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Ahmadinejad's strategy



Iranian President Ahmadinejad's handling of the nuclear crisis that his country is passing through is interesting.

Ahmadinejad tries to convince the world by stating that Iran has no intention of developing nuclear arms, and, on the other hand, he does not recognise Israel and threatens to wipe this country off the world map. It is really difficult to sense what his strategy is. Can anyone tell me what is he trying to prove?

We have been the unfortunate witness to massive destruction in Iraq and Afghanistan. We do not want Iran or any other country to be menaced by war. However, if Iran gets involved in war with the United States, then it can be said indubitably that the benefits that Iranians may derive from the nuclear power plant will be nullified.

So at this stage President Ahmadinejad needs to refrain himself from hurling remarks which may add fuel to fire; otherwise Iran may lose its valuable trade partners like China, Russia or India.

Fahim Wasef
New Eskaton, Hafizabad Colony,
Dhaka

What a mess!

It seems that anarchy rules the country nowadays. No news is good news sans the SC rejects the appeal of CEC. Two days of vandalism in RMG sector gave the country a bad name. But who is responsible for this vandalism? We're trying to find a hand of our neighbouring country but we never try to find out the root cause of the problem.

Though I don't support the vandalism, but I understand the cause of their desperation. Give them their due.

It has been a total mess. Lack of electricity & water supply, farcical activities of the Election Commission and slide in law and order have created great frustration among the people.

Solaiman Palash
East Jurain
Dhaka

Dormant ACC
Ever since the Anti-Corruption

Commission (ACC) was formed in November 2004, the people of Bangladesh thought that the Commission would soon be able to take a firm stand against corruption.

Although 17 months have elapsed since the ACC has been formed, it has failed to achieve anything.

C.F Azim

Dhaka

Politics of disruption

Political parties in Bangladesh put their party interests so much above those of the people and the nation that they do not hesitate to disrupt the public life or cause damage and destruction to public and private property in the name of strikes. It appears as if they cannot think of any other means to show opposition to other groups, parties or opinions. Our politicians have a serious misperception of reality that, only if the public life is

seriously affected and/or the national economy considerably damaged in a strike, has their message been really heard. So, one would notice that a call of strike by any party is followed by a set of very disturbing actions by their fanatic supporters to forcibly bring traffic to a halt, have the gates of office buildings, factories and academic institutions totally shut down, and cause death and destruction. The more complete is the disruption and violence, the more successful is the strike considered by its sponsors.

Although sometimes a group or political parties may call a strike for a good cause, but most of the time the damage done by the strike far outweighs the benefit that it aims to accomplish. Loss to the national economy due to strikes is one of the many undesirable consequences for a country that is dependent on foreign aids for its

survival. Since the politicians consider their party above the nation, political parties in opposition always tend to organise life-paralysing strikes to hassle the other party out of power, as if the damage they do is only affecting their opponents in office, not the nation and its poor citizens.

There is another side to the equation of politics and strikes. The party in office has an important role to play and a democratic responsibility to fulfil in this regard. Those who are in government have to ensure that opposing views and opinions are heard and addressed with dignity and respect for all. It is noticed in our political environment that the government is usually deaf, defensive, or even oppressive to the opposition, rather than being pragmatic to the issues that are raised. This lack of sensitivity on the part of the ruling party creates an

explosive feeling among the opposition, which propels them into strong protests like a strike with inevitable frenzy.

Much of such a situation is avoidable with honest dialogues between the concerned parties. Democracy demands tolerance, patience, necessary compromise and a grain of patriotism to resolve political issues and problems for the sake of people. However, political history of Bangladesh teaches us that we cannot expect such things from our selfish stereotyped politicians, unless citizens exert choking pressure on them.

Therefore, it is time for the conscientious people to rise against unscrupulous politicians and act decisively to persuade the parliament to formulate laws that will stop intentional disruption, damage and destruction (3-D's) caused by any individual, group or party during any demonstration, strike, or other similar activities - political or otherwise - and enforce those laws to the fullest extent without any compromise. But, the law should not be used or interpreted to ban non-violent demonstrations, because provision for peaceful opposition is extremely important and indispensable in a democratic process.

Dr. Matiur Rahman
Austin, Texas, USA

Translate words into action

The other day the hon'ble law minister disclosed that more than one ombudsman would be appointed shortly, which is very encouraging and inspiring as well. But if we consider the contemporary track record of the law minister regarding other pending issues, our encouragement recedes to zero. Since assuming power nearly four years and a half back, our law minister appeared before the electronic and print media on various occasions and said that the judiciary would be separated in no time but nothing tangible has been done from his end. Contrary to his commitment, the government sought numerous adjournment in the separation of judiciary case. Another disturbing feature may

not be out of place to bring to the fore. The government has established an independent Anti Corruption Commission as per their election pledge. Although it is widely believed that due to pressure of donor agencies and other international organisations, the government has done so but then the said commission has remained crippled and dysfunctional even after 17 months which seriously casts doubt on the sincerity of the government. It seems the government is more eager to earn cheap popularity than substantial progress. Considering the above context, we fervently urge the law minister to do something in right earnest. If he is really committed to appointing an ombudsman, then the appointment should be made on the basis of consensus basis.

Khijir Ahmed
Bangladesh Supreme Court
11, Segunbagicha, Dhaka

Tk 60 crore wasted

It is a very serious matter that the fresh voter list, prepared in violation of court orders and public sentiments, has cost the nation and ultimately the taxpayers a huge sum of Tk 60 crore. The Supreme Court has given its judgement. But we the people fail to understand who is going to shoulder the responsibility of this huge wastage of money. Does the Citizen's Forum or the civil society has anything to say about it?

I would request all readers of The Daily Star to come forward and write about it so that the entire nation is made aware of the wastage. The legal experts may please come forward to find a solution if necessary through legal procedures.

A citizen
One e-mail



Nazrul OUR PRIDE

Bangla literature progressed to a great extent with the emergence of Nazrul. Without Nazrul Bangla literature would have remained incomplete. It is said that after Tagore it was Nazrul who added a new dimension to Bangla literature. Nazrul's literary career was very short; but his creativity was great. It is not wrong to say that Nazrul was a born poet. This is because, though in his childhood he had to grapple with poverty and misery, he exhibited his vigour from the very beginning. The contemporary critics and literary giants were dumbfounded by the talent of such a poor lad.

All the literary pieces that Nazrul left are the source of inspiration, motivation, enthusiasm and exuberance for us.

The message of Nazrul in our social and national life is loud and clear.

Kazi Abubakar Siddique
BUBT, Mirpur, Dhaka

A prolific and versatile poet, lyricist and writer, an undaunted voice against bigotry, injustice and oppression, a passionate advocate of peace, freedom, harmony, love, compassion, humanism and beauty, Kazi Nazrul Islam is known as the rebel poet. Probably no other poet influenced the Bengalee society and people so deeply.

He raised his voice against British colonial rule and was recognised as a rebel speaking for the masses. Rabindranath Tagore called him "Dhumketu" and Mahatma Ghandi described his poems as the "song of the spinning wheel".

Mehedi Hassan, Ibrahimpur, Dhaka Cantt.

Garment sector in turmoil

Garment workers perhaps vowed to establish their rights. They have been protesting vehemently in the streets. The owners of the garments are bumptious in saying that they will halt industrial production if the agitation continues.

The disputes have to be settled quickly to save the industry and the national economy.

Ripon
University of Dhaka

We must condemn violence whatever might be the reason behind it. But we must at the same time be aware of the rights of workers.

They are the driving force behind our economy. Why should they be deprived of what they deserve?

The habit of shifting the responsibility to others' shoulders will not put out the fire. The blame game should be stopped. If any foreign connection worked behind the attacks on the country's apparel sector, it is again we who should be rebuked. Our security agencies are not blind, I believe. They have been able to catch militant gurus and destroy militant networks across the country. They better knew who were behind the attacks.

It has been said that the bona fide workers were not involved in the vandalism. Then comes the question, who these attackers were? Were they recruited from a foreign country? It will not be very difficult to find out if anyone from outside the garment factories was involved in the arson.

Finally, I would request the owners of garments factories to become more realistic and pay heed to the demands of the underprivileged segments of the society, before it is too late.

Fazlur Rahman Hijol
Dhaka University



Imagine that you are a garment factory worker who makes living on a day to day basis. You live in a slum raising children who often get sick due to malnutrition and poor hygiene. You leave home, in the dark, before sunrise and come back, in the dark, after sunset. Sick or healthy, you work 15/16 hours a day and are not fairly paid. The prices of essentials have gone through the roof over the last few years, while your wage has stayed where it was four years ago. You and your children are eating less and less every day. You cannot afford a doctor anymore.

You see more and more high rise buildings and pricey cars, shining with all the glories of their owners. The glares of summer sunlight reflecting from those shiny buildings, cars and shiny faces of their owners blind you. You are locked inside the factory from dawn-to-dusk because your employer does not trust you. When fire catches up in any such factories dozens of people like you are burnt alive. You know you may be the next victim. You come home at night to find no electricity or water. Your night is nightmare.

You see launches sink under

the water and dozens like you die. You see buildings collapse and dozens like you die. The owners, whose endless greed caused the misery, go unpunished because they have connections. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute you are losing your flesh and blood, while the rich are accumulating fat from what you are losing. You see the politicians are fighting like hungry wolves over your body. They are in endless blame game, while you see no hope, no end to this misery. Today's politicians are beyond your reach, they live in the fantasylands. They can buy your votes for money; they care for money only, not you.

Those who are cooking-up conspiracy theories should look around the world. Today's labourers are more aware of their rights. Latin America has moved more to the left, causing endless headaches for American capitalists. India has ousted its right-wing, who cared only for the city middle class when poverty-ridden farmers were committing suicides. Left has won a landslide victory in states like West Bengal or Kerala. Indian poor have hope for change through electoral



process. Where the hope is lost the poor have to fight back. Like China, where the government had to put down thousands of protests over the last few years. With a controlled press, most of them go unnoticed by world media. Don't forget the "French Revolution" yet. Bangladeshi working class has apparently lost hope. They don't see any change in luck through electoral process. They don't see any benefit from regime change or they fear that "election engineering" will rob their verdict.

When income disparity goes through the roof social unrest is inevitable. In case of Bangladesh the worst human development in record has added insult to the injury of disparity. Please refer to "Human development catastrophe since 2001", The Daily Star, November 1, 2005 and the latest UNDP report of human development trend. After a healthy 2.4% annual growth in human development in 1996-2000, we are now having the lowest on record 0.9% growth. When our nearest neighbour was having about 6% GDP growth in the late nineties, Bangladesh was experiencing a similar rate. By now India has

experienced double digit growth, while Bangladesh is stuck where it was then. Meanwhile, the prices of essentials have doubled in a few years. For the widening gap in poor versus rich please see "Rich-poor gap widens", The Daily Star, May 15, 2005. The report cites the Poverty Monitoring Survey Report 2004 of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). The report showed that rich had experienced a dramatic rise in income (more than 13%), while poor households saw about 4% reduction in income. Please also see "Inequality and poverty in Bangladesh", The Daily Star, October 22, 2005.

That is why labourers defy death. They have to fight for their rights; they have to fight to survive. Nobody else is doing it for them. They are not only the garment workers as the conspiracy theorists claim; they are all working class people. They are fighting for electricity in Kansat or Shanir Akhra; for fair salary and overtime in Gazipur, Ashulia, Savar, Dhaka, Rangpur. They are garment workers; they are stone breakers; they are farmers. The first spark was Kansat, now the



PHOTOS: AFP

blaze is everywhere.
Zakaria Khondker
Bay Area, California, US

The garment factories are burning and getting vandalized, and any well wisher of Bangladesh cannot but be nervous and quite apprehensive about it. So much is at stake here. While things are getting back to normal it is time for a serious soul searching.

The prevalent notion in Bangladesh is that if you have money and/or political connection then you can not do anything wrong. A system is always there to hide your fault. This no-fault capitalism and the suffocating political corruption created a dangerous situation where no conflict or grievances could be resolved peacefully and systematically. We surrendered our judicial system to the corrupt political machinery and opted for the crossfire of Rab. Every action must have some reaction. And nurturing a bunch of corrupt and hapless police force is not helping anybody, reach or poor, as we can clearly see now.

But things must not be that bleak. There must be a way out. Other countries have done it

and doing it everywhere. Let's go back to the basics.

These incidents show that we ignore our social responsibilities only at

our own peril. Do good to ourselves by doing good to others should be our

guideline. The culture of ostentation will breed hatred. The Porsche and BMW have no place in Bangladesh even if you can afford those with legitimately earned money. The recent incidents must bring home the message that the owners, the workers and the government are all in it together on a common journey.

Letting the system fail would not help anybody, not even the rich, powerful and well connected.

M. A. Islam, USA

The incidents in Savar and subsequent developments show the unwanted but real gap between the employers and employees in this most promising sector of the economy. Unfortunately, none were listening in the meeting on this issue rather they were taking sides. Multiple monologues took over effective dialogue. No moderator was seen. In the early phase

of industrialisation in many countries including South Korea, Germany, USA, UK such things happened. Nobody wanted to know why so many fire deaths took place in one single industry. South Korean women workers excelled both in hard work and hard bargain- far better than the other countries. We can learn from the industrial histories of the other countries, perform better and set new norms for corporate good governance.

I wonder whether the garment owners will lose or gain if share is given to the workers. In that case the RMG workers will not only get salary but also enjoy part of profit. The workers will just buy a few hundred taka shares of the industry and legally become co-owners. Such co-ownership will bring better transparency. If they are the co-owners of the factory, in such a win-win situation they will be motivated to protect the properties of the industry. Share concept is nothing new, rather a universally practiced norm in the corporate world. If the workers earn more, the owners may not inflate foreign banks with super profit, but families of twenty million RMG workers will invest more in health and education. Their future generation will be better equipped to better adapt and face the challenges of the new century. Bangladesh will be a better place to live in. Exploitation brings suspicion. Suspicion brings destruction. A stitch in time will save nine.

Mohammad Zakaria
Dhanmondi, Dhaka