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Dialogue, the only way out



Javed Helali
Austin, TX, USA

Dialogue on the proposed reforms will be held not between the BNP and the Awami League or between the Chairperson of the BNP and the President of the Awami League or between AL General Secretary and BNP Secretary General. It should and must be held between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. The Prime Minister will represent the Government side and the Leader of the Opposition will represent all the Opposition Parties. If any problem arises, then both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition will sit together and through discussion solve that problem themselves. If it really happens, then a new dimension will be added to our national politics, and the country will be saved from chaos, hartals and violence. Democracy will be strengthened.

We often form human chain or observe token hunger strike on various issues or demands. Then why don't we act on this particular issue or demand?

Iqbal Ahmed
New Eskaton, Dhaka

Our leaders have again gone to their childhood game. Despite rising agonies, popular sentiment is reduced to hopelessness. We apprehend fresh onrush of hartal, agitation, police atrocities and even bloodshed. But the situation was created to avoid all such

public sufferings. The dilatory exchanges of letters, high sounding press conferences, all went in vain. Leaders are planning to start it again, right in the streets playing with the lives and properties of general public.

We urge upon leaders of both the sides to act more reasonably and constructively to resolve the crisis. Can't Mr. Mannan Bhuiyan telephone Mr. Jalil to meet exclusively and form a working group to hammer out a solution? Can't they rise up to the occasion and show their sincerity to the people? Don't they understand that the opportunity is slipping away? They should not take patience of the people for granted.

M. Sanaul Huq, *Uttara, Dhaka*

In the recent reform talks, in response to opposition party's letter, the BNP proposed a 5-member committee from the 4-party alliance. This committee had Jamaat leader Ali Ahsan Muhammad Muzahid. The Awami League made a plea that Jamaat should be excluded from the talks.

The government included Ali Ahsan Muhammad Muzahid, but the AL will not accept it. If they accept it, it will be a political defeat for the 4-party alliance. So the possibility of a dialogue to pave the way for making free and fair election is a far cry.

Taslim Hasan Sabu, *University of Dhaka*

I am no lover of BNP or, for that matter, the various components of the opposition. Whether anyone likes it or not, the present government of Bangladesh is a coalition. The government cannot talk to the opposition on this important matter minus its alliance partners. If there is sincerity in demands for electoral reforms, the opposition must talk with the government. Otherwise, the people of the country will think that the opposition is not sincere in its demands.

I presume that ALL the demands of the opposition will not be met in any dialogue but progress towards reforms will certainly be made if there still remains any faith in the democratic process. Hartals only cause loss to the general public and the country as a whole.

To the best of my knowledge, the government has not declined to talk with any member of the opposition. I believe the opposition must talk with the government. If there is no progress then the people by and large may support any further action by the opposition. Talks are a must as the first step toward electoral reforms.

Street politics was fine to oust a dictator like Ayub Khan during Pakistan times or Ershad in the eighties. Things are different now. The present government was elected and is recognised internationally, in spite of all the corruption and other anomalies. If a change is required, it must come through a democratic process.

Private universities

Spending almost two years in a private university in Dhaka, I ask this question today-- do private universities focus only on catering to the needs of the private sector of Bangladesh, or do they play a major part in contributing to the education sector as a whole?

Obviously, there is a huge amount of investment being made on students in private universities, which corresponds with the fact that they are considerably more expensive than public universities. The question is, are the students graduating with a pre-fixed mentality of joining a multinational firm (which

is not bad of course)? Or do their career goals include government jobs?

The role of the government is also in question. Assuming that the recruiting system is clean, do they really promote job opportunities for private university students? Students demand a high salary (as return to the huge

investment their parents made) and, MNCs and private firms are ready to pay such a large price for these talented individuals. Is the government ready to recognise the talent and pay the price?

MNCs on the other hand are very demanding, and many fall out. Is the government providing opportunities for them, and finally, back to the first question -- are the private universities grooming individuals to take up the responsibility of government jobs?

Md. Tauseef Anwar
BRAC University

Rich & energy pricing
The IMF official Thomas Rambaugh has observed that 'low' prices of diesel, gas etc. in Bangladesh are benefiting the rich only, not the poor. He is partially right. In Bangladesh the rich are in a 'win-win' situation.

If the diesel price is increased by, say Tk 5 per litre, the cost of operation for a diesel bus per km per passenger will increase by a fraction of a paisa. But the fare the passenger pays will be increased by a rounded up taka or more! And after a session with the minister it may increase further. The owners/workers associations (headed by lawmakers of all colours) will tell all sorts of stories and the minister will listen to them.

Secondly, are the enhanced income of the bus owners or for that matter the filling station owners are ever taken into consideration by taxation authorities? There are some very rich people who are openly investing in high budget projects. Is our widely admired NBR chief aware of that? If they pay even one-tenth of due tax our state coffers will swell considerably.

Mr. Rambaugh is probably a very good economist but does he have the special education to know the strange ways of Bangladesh politics? Here the rich can ascend the peak of power easily. This may be the first lesson for him.

MAH
On e-mail

Why no BCS exams in London?

The BCS examination has been postponed in London centre from the year 2005. This is a poor decision of the Bangladesh government. This is certainly an unfortunate event for us, the Bangladeshi graduates living in the UK. Because we cannot participate in such a potential career opportunity although we deserve that and we are entitled to it. Why? Everybody knows!

I don't know what policy has been taken into consideration for this decision but I know that it is not good for the national interest. The government is losing most efficient, brilliant, hard working, honest and differently experienced candidates who could contribute to the national progress.

My request is, please resume the BCS examinations in London centre again! Please don't exclude us from our right and let us contribute to the broader national interest.

Shahidul Islam

London, UK

Aids Alert!

Acquired

Immune

Deficiency

Syndrome

Acquired

Immune

Deficiency

Syndrome

I am writing about this recent trend at Dhaka, that in public places many people (especially women) are being injected with blood which have AIDS virus. I have recently heard six such stories that in Gausia, Chadnichawk and New Market women are being suddenly injected with blood which has AIDS virus and immediately informed about it by the words "WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF AIDS". I don't know if this is really true, but six different stories can't really fall from the sky and there can't be smoke without fire.

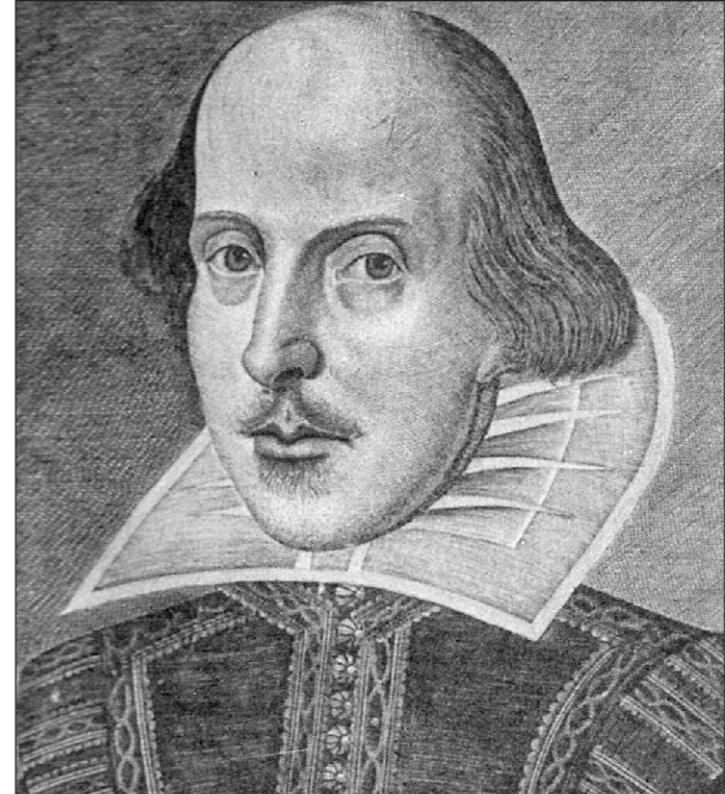
It is only in Bangladesh that people come up with such innovative ideas to kill others. These people do not even have any kind of enmity with the ones they are injecting. Then why are these innocent people harmed? Moreover, no newspaper is writing about this issue. Only the daily Ittefaq wrote a small column on this last week but they took this whole matter as a rumour.

So I would greatly appreciate if The Daily Star takes this matter seriously.

Shahbaz

On e-mail

Shakespeare's birth anniversary



William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564 at Stratford. He is considered the greatest playwright who ever lived. The dramatist wrote 37 dramas in all, along with a good number of sonnets.

Through his works, he unveiled the good, the bad and the ugly in the human nature. His characters, though presented in the statue of Prince Hamlet, King Lear and other personalities, yet they speak of universal humanity, joys and sorrows. And in doing so he just held the mirror up to nature he drew the portraits as they appeared before him. The eloquence in which his characters speak is simply elegant; the words that he used are the words that are Shakespearean number of adjectives can be deemed worthy to describe the uniqueness that he holds. Students of literature, people with an aptitude to read, are dissecting each single word that appears in the books in an inexhaustible effort and spirit and ultimately coming up with something new and beautiful in the process.

Shakespeare used 29,000 different words in his plays and 10,000 of them had never previously been used in any surviving English literature.

His characters portray such a variety of qualities that the humans are uniquely endowed with and thus they encompass the universal canvas of human psyche. Injustice and the inhuman plight that are vividly exposed in Lear are the ordeals that we all encounter in our daily life. In short, his unique exposition of human psyche is a universal phenomenon.

Rafiqul Islam Rime

Agrabad, Chittagong

BSF atrocities



I am totally outraged to read in newspapers that BSF members are frequently killing innocent Bangladeshi citizens and pulling their dead bodies inside their territory. After any incident, BSF and BDR arrange flag meetings and reach a solution. The

solution is that the dead body is returned. What a pity!

The Bangladeshi government should strongly raise the issue with its Indian counterpart.

Nasirullah Mridha Salim
Mataail, Dhaka

May Day

We remember the sacrifices made by the workers all around the world to assert their rights to work with safety and dignity. May Day provides a perfect opportunity for us to reflect on the state of workers' rights here in Bangladesh. The recent events of the KTS garment factory fire and the collapse of the Phoenix building remind us all too vividly that many workers are forced to gamble with their lives just to earn a living due to a complete lack of respect for their rights by owners, managers and supervising authorities.

Bangladesh, with its large population, has enormous potential to participate in the world's economy. However, its contribution will remain marginal if the rights of those who run the economy are not realised. The supervising authorities and the legislature must ensure that their promises are not empty words. For example, after the events mentioned above, the BGMEA promised to inspect all factories across the country; but how many factories have been inspected? What records of the inspections have been kept and what actions have been taken against factories that were found to be violating the rules and regulations? In addition, what steps have been taken to ensure that there will be no repetition of conditions which endanger workers' lives? What processes are being put in place to ensure that workers are aware of and able to demand fulfillment of their rights? Until these sorts of questions are adequately answered, Bangladesh will not only be excluded from meaningful participation in the world's economy, it will fail to attain true and just development.

Taleya Rehman
Executive Director, Democracy Watch

Rising fuel prices

Globally, almost every country today is facing the fuel price crisis. Everyone is dealing with this actively. It's not surprising that the Bangladeshi government is facing a similar crisis. What remains a matter of befuddlement for both the general citizenry and experts alike is the fact that the government policy is so blinded by upcoming elections that they are more willing to be an idle spectator to the crisis at hand and then revise the government policies for energy by raising prices of oil and electricity.

Our oil emergency reserves are the lowest in the world. What if today, we have no external supply? Experts suggest that in 25 days Bangladesh would face complete closure. We are being warned by all agencies both domestic and foreign as to how this is dangerous for the economic growth and stability of our nation, but yet there is no proper response from the powers that be. Today, Bangladesh is possibly experiencing the worst energy draught since the mid 1970's. Both in supply of fossil fuels and electric energy. Yet, our energy minister says that we have the best situation now and no crisis at hand. So, why are the oil pumps closed in a lean demand season? Why are there cases of rationing? Why is CNG conversion rising? Who is benefiting from this crisis? Why are prices of essentials rising? Why are there blackouts? Why are there early trends of economic slowdown?

Matthew, Cardiff, United Kingdom