allies

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in the October 3 grand rally," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star yesterday.

On the programmes to be announced from the rally, he said, "All these issues are still on the table. Our leaders and allies have not finalised the dates and modes of agitation programmes yet."

An AL source however said the party leadership is mulling over a two-day hartal before October 10, the day the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition celebrates its third anniversary in office.

The source said the final decision on the agitation programmes would be made after AL President Sheikh Hasina returns, may be today, from Singapore, where she went to get treatment of her hearing problem.

"We have not decided yet..... We don't want hartal but government is pushing us to enforce it," Jalil said alluding to the ongoing blanket arrests of opposition adherents. "We are being deprived of our rights to hold peaceful programmes like processions and rallies," he added.

Earlier, Jalil warned, if the government does not halt indiscriminate arrests to foil the AL rally, his party would paralyse the country by enforcing indefinite hartals.

The High Court yesterday issued an ad interim injunction against the government prohibiting arrest under Section 86 of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance.

JD President Hasanul Haq Inu said, "Nothing is finalised yet. But we are thinking to announce programmes simultaneously to mobilise people in the out-government movement."

"We will sit with the leaders of Awami League and other parties in this regard within a couple of days," he said, adding, "We don't want to make people suffer during the month of Ramadan by enforcing hartals."

The AL and its front organisations meanwhile are working out ways to make the October 3 rally a big, successful showdown. The party has already obtained permission to hold the meeting in Paltan Maidan from the National Sports Council.

"We will make the rally a success at any cost braving all the repressive measures of the government," Jalil declared.

Dhaka Jailer

FROM PAGE 1
Rashid, Jailer Mohammad Kamruzzaman, Subedar Fazlu Mollah and Habildar Tasim Uddin of his brother.

Mohammad Amir Hossain, Abu's brother, was convicted in an arms case and jailed for 15 years on November 19, 1999.

Abul said in the complaint that he and two other relatives went to the jail Monday and learned the incident. Amit told them that the accused severely beat up him without any reason and also showed them the marks of torture in his body.

Other prisoners of the visiting room, whom Abul has made the witnesses in the case, have confirmed the incident.

Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullah-Hel-Baki after hearing took the case into cognisance and directed the officer-in-charge of Lalbagh Police Station to take necessary steps after a probe.

However, Jailer Mohammad Kamruzzaman refuted the allegation. He told The Daily Star by phone that he does not know anything about the incident.

Three SUST

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The teachers brought the matter to the notice of acting VC Professor Moslehuddin Ahmed.

Earlier the same day, Prof Farzana Siddiqua also received a death threat in the same way.

She informed the varsity registrar of the matter and lodged a GD with the Sylhet Kotwali Police Station.

The President and General Secretary of the SUST Teachers Association in a statement strongly condemned the threats.

Alliance plans rally

FROM PAGE 12
General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the chair yesterday planned the programme.

BNP leader Abdus Salam, Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mujahid and central leader Abdul Qader Mollah, BJP leaders Kazi Firoz Rashid, Maudul Islam and Saifur Rahman, IOJ leaders Izzharul Islam, Ahmed Abdul Qader and Abdur Rab Yusufi attended the meeting held at Bhuiyan's official residence yesterday.

Most of the arrestees were either involved in crime or have criminal charges against them, he continued.

Bhuiyan said innocent people, if arrested mistakenly, are being released. "We don't want to harass innocent people and political activists.

The authorities have instructed the police not to cause any suffering to innocent commoners," he added.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Bhuiyan said the October 9 rally was also to protest terrorism, anarchy and bomb explosions in the country.

When asked whether the alliance will shift its October 9 rally if Awami League calls a hartal on that day, Bhuiyan said, "We don't know yet whether they will do so, but we hope they will refrain from taking such decision in the interests of maintaining a healthy political culture."

He said BNP never obstructed the main opposition in any of its programme. Responsibility to maintain a congenial political environment rests on all political parties.

Referring to the ongoing mass

arrests of opposition activists and commoners across the country, Mannan Bhuiyan said he too has heard about it. But the home ministry had informed him that police were making those arrests in an anti-crime drive ahead of the Puja, Ramadan and some other religious programmes, not to obstruct Awami League's October 3 rally, he added.

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