

KALEIDOSCOPE

We condemn the violence most strongly

What did the 18-party siege achieve?

WE wonder what the BNP and its alliance members have achieved in the half-day siege yesterday. Except for the violence, that we had predicted in this very column yesterday, that the programme would engender because of the fact that the siege would be 'enforced' by the 18-party alliance, anything that the BNP-led alliance had wanted to convey to the people was marred by senseless violence and destruction. It sounds ludicrous that the siege, among other things, was to protest against the public sufferings caused by government policies.

We cannot agree with the BNP leaders that the programme was supported by the people spontaneously. The matter was compounded by the fact that the AL and its student and youth wings were on the streets too, which reportedly, had also indulged in violence and damaging of vehicles.

The situation on the streets was rather different yesterday than on previous occasions. The alliance activists were seen to be more active and belligerent, indulging in pitched battles with the police. Living up to the veiled threat of the acting secretary general to keep all types of vehicle off the roads, the opposition activists had targeted the vehicles that had ventured on the streets. Although it was supposed to be 'peaceful' programme, violence had occurred in some parts of the country that resulted in two deaths and more than hundred injured and destruction of property both public and private including ambulances and police vehicles.

And in spite of what the BNP says about the police preventing it from exercising its political right, we are afraid that exercising ones political right can not subvert the political rights of others which the BNP-led alliance programme had certainly done. By the same token, using the student wing of the ruling party to thwart the programme cannot be condoned. The job of the law enforcing agencies cannot be outsourced to supra government elements.

When political programmes lead to vandalism and pitched battles between the opposition which called the programme, and its political opponents and the law enforcing agency, with the aim to stifle that programme, than that no longer remains a political programme but becomes a political joust. We condemn such violence in the strongest possible terms.

Congratulations to Bangladesh cricket team

Strive to move to the next stage of entering the ivy league

BAHGLADESH cricket team by wresting a two-wicket victory in the deciding finals of the five-match one day series from the formidable West Indies side has done us proud. There were all the elements of drama, steep rise and fall in fortunes, climax and anticlimax, and above all, a nail biting finish to a glorious triumph of the Bangladesh side. It was a well-deserved victory, Bangladesh team had to fight every inch of the way to script a diligent team work performance.

This was competitive cricket at its best. It kindles hope that all those concerned with the future of Bangladesh cricket must now strive to take the next step forward: making consistency in performance and winning into a habit.

As signs of maturation, experts are apt to cite three instances. First, the clinical performance in the twin victory in Khulna which had been missing in the following two encounters with the West Indies in Dhaka, could be glimpsed when our team rose from the paltry 30 for 3 to the height of a superb performance in the end. Second, we cherish and celebrate this victory as the second ODI series win over a full strength Test side after trouncing New Zealand 4-0 in the same venue in 2010. Also in the Asia Cup our side made it to the finals after vying with strong world class sides.

As well as expressing jubilation over such feats, we needn't get carried away; instead, we concentrate in areas of techniques and temperament where we still have weakness. The BCCB, coach/es, physical and mind game trainers, the national side, and the expanding reservoir of budding cricketers talents, all have their job cut out. Bowling coach Saqlain has done his job well but we now need a competent coach on an overall basis.

An improving side that Bangladesh has become is in part due to better organised series of first class matches in domestic cricket coupled with our greater exposure to international cricket. The trend will have to be sustained

Countries default on observing human rights



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

HUMAN Rights Day marks the occasion when on December 10, 1948, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It was the destruction, deaths and incidents of gross human rights violation on an unprecedented scale during the Second World War that propelled the world community to consider the issue of human rights in a new light. As the madness of the war was over, good sense again prevailed. Humanity felt the need to designate a day of the year to observe as human rights day. Formally, that day was declared by the UNGA at one of its plenary meetings held in December 1950.

From that point of time until today, December 10, 2012, the world is observing the Human Rights Day for the 62nd time. The day is being observed at a time when about 1.2 million people have been internally displaced and some 500,000 made refugees in other countries, while 41 thousand people have been killed in Syrian civil war that started about 21 months ago. The world is watching while Syria is bleeding. The people of that country are facing the worst kind of human rights violation at the hands of their own people in the government's security forces.

Similar violations of human rights have been going on unabated in Palestine at the hands of the Israeli forces since the time when the Universal Human Rights Day was proclaimed by the UN. Iraq, has been ravaged by wars with neighbouring Iran and Kuwait followed by US invasions. The first invasion took place

between August 1990 and February 1991 (the Gulf war), while the last one termed "Iraq war" was foisted upon that country in March 2003. Internal conflicts and insurgencies further compounded the situation in Iraq and have turned it by now into a bottomless abyss of death and brutalisation of humanity.

The lofty aims of UDHR sound hollow to the people of Iraq. So does it to the people in Afghanistan since the former Soviet Union invaded it over three decades back. The US then created the Taliban with the help of the Pakistani dictator Ziaul Haq, to drive the Soviet communists out of that country and establish democracy

ity prevail are also not immune from human rights violations.

Silent wars are going on day in day out in every country regardless of whether it is run by popularly elected governments or by dictators, or other forms of unelected governments. And the result is unending cases of HR violations. Social conflicts including communal violence, conflicts of political origin, gender-related violence, rivalries among social or political groups for supremacy, etc. are the social source of these HR violations. Security agencies of the state are also involved in HR violations. And reports published by international as well as local HR bodies periodically provide a

border security force (BSF) at the border areas, 24 people were victims of enforced disappearance, 5 deaths occurred in the jail, 152 fatalities were caused by political violence. All these violent incidents took place over a period 11 months between January and November 2012. In the same period, attacks on journalists caused death to 5 and injuries to 156 persons. Add to these the victims of other types of HR violations such as acid violence (97), dowry-related violence against women (771), rape (760), sexual harassment including stalking (459), and public lynching (120).

But incidents of human rights violation in its hundred and one forms are taking place every minute across the globe of which only an insignificant fraction is reported by the HR watchdogs, research organisations and the media. And in each case of HR violation, the Articles of the UDHR are given short shrift by its perpetrator.

It was undoubtedly a moment of great historical significance when the UN adopted the UDHR 64 years ago. But when it comes to observing the principles enshrined in some 30 articles of the Declaration in practice, most governments have hopelessly defaulted on it.

The constitution of Bangladesh ensures basic human rights for all its citizens. And every time that an instance of HR violation occurs, it means the incumbent government has failed in its constitutional obligation to ensure the victim's human right. The last 11 months' account of HR violations as mentioned in Odhikar report is itself a testimony to how far the incumbent government has been able to fulfil its bounden obligations.

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and human rights in place of what they termed godless communist dictatorship. But the Taliban thought otherwise and so entered America on the scene, and the war continues to crush the Taliban for their extreme view as to how the country would be ruled. Amid these unending wars, the human rights of the Afghan people have been the ultimate casualty.

Violation of human rights on a colossal scale has also been occurring in Libya, Somalia, Congo and in many other parts of the globe. Besides these cases of large scale violations of human rights where full-fledged wars or civil wars are raging, other countries where apparent peace and stabil-

very grim of picture of the state of human rights in every society.

Bangladesh, an elected democracy since 1991, is also facing this menace. Odhikar, a local human rights watchdog, in its monthly human rights monitoring report of November 2012, shows how a single instance of failure to maintain safety standards at workplace caused the death of 111 garment workers. It was a gross instance of the violation of the basic human right of a person to have a safe place to work. But the employer denied them that right.

The same HR report has brought to the fore 67 cases of extrajudicial killings, 34 deaths in firings by Indian

America's hope against hope

JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

AFTER a hard-fought election campaign, costing well in excess of \$2 billion, it seems to many observers that not much has changed in American politics: Barack Obama is still president, the Republicans still control the House of Representatives, and the Democrats still have a majority in the Senate. With America facing a "fiscal cliff" -- automatic tax increases and spending cuts at the start of 2013 that will most likely drive the economy into recession unless bipartisan agreement on an alternative fiscal path is reached -- could there be anything worse than continued political gridlock?

In fact, the election had several salutary effects -- beyond showing that unbridled corporate spending could not buy an election, and that demographic changes in the United States may doom Republican extremism. The Republicans' explicit campaign of disenfranchisement in some states -- like Pennsylvania, where they tried to make it more difficult for African-Americans and Latinos to register to vote -- backfired: those whose rights were threatened were motivated to turn out and exercise them. In Massachusetts, Elizabeth Warren, a Harvard law professor and tireless warrior for reforms to protect ordinary citizens from banks' abusive practices, won a seat in the Senate.

Some of Mitt Romney's advisers seemed taken aback by Obama's victory: Wasn't the election supposed to be about economics? They were confident that Americans would forget how the Republicans' deregulatory zeal had brought the economy to the brink of ruin, and that voters had not noticed how their intransigence in Congress had prevented more effective policies from being pursued in the wake of the 2008 crisis. Voters, they assumed, would focus only on

the current economic malaise.

The Republicans should not have been caught off-guard by Americans' interest in issues like disenfranchisement and gender equality. While these issues strike at the core of a country's values -- of what we mean by democracy and limits on government intrusion into individuals' lives -- they are also economic issues. As I explain in my book *The Price of Inequality*, much of the rise in US economic inequality is attributable to a government in which the rich have disproportionate influence -- and use that influence to entrench themselves.

With the euro crisis likely to continue unabated, America's continuing malaise does not bode well for global growth. Even worse, in the absence of strong American leadership, longstanding global problems -- from climate change to urgently needed reforms of the international monetary system -- will continue to fester.

Obviously, issues like reproductive rights and gay marriage have large economic consequences as well. In terms of economic policy for the next four years, the main cause for post-election celebration is that the US has avoided measures that would have pushed it closer to recession, increased inequality, imposed further hardship on the elderly, and impeded access to health care for millions of Americans.

Beyond that, here is what Americans should hope for: a strong "jobs" bill -- based on investments in education, health care, technology, and infrastructure -- that would stimulate the economy, restore growth, reduce unemployment, and generate tax revenues far in excess of its costs, thus improving the country's fiscal

position. They might also hope for a housing programme that finally addresses America's foreclosure crisis.

A comprehensive programme to increase economic opportunity and reduce inequality is also needed -- its goal being to remove, within the next decade, America's distinction as the advanced country with the highest inequality and the least social mobility. This implies, among other things, a fair tax system that is more progressive and eliminates the distortions and loopholes that allow speculators to pay taxes at a lower effective rate than those who work for a living, and

focus must shift from speculative and proprietary trading to lending and job creation, which implies reforms of financial-sector regulation, and of anti-trust and corporate-governance laws, together with adequate enforcement to ensure that markets do not become rigged casinos.

Globalisation has made all countries more interdependent, in turn requiring greater global cooperation. We might hope that America will show more leadership in reforming the global financial system by advocating for stronger international regulation, a global reserve system, and better ways to restructure sovereign debt; in addressing global warming; in democratising the international economic institutions; and in providing assistance to poorer countries.

Americans should hope for all of this, though I am not sanguine that they will get much of it. More likely, America will muddle through -- here another little programme for struggling students and homeowners, there the end of the Bush tax cuts for millionaires, but no wholesale tax reform, serious cutbacks in defense spending, or significant progress on global warming.

With the euro crisis likely to continue unabated, America's continuing malaise does not bode well for global growth. Even worse, in the absence of strong American leadership, longstanding global problems -- from climate change to urgently needed reforms of the international monetary system -- will continue to fester. Nonetheless, we should be grateful: it is better to be standing still than it is to be heading in the wrong direction.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 10

1949 Chinese Civil War: The People's Liberation Army begins its siege of Chengdu, the last Kuomintang-held city in mainland China.

1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Liberation of Laksham. Bir Srestha Ruhul Amin embraces martyrdom.

1978 Arab-Israeli conflict: Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin and President of Egypt Anwar Sadat are jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.