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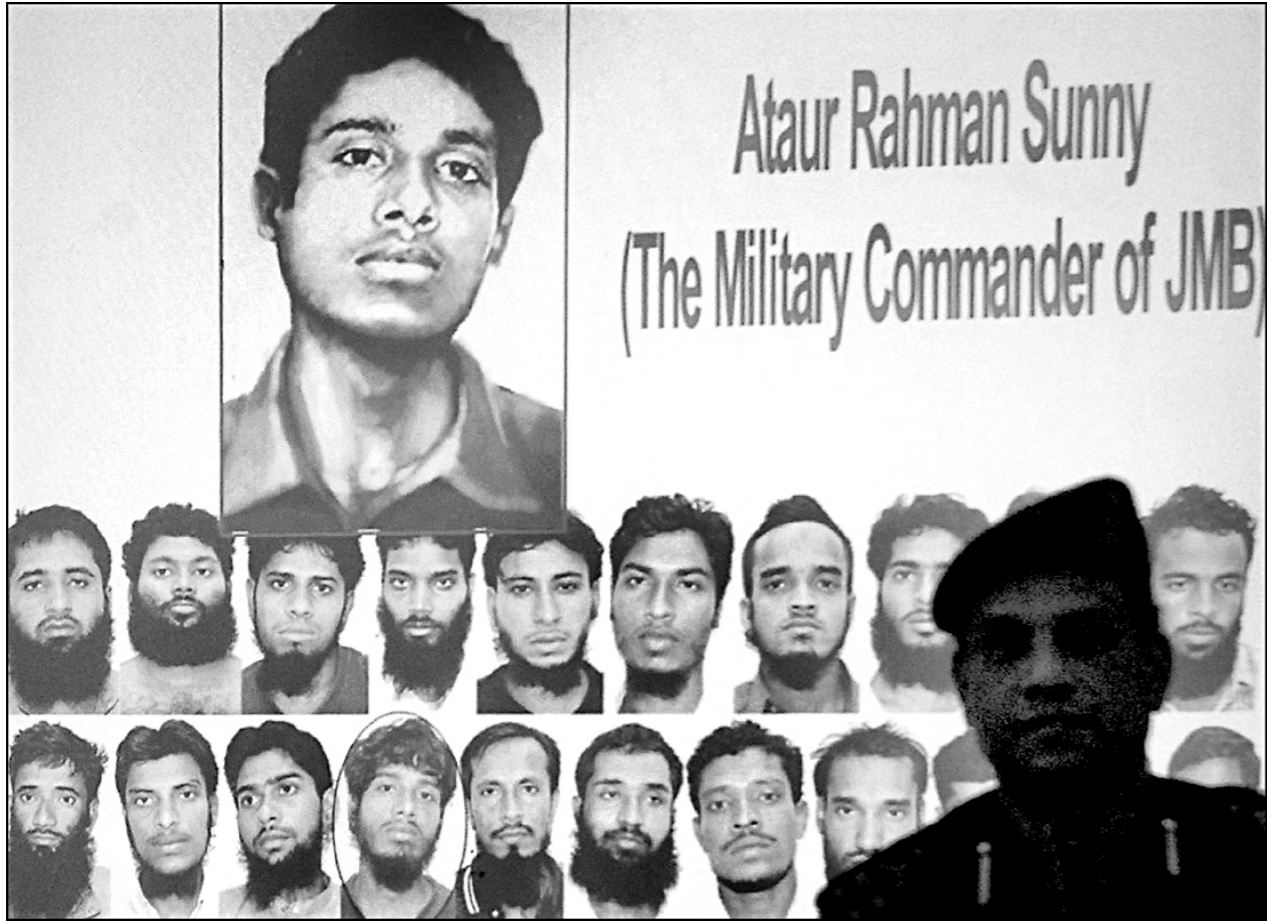


PHOTO: AFP

Danger at home

I do not think the present government, with its political composition, is in a position to contain the fanatic upsurge of the so-called Islamic extremists. The government has been, from the very beginning, suffering from the alleged image problem and fighting against the opposition party, mainly the AL. Therefore, in its initial years several journalists and writers were harassed and even accused of so-called anti-state activities and imprisoned. The AL was also implicated in the process. But now, as the media reports go, these extremists are openly threatening the very political structure sanctioned by the Constitution of the country and even threatening to destroy the Shahid Minars built in memory of the contribution of the freedom fighters and delivering fatwa not to observe the Victory Day etc. They have even gone to the extent of declaring 14 August as independence day and rehabilitating Jinnah as the father of the nation! And

these are indeed the most serious anti-state activities - nothing but plain and simple, and are enough to belittle this hard earned freedom of the country and the cause for which Bangladesh was born. These are some of the reasons for which Bangladesh is losing credence in various international forums and the international donor/development agencies are now showing reluctance to be partners of our national development efforts.

It seems that the intelligence machinery and the law enforcing agencies of the country are yet to fully unearth the activities of the extremists. However, there are reasons to believe that the ultimate motivation of these extremists is to erase Bangladesh from the map of the world. Does the government entrusted with upholding independence of the country and protecting its citizen read this message? The two major allies of the ruling BNP have

long been professing for turning Bangladesh into a so-called Islamic state (we have seen what this was during the Paki period). They are also directly or tacitly lending support to the extremists at the cost of BNP and its founder's contribution to our struggle for liberation in 1971. This is high time the BNP shakes off its allies and stand on its own for the sake of an independent entity of Bangladesh and the goals for which this country was born. The BNP will shine in the history of Bangladesh ever by adopting such a measure for the sake of the country. Otherwise, it will be doomed to oblivion altogether. The political parties must quit the blame game now and look for the truth. No wonder, Bangabandhu had the farsightedness to see this poor country secular where all religious faiths could flourish and live together!

Dr. K. Maudood Elahi
Jahangirnagar University

politicians' interest. Because November 21 strike was essentially a government enforced hartal. Anybody pretending otherwise will have to explain the remarkable coincidence of the strike happening just the day before Awami League's grand rally.

Awami League hartals, no matter how we hate them, are at least declared in advance. Though emergencies like taking someone to hospital don't care about advance notice, life to a large part can be adjusted to brace the inconvenience. That was not to be with the BNP. In the evil design to hinder the AL's programme, they unhesitatingly put scores of people marooned in despair whom they took oath to serve. Not to mention the economic losses that resulted.

Sometime next year we will have to vote. We have two parties. One party's activities consist mainly of ruminating history and shouting, "Oust the government right now." As if to add variation, now they have unleashed a string of election promises they didn't bother to implement when time was theirs. Another party rules through a motion of denial for everything from skyrocketing prices to BCS question leakage. Now they have proved they can sell us out anytime it serves their own end.

What should we, ordinary voters, do now?
Ashish Ahsan
Uttara, Dhaka 1230

Monga and our leaders

The inevitable Monga in North Bengal hits hard every year. The news media does its job by bringing the picture to the whole nation. It gives an opportunity to the two major political parties to blame each other without showing any interest to share the agonies and pains with the poverty stricken people. Both are shocked when some one drops dead from hunger and plays a different tune in their political flute. People were dying for a plate of plain rice during Ramadan & Eid but our leaders were busy throwing and joining 'IFTER PARTIES', they have shown plenty of interests in chewing chicken drum sticks, gulping soup rich in vitamins, biting on king prawns etc. etc. which continued with Boom Boom celebrations of Eid. What kind of leaders we have?

Over the past years we have noticed none of the major parties has planned or taken any preventive measure to solve this problem once and for all, it's nothing new to us. As a matter of fact, we all know that the political parties are there to cash on the situation. They make promises and break them because they know promises are made to be broken. We the people still believe them, we start day dreaming and then get hurt when none of their promises are fulfilled, we again forgive them when they approach us with new promises and that is continuing since the creation of Bangladesh.

When the leaders talk about their regime and claim shamelessly that "We did this, we did that for the people & the country"; (I feel sorry for myself). Excuse me!! what the hell you're claiming, you were on the street, at our door, traveled the whole country on choppers begging for our mandate, promising lots of things that you intend to deliver, which eventually you cannot because you need to have honesty, devotion, planning, a platform and the zeal to deliver.

Come on, none of you spent a single penny for your country or people. My question to all, don't you think we have had enough of this? There has been so much of chaos and violence. The time has come to turn back to them and demand answers, God knows when it will happen.

I have never heard any political leader acknowledging that, "We were chosen and given responsibility by the people to run the country,

lead the nation to a prosperous future, build the country and it's economy and so on, we are sorry we couldn't deliver which we promised, we are assessing our past, we therefore ask forgiveness from our people." Instead we are listening to their mouthful claims over and over again "We did this, we did that". Shame on you, look at Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia where they have reached and where we are heading for. Clinching the championship five times in a row for "Corruption" is our only gain in the past 35 years....

I am not very optimistic about any change taking place in the near future. But the leaders must change for the benefit of all concerned.

Kazi M. Rahman Tazim
Manama
Bahrain

Dirty politics

Our beloved country is going through a very critical stage, thanks to our

leaders' playing a dirty game of politics. We, the common people, have to suffer for their selfish and impatient acts.

The main opposition party Awami League and the 14-party opposition combine successfully organised their Grand rally at Paltan Maidan on 22 November. In order to foil the oppositions' grand rally, the government allegedly

backed transport unions to hold a wildcat strike which eventually paralysed the entire country.

Not only that, the ruling party allegedly instructed the law enforcers to indiscriminately beat up the opposition activists who came to join the rally. They even didn't spare the journalists.

But did it serve the government in any way? Did it stop the opposition supporters from coming in large numbers to the rally? Actually the law enforcers' approach & manhandling of the opposition workers didn't make any impact on the rally, rather it gave the opposition a chance to call a hartal!

Undoubtedly this hartal would just add to public sufferings, nothing else. Hartal is a self-destructive weapon going against the greater interest of the country. But it seems that our politicians don't care about this.

So do we have to assume that their petty party interests are greater than the interests of the masses? Politics is for the welfare of the general masses but in our country it seems that politics is for the welfare of our politicians alone!

The government doesn't want to give any room to the opposition while the opposition wants to dislodge a democratically elected government by force! How long will the people have to suffer for the limitations of our political parties?

In a democratic country, the opposition has every right to hold rallies, processions etc. as these are their democratic rights. The government shouldn't try to resist the opposition from doing so. On the other hand, the opposition shouldn't do anything which is against the interest of the country.

As both of our leaders are regarded as born politicians--they should know it better than us!

But they don't want to act the way they should.

So when will our leaders' good sense prevail? When will the nation get rid of this dirty politics which is destroying the entire nation?

Nazmus Saquib
Notre Dame College
Dhaka

Scrap BCS exam

Once again, BCS question papers are reported to have been leaked. It is quite outrageous and shocking for the whole nation. I can't understand why the same incident is happening again and again. Recurrence of the same incident raises a question in our mind--how competent PSC is to conduct such an important exam?

At the same time, it also raises the question why the government is not sincere to stop recurrence of question paper leakage. There is no doubt that some incompetent, meritless candidates will get appointed owing to question paper leakage. Eventually, it will create a vacuum in administration. Moreover, it is easy to predict that candidates, who will be appointed by way of illegitimate means, will never do anything good for the country or people. Inevitably, they will breed more corruption in our administration. Ultimately, people of Bangladesh will be the worst victims of this process.

they have lost it. The so called religious extremists in our country are now trying to establish a total anarchy. Do they think that people will rush to follow them?

For a long time our political leaders have tried to play with people's sentiments. They always showed total disregard for the system with mistrust. They didn't think that the majority of our people are illiterate, live in inhuman condition with constant poverty. The politicians have targeted them to win with false hope, false dream, false promise. Now these masses

DECEMBER 16

The day broke bright and sunny and there were celebrations all around us. Incredibly, the voyage across the turbulent sea had come to a glorious end. But Alas! Many of the navigators were lost as the nation passed through the most excruciating nine months in its history.

But what do we watch today? The forces defeated in 1971 are again showing their ugly fangs. We must unite to break the back of the evil elements.

Mansoor Raja, Dhaka

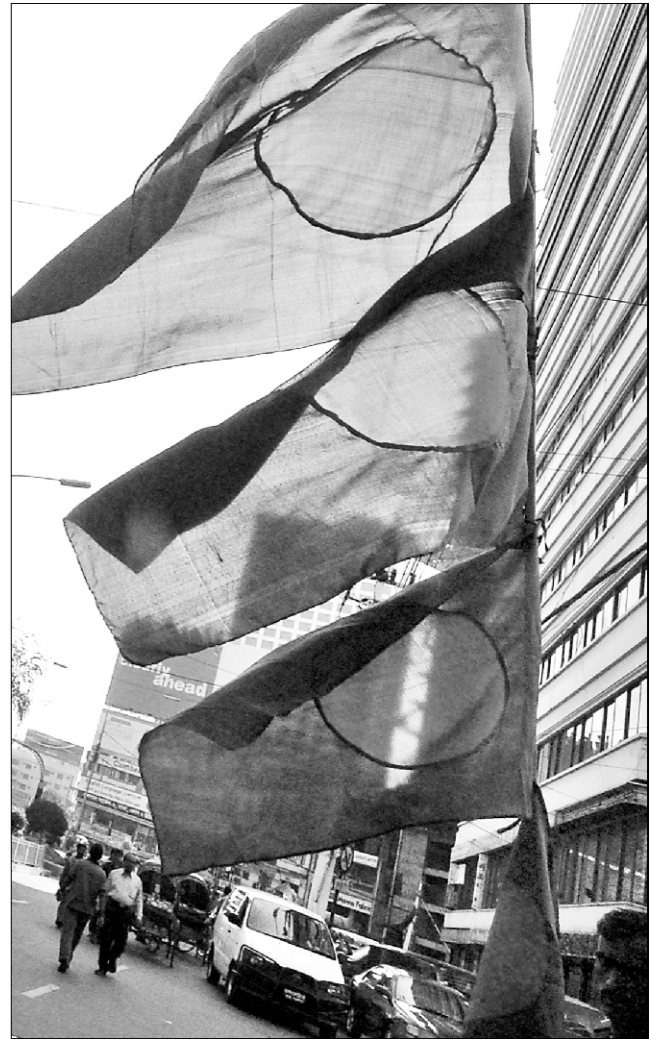


PHOTO: AFP

Get rid of Biman

Stitches, patches and plasters will not work. Changing ministers, changing managers or madly rushing out for short-term solutions will only delay -- while costing more money -- the inevitable: the total breakdown and bankruptcy of Biman. The problem Biman currently has is not the result of one mistake, one month's mismanagement, or even one year's mismanagement. It is the result of a catalogue of mismanagement, committed by people who never should have been anywhere near the Biman office. People were given jobs for which they weren't qualified. People were let off when they made mistakes, when their arrogance and incompetence cost millions to the taxpayers. All because of political favouritism.

There is only one solution left for Biman: get rid of it. There are homeless people, starving people, people with life-threatening illnesses who need government money. There are people starving to death in some districts because of monga. Those people need our money more than Biman. We do not need to advertise our pride all over the globe by having a national flag carrier. There are other countries that don't have national flag carriers and they get more respect from the international community than Bangladesh. If Biman wants to operate, let it operate privately. Our poor people should no longer pay a single penny for an airline that survives mainly by flying our ministers, MPs and VIPs. We do not need Biman. Let's get rid of this financial 'black hole' now.

Azad Miah
Oldham
UK

Islam, terrorism and corruption

The avowed objective of the Muslim fundamentalists is to establish a Puritan Islamic State and Sharia Law. But what is Sharia Law? Most people are aware of the harsh punishments for adultery and theft (although in the Holy Quran there are humane alternatives of forgiveness, reparation etc which are eschewed). But what about other crimes of the modern age like bribery, corruption, fraud, cheating, misappropriation of bank or other

people's funds (including that of orphans), smuggling, Mafia or warlord style killing, looting and intimidation for power, etc.? In the holy book there are exhortations (in many places) from Allah to avoid such (unrighteous) activities if heaven and not hellfire is desired in afterlife, but no earthly punishment is prescribed, as is prescribed for adultery and theft. In addition Allah's judgment of one's deeds on the day of resurrection is stated to be based on totality of activities, good or bad, and then on its balance.

Of course bigoted terrorists must be rooted out but at the same time a council of Islamic scholars, (perhaps this is a proper job of OIC), must research the Quranic principles to prescribe earthly punishments for all modern crimes and social evil-doings.

Shafi Ahmed
London UK
100 Western Avenue
London W3 7TX

Role of politicians

While I notice that terrorism in the last couple of years has come from the bottom of the list of civic anomalies to the first position, I have to go through the newspaper headlines on terrible bomb blasts, the threats of militants and ask myself "where is our fault?" Are we heading for a state of anarchy?

Unless and until our politicians realise that they have a vital role to play against the outlawed militants, our problem will not be solved.

Rezaul Karim, Railway Colony, Shajahanpur, Dhaka

Saarc Summit

If any guests come to our house and we start quarrelling among ourselves and keep shouting "What the hell, why do the guests come off and on to our house? Don't they have anything else to do? What is the benefit in entertaining them with good food and flowers, all these are just wastage of money....?" etc., just think what will be the mental condition of the guests? Won't they feel unwanted? Something like these

could happen to Bangladesh. But the guests from the Saarc countries really appreciated the hospitality of Bangladeshi people, as the Pakistan prime minister said in the opening ceremony. The India prime minister also said that next time it will be a challenge for India to arrange such a summit like Bangladesh did. We feel good when someone says something good about Bangladesh even in the midst of thousands of problems we face in our day to day life.

Our leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina didn't take a prudent decision. She neglected the Saarc Summit and neglected the country's image. She says she would love to be amongst monga affected people, but she stayed there only for those 2/3 days when the summit was going on. Look, when the summit came to the end, she quickly came to Dhaka and met the Saarc leaders at Sheraton Hotel. What was in her mind? Politicians in our country think that we can't understand anything, we have no brain, we can't see anything, can't hear anything.

Whenever the ruling party does anything our opposition parties disapprove of it. It has become the tradition of our country. I don't think there is a single country in the world where the opposition acts like this. This is really weird!

Whatever we do, we will have to think about the country's interest first.

If this tradition goes on, what will happen in future? What will be the fate of Bangladesh?
Cantara Wali Ruhi
Dhaka

Who could we turn to?

Someone I know had to climb through the window into a crammed railcar, lose a bag in the jostle, and stand for 9 hours to go to Dinajpur on Nov 21. He was lucky. Hundreds of thousands of others suddenly found themselves helplessly stranded around the country with no bus to carry them, because government backed transport workers called a sudden strike on that day.

When travelers' helplessness was immediate and despairing, a more permanent sense of helplessness took hold of all of us with the reality sinking in: we have nobody to turn to; we all are expendable to

Fuel price hike

It's alarming to learn that the IMF is suggesting another price hike of fuel. No doubt it will increase living costs. But we know the history of price adjustment in our country, i.e. all sections of traders will start increasing prices, not considering the actual costs.

So the government must act discreetly.
Sarwar Kamal, Dept. of philosophy, CU

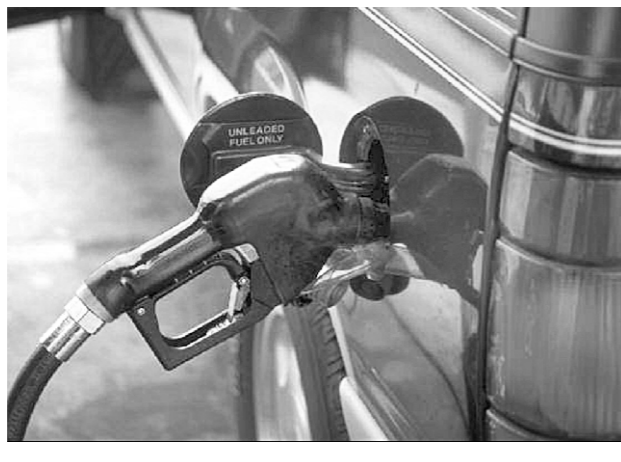


PHOTO: AFP



We have left autumn behind. It's winter now. The gentle breeze is getting cooler with

every passing day. The changes in nature do affect all living beings. It's time to

prepare for misty, hazy days and nights.
Roney, One-mail

have become a Goliath. Political unrest is again looming on the horizon. The void of lawfulness, the time of political change of heads will again bring more unrest. Already different political parties are showing their might with blaring songs of their party - showing disrespect, disregard to the community, to the people.

The whole world is experiencing this.

I am really nervous.
Maleka Parvin
Dhaka 1000
Bangladesh

Why this confusion?

I am a student of RUET (Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology). I am a BSC student, but sometimes I face a problem that general people think that am a student of DIPLOMA course. But there is a lot of difference between a BSC engineer and diploma engineer.

MD. Khairul Alam
ME-04, RUET

Punish the patrons

The recent utterances of Abu Hena MP and others of the BNP reminded us of what can happen to people after they realise that they have made mistakes. The promoters and patrons of the much hated 'Jamaat' and Islamic militants seem to suddenly find the light, realising the hard facts, repenting about the 'Frankenstein' they themselves had created for their selfish, narrow political gains. Now that the situation in general, public opinion, world opinion are turning against them, they have changed their postures.

There are people in this country who have chosen a violent course, and we are already paying heavily for their subversive activities. These enemies of the people ought to be tried in public and the anti-liberation, anti-Bengali, anti-progress, self seeking devils should be meted out the heaviest punishments so that this country is ridden of these cancerous elements for all times. And our much loved country can flourish in the right spirit and direction.

TKM
On e-mail