

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

'Political parties must work together to save democracy'

Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiky is the founder treasurer of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and has been a member of the National Standing Committee since its inception.

Till now BNP's decision is not to participate in election until its five-point demand, including lifting of emergency, is met.

Besides, everyone wants a transparent election, and the chief adviser himself said before the nation that the emergency would be withdrawn, if necessary, to hold a credible election.

Though held under emergency, the recent city corporation elections showed a huge voter turnout, and many voters said they felt safe due to presence of emergency.

The government has already announced that the upcoming elections would be held under emergency to ensure security of the people.

Fundamentally, it is a wrong concept of both the government and the Election Commission. It means the government has no faith in the people.

We can follow India. There is chaos and anarchy there, but they didn't hold any election under emergency.

participation, like the recent city corporation elections. They [AL] want to form a government through walkover, as they know their grand alliance will not get a majority if the four-party alliance takes part in the election.

But the EC did say that it will not make any more changes in the RPO. I don't think there is any scope for the government and the EC to stick to their prior decision as they have already changed their position on several issues several times, due to lack of experience.

There are master players, and what was their game plan? The game plan is to keep BNP away from the election process so that they can bring their chosen person into power through a one-sided election.

But we want to draw your attention to the point that there is no problem for BNP to be registered according to the new provisions.

Those who are working on registration related issues are looking into it. BNP is an election-oriented party. There is no alternative to election to save the people from this suffocating situation, and we have to play a responsible role.

You are asking me about registration. All sort of efforts are being made to keep BNP away from the election. Why did they hold city corporation elections? Why do they want to hold upazilla elections?

What is the party position on the persons those who have been accused and convicted on charges of corruption? The party position is clear, that we can't term anyone as corrupt until the appellate division of the Supreme Court confirms it.

You have seen the contradiction between the Election Commission and the chief adviser. Now the time for making preparations is very short, but BNP is an election-oriented party.

You have said time is very short for election preparation, has BNP started its election preparation? We are working on it regularly.

Have you prepared your election manifesto? Yes, we have started working on it. We are working for everything but we are uncompromising on the question of our ideology.

But the BNP constitution says a person cannot stay in the party if he is known as corrupt in the society. The party constitution is clear. You cannot brand anyone as corrupt before the verdict from the Appellate division, even if a lower court convicted him.

Some of your party leaders proposed bringing changes in the party constitution to curb the powers of the chairperson, do you agree with that? It might be considered if someone placed the proposal to the party council in the future.

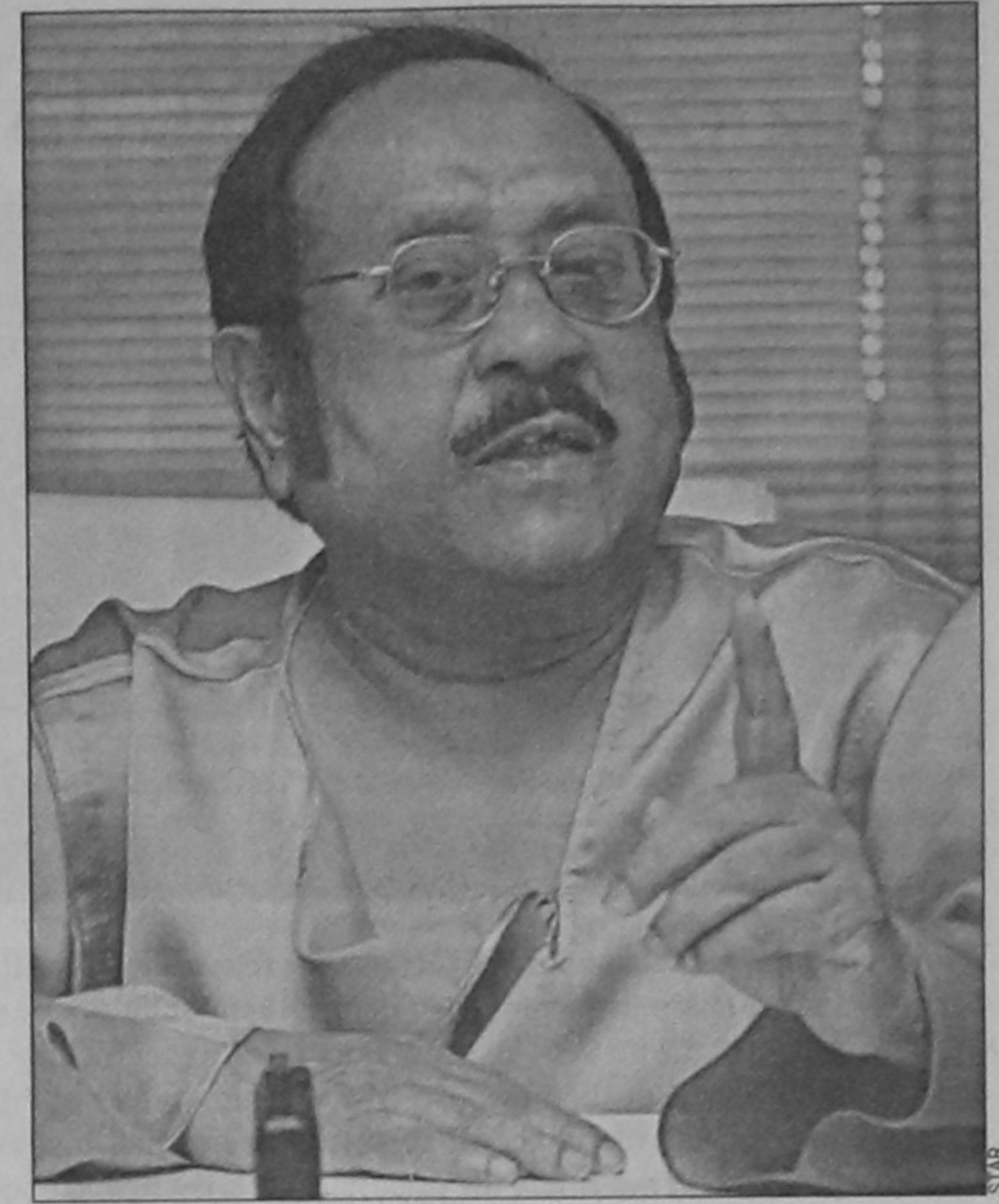
The major allegation against BNP in its last tenure was corruption. How did BNP become known as symbol of corruption? Do you agree that BNP tarnished the image of BNP?

Much ado about nothing. 1/11 has happened, but what has been proved? I am demanding a white paper about corruption. We have seen things in the media that cannot be accepted.

Hawa Bhaban played a master role as an election officer, and helped the four-party alliance win the poll with two-third majority. It worked as a think-tank of the party.

What is the party decision regarding those former lawmakers who were known as reformists? All except two (Mannan Bhuiyan and Ashraf Hossain) will continue their activities from their respective positions in the party, as the chairperson said.

However, I want to quote Winston Churchill the great, "You may forgive the criminals, but do not forget their crimes and their names."



Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiky

But there are allegations that some BNP leaders became proprietors of television stations, banks and industries through illegal means -- does this not damage the party image?

consciousness, will have to realise that we will be in trouble if we do not save democracy together. Holding an election and sitting in parliament is enough?

Curbing political violence

Patronage of political activists by political leaders makes the job of law enforcing agencies extremely difficult, and compels them to accept all the blame for politically motivated crimes.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

ORDINARILY, violence means unjust or callous use of force or power. Till 1857 (the year of the Sepoy Mutiny),

Bangalees were regarded as timid. By leading the Sepoy Mutiny, they proved that they were in no way inferior to any other Indian in courage and fortitude.

Bangalees are basically peaceful and dislike violence. Because of political and economic restlessness they started changing since the 1960s, and at the fag end of the 1960s they saw political violence through-out the country.

This caused huge damage to public property and victimisation of a large number of non-political people, irrespective of religion. In fact, the steady growth of violence almost turned the country into a 'failed state' before 1/11.

For the last 20 months, we have heard much about elimination of muscle power from politics. Both the CTG and the EC are striving hard to find some effective way to control political violence in the future.

However, to be reasonably successful in this venture, effective understanding and cooperation among the government, politicians and the common people are

needed. The politicians should be fully convinced about the need to bring a reasonable level of honesty and integrity in their thinking and behaviour.

In a parliamentary democracy, political activists are needed to disseminate the ideas of political parties to the common people.

Such payment has to be collected from the people (not always people supporting the party). When these activists are not paid adequately and regularly, they have to resort to violent practices like extortion or robbery.

Due to easy availability of service from these activists some politicians mainly concentrate on using force in obtaining votes, and pay less attention to the welfare of the people. This results in damage to the image of the party, creates the wrong impression about democracy, and reduces respect for the government, which ultimately has an adverse effect on governmental efforts for accelerated development.

Political activists, because of strong support from their patrons, go for extortion in the name of the concerned leader or party. This changes their lifestyle and they go for ease, comfort and violence. In fact, they are the principal promoters of the trade in illegal firearms in



Violence is no solution.

the country. Needless to say, the ready availability of firearms results in deterioration of law and order.

Patronage of political activists by political leaders makes the job of law enforcing agencies extremely difficult, and compels them to accept all the blame for politically motivated crimes.

Hardly two months are left for the parliamentary election. Unless there is some sort of understanding between the government and the political parties, there is a strong possibility of an increase in political violence to an unacceptable level.

We do not expect that the return of democracy under an elected government will ensure a decrease in political violence. In fact, as the date for national election is drawing near, all the top Bangladeshi terrorists inside or outside the country are busy organising themselves to be used by the political leaders in the election.

It is learnt that immediately after the establishment of the CTG a large

number of these terrorists took shelter in neighbouring countries, including India. It is not clear why the government doesn't conclude an extradition treaty with those countries to obtain necessary assistance for capturing the terrorists from the concerned countries.

Hardly two months are left for the parliamentary election. Unless there is some sort of understanding between the government and the political parties, there is a strong possibility of an increase in political violence to an unacceptable level.

To hold the parliamentary election credibly and peacefully, all-out efforts are necessary to maintain a peaceful atmosphere. We have to control the heinous activities of the terrorists as much as possible immediately before and after the election.

A.B.M.S. Zahur is a former joint secretary.

Battling HIV/AIDS

If we start immediately and in a logically planned manner, we can stop HIV in Bangladesh. Our social, cultural and religious environment has kept us safe so far. Now it is for us to take the initiative and drive back the HIV epidemic from our motherland.

ISHTIAQ SHAHRIAR JOARDER

WHEN the world first learned about HIV/AIDS in the early eighties there was confusion, stigma and little scientific information.

However, this turned out to be a myth and, like a bush fire, HIV swept across the globe affecting every single country. Doctors and scientists embarked on rigorous studies and researches for discovering a cure, but a horrible truth emerged -- there was no ready cure because the virus continuously changed its physical structure!

So if one element controlled or cured one particular strain, it was ineffective on many other varieties of HIV. For the first time since the bubonic plague of the medieval ages, mankind faced another similar situation of the same magnitude and the only way out is through prevention.

Even then it took decades of concerted efforts to slow down the onslaught of HIV because like the many shifting physical shapes, HIV also has many routes for spreading

and some of these routes are less known or considered for interventions.

The social and economic burden of HIV epidemic on a nation is devastating and one has just to look at the African countries to get an idea!

HIV infection was detected in Bangladesh around the nineties and, to date, the prevalence in the general population is less than one percent -- meaning there is still no general epidemic. This is no reason for complacency on our part for a number of reasons:

- The countries surrounding Bangladesh -- India, Myanmar, China, Thailand -- have either HIV epidemic or very high prevalence;
• Some Most At Risk Groups (MARG), like Intravenous Drug Users (IDU), in Bangladesh show much higher prevalence at certain sampling points -- the experts call this a "concentrated epidemic";
• The national serological and behavioural surveillance systems are not comprehensive or concurrent, leaving large gaps through which HIV epidemic may enter;
• National HIV interventions are not consistent or comprehensive -- for example, last year, there was a drop in the HIV interventions by the NGO network, which implements the bulk of community interventions because there was a drop in donor funding. Most of the interventions cover the most accessible and the most popular locations and target groups;
• The government is not strength-

ening implementation of existing safety policies regarding needle safety, clinical waste disposal, decontamination and sterilisation of surgical instruments, blood transfusion, special protection acts for women and children, etc.

So, what can we do about HIV prevention in Bangladesh?

First of all, we need to pool all available resources and initiate a national policy for coordination and collaboration for HIV interventions. This will immediately improve outcome and reduce wastage of increasingly scarce resources.

Secondly, we need to standardise all critical HIV interventions for maximum effect -- for example all messages on condom use, no matter by whom, should say the same thing in exactly the same way. Then we need to prioritise our national HIV interventions so that they will produce maximum effect in minimum possible time.

It is best for us just to copy the two focus areas that the Thailand government acted upon -- consistent condom use and regulations for commercial sex.

The other focus areas would include:

- Strengthening of STI/RTI case detection and treatment,
• Strict implementation of existing blood transfusion, and surgical instrument and needle safety regulations, with high penalty for non-compliance,
• Formulation of national clinical waste disposal standards,
• Formulation and strict implementation of HIV policies regarding migrating populations and
• Strict implementation of existing women and child protection laws. The last relates to national HIV scene because, in almost all cases of exploitation or abuse of women and children, there is every possibility for HIV infection. We can use existing women empowerment and adolescent programs in this regard.
If we start immediately and in a logically planned manner, we can stop HIV in Bangladesh. Our social, cultural and religious environment has kept us safe so far. Now it is for us to take the initiative and drive back the HIV epidemic from our motherland.

Dr. Ishfaq Shahriar Joarder is a national HIV specialist in the second urban primary health care project.



The real reason for the war in Georgia

Advertisement for 'Vittachi' featuring a woman's face and the text 'ONLY IN ASIA by Nury Vittachi'.

AS the war in Georgia had intensified, the United Nations has called for an urgent redistribution of vowels across the world.

Sources on the ground inform us that the Russian incursion is actually a thinly disguised vowel-grab," a spokesman said. "The tragedy is that Georgia is already drastically short of vowels. The shelling started in vowel-short Tskhinvali, then the action moved to Tbilisi, and fears are growing for the city of Mtskheta, which had only two vowels to start with."

However, Russian commander Grigr Mzdzhy denied having any interest in their neighbours' vowels.

"Why would we? Georgians haff hardly any vowels," Cmdr Mzdzhy said. "Their language is full of words such as gubrdyynis. Even we cannot say them."

The UN Security Council is meeting tomorrow to discuss whether to replicate the famous air-drop of vowels over Bosnia in 1996, sponsored by The Onion magazine.

Many people believe there are not enough vowels for everyone on the planet, but it is simply not true," a World Health Organization spokesman said. "Some places have an obscenely large number of them, whereas in others, people have to scrape by on less than two

vowels a day."

The conflict has highlighted the world's drastic vowel shortage. The WHO has designated a minimum of two vowels a day as a minimum for health. Anything below that is classified as being "under the poverty line" henceforth to be known as the prvty line, to avoid wastage.

Last week, the UN strongly condemned New Zealand, normally a neutral party in conflicts, for frequently using its alternative name Aoteoroa.

New Zealand diplomats pleaded that the name was the traditional Maori word for the land, but the UN's Croatia ambassador

dismissed the excuse out of hand. "In Croatian, the word 'supplying' is opskrblijvanje," he said. "Most business people cannot say it, so economic activity has been made impossible."

A Slovak diplomat added: "Slavic languages are full of words such as stvrt and zmrlina and zblnknutie. Can you imagine the hardship suffered by our children, having to grow up with words that cannot be uttered, even mentally, without complex lip-maneuvers that take years to master?"

New super-strict United Nations rules on excessive vowel use came into force at the weekend, and member nations are anxious to

be seen to be enforcing them.

In connection with this, three arrests were made last night. A literary scholar at the Sorbonne in Paris was charged with excessive use of "Rousseauian," an Australian feature-writer was detained for writing "pharmacopoeia," and a warning was given to a London railway station manager for using "queueing" four times in an hour.

But there have also been bright spots, with nations donating vowel-rich words to the beleaguered Georgians. The Italians sent over their word aiuola, and the Romanians dispatched their term for sheep, made entirely of vowels:

oaie. The Singaporeans have sent over a surname, Ooi, and the Chinese have offered moooi, meaning "little sister."

Aid workers hope these will provide some relief until next week, when freight transport from Finland is due to arrive bearing a large shipment of the archaic 12-vowel Finnish word for dating, riiuuyoaieiointa.

The Georgian Minister for Vowels, Radze Vzdzhe, said: "When I heard about the Finnish offer, I had tears in my eyes. Or as we say in Georgia, tyzhi in my tyzhi."

Visit our columnist at: www.vittachi.com.