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Real owner of the country

This is the truth, and this is reality. Or is this only a dream and a fantasy? Something that does not exist at all. Have we failed to establish this truth? We all know that Bangladesh is endowed with a mighty peoples' power of one hundred and forty million. Even so, widespread violence has totally suppressed peoples' voice.

In Bangladesh today it is a reign of terror and violence sans frontier. The ultimate authority and power rests with those who are most violent and cruel, capable of maneuvering and manipulating the peoples' psyche in a manner to ensure that violence is practiced from within. Then, being encompassed by mighty power, two or more persons having lived all their lives in the same village are friends no more to each other, they have to be like enemies and kill one another. Within the same union in adjacent villages some may have lived all along, yet their feeling of co-operation is cancelled by the forced cultivation of animosity. The feeling of death and destruction is nurtured among the persons of the same upazila town so that over a small divergence these persons do not talk out their differences and reach an understanding, instead they ransack and attack homes and workplaces in the area. They have become pawns of self-inflicted destruction in the hands of the powerful violence mongers.

The memory of 1971 is still fresh in our minds. It was violence that gave birth to a river of blood. The violent occurrences that rocked the country over the past few days have also culminated in several pools of blood. Within these pools lie the dead and rotting body of ones' own brethren. We are shameless. We do not stop killing; we count the numbers killed.

The infused passion of hatred is so strong that a man kills his own near and dear ones in a manner that has been likened to collective killing of a poisonous snake!

How will all these events be recorded in our history books? Will posterity not compare all that occurred soon after Eid-ul-Fitr after the observance of the holy month of Ramadan, which is for self-discipline, and self restraint, to the barbarian time of Chengiz Khan? Or in all probability the atrocities committed over the past week will appear bigger in magnitude as this violence, crime and killings were all committed by members within the same family, same neighbourhood, same community and same nation.

We can all hear the fervent call by those who are at the helm of affairs to resolve the national crisis by adhering to the constitutional procedure. However, in following this path many persons are being grievously injured or are brutally killed, as most people are drunk with the thirst for blood of their own kind. Then in abiding by the Constitution for this issue, does it call for ignoring the provision of individual's right to life and protection provided within the same document?

Does it not seem that it is all a

devil's drama that is being staged? The actors have no respect for law, they do not fear killing, injuring, torturing, and beating-up their own kith and kin. And this drama also reinforces the ancient axiom of divide and rule. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves and hang down our heads in shame.

Farida Sheikh, On e-mail

US Congress election 2006

I am not a voter in the US. Yesterday, however, almost whole day my work spot happened to be an off-Broadway theater in Manhattan called The Theater for The New City located on the 1st avenue, between 9th & 10th St. No, I am not a theater actor. I was simply working as a helper to assist the people preparing the hall for a particular show called "Theater of Science"--an already well acclaimed play by the London Observer and others in promoting science & reason--which is being

outside the election centre and giving out the fliers for the theater show.

A white American girl, probably in her mid 20s, was interviewing a middle-aged white American man. She was a journalism grad student at NYU and this she was doing as part of her class assignment. Of the many questions she asked the man related to the election, one was: how do you rate the present US government's performance? The face of the white man started turning red in anger. "Never ever in my life, I've seen such a shameless, arrogant, corrupt,and [he was stammering in anger] incompetent government." The man continued with his outburst but didn't forget to mention he is not affiliated with any political party.

"This government doesn't have any respect for the people of other cultures or race."

"You spoke my mind, although just like you, I'm too not affiliated with party politics," I told him. "Yea, it's so obvious," he replied.

People here are good. And the city lacks nothing except the rules and system.

No rules on roads etc. Nobody listens to police. In fact police obey the rich people here. The government should do something about it.

Anju, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Beggars with babies

We often see beggars, mostly women in different busy intersections in the cities and towns, begging with sick and rickety babies. The women are generally young and their faces reflect distress. But the practice is not good. It has been heard that they take these babies on hire basis or they may be their own. In sweltering heat or shivering cold, the babies remain on the arms of the beggars while they run. Most babies do not appear to be properly fed and clothed. They also do not get proper care. All day, they remain with the women in open air. When these women run for alms the babies cry in pain and hunger. Sometimes it is heard that these babies are tortured so that they cry. This helps the beggars to draw sympathy from the passers by. This is really inhuman.

In this civilized society, we should not allow this type of begging business. I request the NGOs and the governments' social welfare department to conduct a survey in this field. The survey should be extensive to dig out the real sources and causes of this profession so that this type of business could be rooted out. Beggars may not cooperate. So the surveying organisations might need help from law enforcing agencies. It should not be for punishing the beggars, but to help them get work and stop this inhuman baby torture/exploitation.

AKM Harunur Rashid, Dhaka

Report on education

I was reading the article "Education copying curbed, quality fell" in The Daily Star.

It's really surprising to see how the journalist saw nothing good in our education system in the last 5 years. I have been living in the USA for the last 8 years and I know that the problems she mentioned in her article are also present in the United States. It just surprises me that she didn't find a single good thing to say about the "nakal removal" from our education system. As if it's just a normal thing that copying is removed from our exams.

I do not consider myself a BNP or AL supporter. But not to see the good things that anyone does is really bothersome. The world is not perfect and everyone has problems but not to appreciate the good things and only concentrating on bad things will not take us anywhere. The general public appreciates what the past government did about removing copying from the exams.

Hopefully, the next government will go one step ahead and try to eradicate the other problems.

Saif

On e-mail

Jahed Ahmed, New York

Midnight tamasha at Zia

Five Days back, we were coming from Malaysia. We landed at Zia International Airport at 12.30 in the night. Everybody rushed towards the immigration counter as it was already late night and they wanted to reach home to sleep. In the next five minutes what happened was unbelievable! A man fully drunk who was not even able to put his sleepers on was anyhow being carried by somebody towards the immigration counter. The drunken man then started giving lectures on Russia...Bangladesh. God knows what he was saying. All rubbish. Then he went near the counter and stood on that and again started shouting. He kept around 400-500 people stranded in a queue for almost 30 minutes! But there was nobody to help them.

Dhaka is a nice place to live in.

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Voting was taking place in the spacious corridor of the theater, between the main entrance on 1st avenue and the entrance to the main hall of the theater. Thus for the first time I had a chance to see, how Americans vote. "It seems a lot more number of voters are showing up this year than the last time," I threw my somewhat blank comments toward an African American lady who was working in the election centre. "Oh yes. A lot more", she confirmed me of what I recently read in the newspapers and polls--this time a lot more number of Americans are showing interest in election & politics than those in the previous years. Similarly, a beautiful young lady nodded her head when I asked on her way out of the centre after casting her vote.

For a while, I was standing right



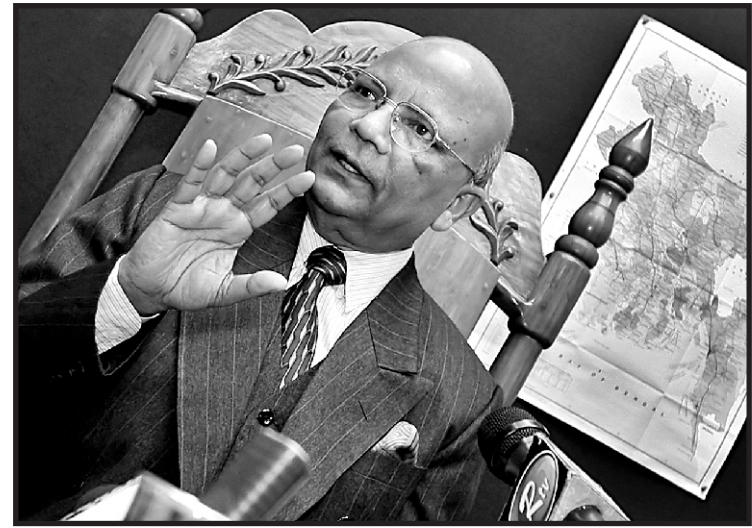
CEC issue

Like most Bangladeshis, I am deeply concerned to see the grave political crisis prevailing in the country. This is widely believed to have been created by the long practice of narrow self-interest and intransigence of the two major political parties-- mainly their top leadership. The situation is critically aggravated by the apparent unwillingness of the controversial chief election commissioner (CEC) to voluntarily step down, apparently due to his personal pride and alleged 'respect' for the constitutional office he holds. The president cum chief advisor (CA), and the caretaker government (CG) are also unable to decide on a course of action to remove him in view of his constitutional appointment to the office of the CEC. This is thought to be a constitutional impasse and the problem may not be resolved without an amendment of the constitution. We would like to suggest however that it does not constitute a constitutional crisis, since the above difficulty could be overcome without an amendment, on the following grounds: (a) Nobody is above the law, not even one appointed to a constitutional office. (b) The CEC has flouted the constitution and rule of law by repeatedly disregarding the directives of the Supreme Court regarding the voter list, during his tenure in office. (c) This constitutes a grave disregard by the CEC of the constitution and amounts to violation of the rule of law. (e) The CEC has failed further to discharge his constitutional duty by being unable to prepare a credible voter list in time, and endangered thereby the holding of a credible free and fair election, as ordained by the constitution. (d) The president, as the head of the nation, as protector of the constitution, and as the chief executive is duty bound

to hold the election properly, may therefore be obliged to suspend the current CEC and to appoint a new CEC, to complete the urgent task of preparing a voter list and to hold a free and fair election.

Khokon Uddin
Cambridge, USA

It is unfortunate that the BNP once again took a stance against the popular demand by extending support to CEC Mr. Aziz. The BNP perhaps secretly asked Mr. Aziz not to resign, although just a



week back CEC hinted at conditional resignation. Instead of taking an 'Exit Strategy', the BNP opted for a 'Strategy of Confrontation' or a strategy of 'Disrupting Election'. After a series of setbacks to the BNP through poor performance of the immediate-past government, defection to LDP, Justice Hasan issue and finally the issue of Ershad's 'U-turn', BNP is perhaps convinced of not returning to power.

Even if BNP wins on the CEC issue it will damage the party for many reasons. Many BNP leaders, opposing the CEC, may express dissatisfaction against the party leadership. BNP is already losing swing voters (Nazim Kamran's assessment) and is expected to lose further. The credibility of BNP decision making in the eye of people will further decline.

The BNP must remember that the outcome of the election will not depend on the CEC as it will on the local administration.

Khan Jaker
Retd Naval Officer and Expatriate Bangladeshi

Accountability of our politicians



I commend your editorial (November 1, issue on Politics of retaliation and violence must cease, Tolerance is the need of the day). It is indeed a timely appeal to the conscience of our nation and I hope our people would pay heed to it. After all, blind faith in bad leaders is not patriotism.

In a democracy, it is natural and expected that people would support different political parties. There will also be competition for attracting people's attention and support to one's agenda. However, all opposi-

tion and competition must be within legal domain and civilised discourse. Intolerance, violence and killing of the opponents are not conceivable in a democratic system. Unfortunately, our politicians have gone so low in this regard that many people wonder if democracy will at all be possible or safe under their reign.

Honestly speaking, many expatriate professionals like me who were thinking to go back to Bangladesh and serve the country are now in a big dilemma. It looks like we have to

bury our noble desire forever. Unless our politicians pursue the democratic norms and are held accountable to the people for their corruption, for involving and instigating the heinous and violent acts, there is no better future for our country. It is simply mind-boggling that some of our politicians would let their followers set on fire and destroy private and government properties and kill opposition political activists at their will. We would urge our future law makers to bring legislation for banning hartal and for implementing the

exemplary punishment against those who carry illegal firearms, kill political rivals and destroy national or private property in the name of their so called political agenda.

Mohammad Mazibur Rahman
New York

Both AL and BNP are constantly threatening the president and chief advisor to comply with their demands or face severe countrywide agitations, which we believe made the president quite uncomfortable to discharge his duties properly. May

we therefore request AL and BNP to sit together and mend their differences in order to pave the way for the president to hold a free and fair election in the country?

We no more want to remain prisoners in our own country. We are totally exasperated with AL and BNP's political harangues.

Humayun Hyder
Zigatola, Dhaka

Bangladeshi people living in Canada were anxiously waiting for the final moment of the past government. Everyone expected a peaceful transition and formation of a neutral caretaker government. Unfortunately, it did not happen. A huge agitation paralysed the country and some lives were lost in violence. The former government could have avoided the violence by accepting the demands of the opposition. They could have accepted them even partially to keep things under control. Former Justice KM Hassan was on the frontline but declined to take the office responding to the uprising. And Justice Mahmood Amin Chowdhury was the next on line to become the chief advisor of the caretaker government. Other than Jamaat and BNP all other political parties in Bangladesh were ready to accept him. But President Dr. Mohammad Iajuddin Ahmed proposed his name after KM Hassan and did not even follow the constitution. He ignored the public demand and took charge of the caretaker govern-

ment. He met the political leaders from some political parties but all except BNP and Jamaat requested the President not to do so.

The credibility of the President became questionable since he took office and the 14-party alliance demanded of the president to prove his neutrality. The president also failed to form a credible council of advisors. The rumour was that the President was being directed by the BNP leadership and the whole plan was made long before the government finished its term. In Canada, the Bangladeshi community is deeply concerned about the future of our political system.

It is a common fear amongst our Bangladeshi people in Canada that a free and neutral election under this caretaker government will not be possible. The Election Commission under the current CEC cannot be fair and he has to go. To transfer some senior officers will not make any difference. They may hold an election but without the 14-party alliance the election results will not be acceptable to the people or the international community. The President is now simultaneously holding two top posts and the whole responsibility lies with him to make the right decisions. Any mistake by the President will lead to further violence.

We hope President Iajuddin will read the mood of the nation and the mind of the people correctly and take steps accordingly.

Azizur Rahman Prince
Toronto, Canada

The two leading political parties of Bangladesh held a dialogue to avert what may be called a civil war. As I was watching BBC, it seemed like a video from Congo or Somalia. The dialogue has failed and direct confrontation has commenced. But the political leaders are enjoying full security, financed by the state, while people are dying and suffering. I have not heard that Sheikh Hasina or any other leader who planned the Dhaka siege programme has called upon the nation to maintain peace through self-restraint. As if the deaths were natural and justified, and so no leader has come up to

sympathize with the families who have lost their kith and kin. The media is more focused on the selection of the Chief Advisor than the sufferings of the people. An appeal was made to Justice KM Hasan not to accept the position of Chief Advisor. Then another appeal has been made asking the president to maintain neutrality.

But where is the call for a peaceful resolution of all the problems? Where is the call to the political leaders to stop violence and spare the ordinary people?

This is our fate.
Kabir Ahmed
London, UK

