

GROUND REALITIES

The damage that dynasties do

That is not the way for politics to run

They must settle for talks and iron out differences

WE have been observing with deep concern for the last few days the spate of vandalism, mayhem and anarchy on the streets. The opposition-called blockade and hartal and counteracting of those by the pro-government activists have made politics extremely violent. In other words, the excesses from both the opposition and the ruling parties are leading to highly explosive and violent consequences.

Let there be no mistake that the route you are taking has repeatedly proven not only counterproductive but also inducing increasingly hard-line positioning by the parties. By taking such a stance the opposition could neither oust the ruling party from power, nor could it realise its demands peacefully.

The rising trend of violence has led to deaths of innocent pedestrians, damage to private and public property, harm to business and suffering of the working people. And by disrupting smooth movement of goods and services, hartal and blockade have only pushed up prices of essentials thereby making life harder for common people.

The government, on the other hand, came down hard on the opposition. Particular mention may be made of the arrest of acting secretary general of the BNP on charge of smashing a city corporation-owned truck carrying garbage! The very suggestion of a senior political leader doing such an act is simply incomprehensible. If anything, it only points to the new low that the political culture has hit.

Faced with such a situation, we would call upon either side to shun the path of street confrontation. Otherwise they seem to be headed for reverting to the dreadful consequence like that of 2006.

We urge that you hold back, take a pause and ponder over the consequence of what you have been doing and settle for talks to thrash out the interim caretaker dispute to the satisfaction of both the sides. This will have the benefits of saving the economy, sustaining development and not subjecting the people to punishing programmes of which they have had enough.

It's a shame

Why must a foreigner face such a situation?

WE note with dismay that a German citizen, an architect by training, on an official visit to the country was on her way back to the capital city when her car was attacked. The fact that her vehicle was vandalized by the protesters goes to illustrate a departure from the standard practice of keeping foreigners out of harm's way. These people are here as guests and need to be shown the hospitality that is synonymous with Bengali culture.

True that the German consulate here has sent a letter of protest to Begum Khaleda Zia, and we sincerely hope the leader of the opposition will do everything in her power to make this the last incident. Ms. Heringer managed to get out of the car and leave the scene unscathed while her driver was not so lucky. But then one should remember that this attack is the second of its kind in so many days. Only the other day, an American embassy vehicle was vandalized and put on fire, for which Jamaat apologized.

Whatever may be the nature of the anti-government programme by the opposition parties, we have to observe the sanctity of foreigners and see to it that our political violence does not spillover to embroil them. For once the deed is done, no amount of apology will undo what has been done. The last thing this country needs is to be portrayed by our foreign friends as a nation where little or no rule of law exists. We are better than that. We have to see to it that our political programmes do not in any way affect them.

We have to shun recurrence of such incidents lest they affect investment in the country.



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

IN recent times, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has warned the government that no dynasties would be permitted in the politics of

the country. That statement was significant, not to say intriguing, coming as it did within days of the forty-eighth birthday celebrations of her exiled elder son. A very large number of people in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party went quite overboard in singing paeans to the young man, to a point where a senior figure in the party took it upon himself to inform the nation that the elder child of General Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia was the leader of the sixteen crore people of the country. On what basis he made that revelation remains unclear.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Commission has come forth with news that money stashed away in Singapore by the younger son of the leader of the opposition has been brought back to the country. That made quite a dent in the politics of the BNP, though its leadership tried putting up a brave face to the crisis by calling the ACC move a conspiracy by the ruling circles.

Be that as it may, the point here is the question of dynastic politics. It is quite telling that Begum Zia herself has raised the issue. On a bigger level, the issue is a pretty critical one, seeing that in recent decades dynastic politics has quite stymied the growth of democracy, in that proper sense of the meaning, in the country.

A clear sign of how dynastic politics

has been leading to a progressive stultification of pluralist politics comes through the many billboards and posters displayed all across the country. If on one poster it is the images of Bangabandhu, Sheikh Hasina and the latter's son that you spot, there is another where you have Zia, his spouse and their son that you stumble into. And all these images are up there because some local politicians have decided that they need to be noticed by their supreme leaders.

Whether such sycophancy helps in the long run is quite another matter. But the damage that it does to politics is something you certainly cannot miss. On the one hand, it strengthens the hold of the leader on her party, thus rendering difficult the task of

The unfortunate reality is that once the patriarch of a dynasty or future dynasty has passed from the scene, those who come after him do not measure up to his standards. That has been the lesson everywhere. Worse, these descendants, when they arrive on the scene, put a clamp on the wheels of democracy.

promoting a free expression of opinion in the party.

On the other, it informs you that beyond a few families or clans, Bangladesh does not have the capacity to produce leaders for the future. That is not the way things were in the 1960s and the earlier half of the 1970s.

And there lies the danger, which again is accentuated when you observe the trickle-down effects of dynastic politics. If you now have national politics in the grip of two major families, you have local politics getting to be increasingly dominated by smaller dynasties beholden to the bigger ones. And these smaller dynasties are but a reflection of the thought that in the

years ahead, politics at the local level will likely turn into an entrenched affair, with the result that political parties per se will tend to atrophy.

Parties and dynasties do not go together. When dynasties get on top of parties, it is politics which goes missing. Recall the Ershad years when his Jatiyo Party was essentially a political weapon in the hands of his family -- his wife and siblings -- to be used at their convenience. That did little good to the Jatiyo Party. In time, individuals like Anwar Hossain Manju, Sheikh Shahidul Islam and Najjur Rahman deserted Ershad and went ahead with giving shape to their own political factions. Najjur Rahman's small party is today in the hands of his son, which is proof once again of how bigger

national politics. The son and brother of Tajuddin Ahmed have been part of the political process; and today it is Tajuddin's daughter who represents her father's old constituency in parliament. Ahsanullah Master's son holds his seat in the legislature. Saifur Rahman's son Naser came into politics with his father's blessing. And today the son of President Zillur Rahman not only holds his father's old seat in parliament but also presides over the nation's cricket board as its chief.

The politics of dynasty circumscribes the growth and expansion of liberal democracy. There will, of course, be those who argue that it is the charisma of the dynasties which ensures a continuity of democratic politics. Charisma is all right when it is to be spotted in an individual politician. But in the descendants of politicians, it is more than charisma you look for. You look for ability, that certain grey matter which gives a new dimension to politics.

The unfortunate reality is that once the patriarch of a dynasty or future dynasty has passed from the scene, those who come after him do not measure up to his standards. That has been the lesson everywhere. Worse, these descendants, when they arrive on the scene, put a clamp on the wheels of democracy. And pluralism shuts its doors to those who have it in them to reinvent politics and shape a new political agenda.

Dynastic politics thrives on sycophancy and a false sense of nostalgia. It kills aspirations. It does not permit a flowering of rainbow dreams in a country.

The writer is Executive Editor, *The Daily Star*.
E-mail: ahsan.syedbadrul@gmail.com

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Doha climate talks end with weak outcome



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE Eighteenth Conference of parties (COP18) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

ended 24 hours over time on December 8 in Doha, Qatar with the adoption of the "Doha Climate Gateway." Even though the package consisted of decisions which were of very low ambition on several key issues some countries, including Russia and Ukraine, tried to stop their adoption and the Qatari President of the COP had to force it through despite their objections. The compromise package emerged after 36 hours of non-stop negotiations at ministerial level on the three critical issues being discussed in Doha.

The first was the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol beyond the end of its first commitment at the end of December 2012. This was indeed achieved, but only by a few of the original Kyoto Parties and that also at a relatively low level of ambition. However, this agreement opens the way to negotiating a much more ambitious mitigation agreement including all countries by 2015.

The second key issue was the amount of funding to be provided to developing countries to tackle climate change (both for mitigation as well as adaptation) between 2013 and 2020. The developed countries had promised to provide up to \$100 billion a year from 2020 onwards and had also promised (and to some extent delivered) \$30 billion over three years (2010, 2011 and 2012) but had not promised any concrete amounts between 2013 and 2020.

The developing countries had demanded \$60 billion over the next



The best thing that can be said about the Doha outcome is that it did not end in complete collapse (which it almost did) and keeps the show on the road towards a potentially more ambitious agreement at COP21 in 2015.

three years (2013 to 2015) but only a few countries (including the European Union) actually promised anything concrete while others gave some vague promises without any figures. This was perhaps the most disappointing failure of the Doha package.

The third issue can be called a victory of sorts for the developing countries, especially the small island states and the least developed countries (LDC), namely the agreement to consider setting up an "international mechanism for loss and damage" which opens up the door to potential claims for compensation in future. This item was fiercely resisted by the developed countries, particularly the United States, who wanted to kill the loss and damage negotiating track in Doha (their argument being that it should be dealt with under the existing negotiating track on adaptation). However, after two nights of continu-

ous negotiations at the ministerial level, where the island countries and LDCs said that they were prepared to leave Doha with nothing if they did not get loss and damage included, the developed countries were forced to concede and compromise.

Besides the three critical issues mentioned above progress was also made on a few less controversial (but nevertheless important) issues, including the National Adaptation Plans (NAP) which will now be developed by all developing countries including the LDCs. Agreement was also reached on implementing reductions in emissions from degradation and deforestation (REDD). The new Technology Centre was also agreed to be set up by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

One other critical topic that was agreed to be discussed is the issue of equity and particularly the application

of the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in determining the level of mitigation actions by all countries in the next agreement in 2015.

Bangladesh's role: Bangladesh had a relatively large delegation consisting of government officials, experts, NGOs, members of parliament and journalists under the leadership of the minister of environment and forests. Bangladeshi negotiators have over the years developed considerable knowledge and skills in different negotiating issues and several of them represent the LDC Group or the Developing Countries group on important negotiating tracks. They also held a number of press conferences and side events to highlight Bangladesh's own actions in tackling climate change.

Doha also marked the end of the tenure of Gambia as Chair of the LDC Group and the handing over to Nepal as the incoming Chair for the next two years.

Conclusion: The best thing that can be said about the Doha outcome is that it did not end in complete collapse (which it almost did) and keeps the show on the road towards a potentially more ambitious agreement at COP21 in 2015 (possibly to be held in Paris, France). However, there are many more tough negotiations to be done between now and 2015 to raise the level of ambition from all countries to increase their levels of mitigation if the temperature increase is to be kept below 2 degrees as it is now headed toward 4 degrees.

The writer is Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh and Senior Fellow at the London based International Institute for Environment and Development.
E-mail: Saleemul.huq@iied.org

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 12

1098 First Crusade: Massacre of Ma'arrat al-Numan Crusaders breach the town's walls and massacre about 20,000 inhabitants.

1911 Delhi replaces Calcutta as the capital of India.

1911 King George V of the United Kingdom and Mary of Teck are enthroned as Emperor and Empress of India.

1925 The Majlis of Iran votes to crown Reza Khan as the new Shah of Persia.

1939 Winter War: Battle of Tolvaajärvi Finnish forces defeat those of the Soviet Union in their first major victory of the conflict.

1941 Adolf Hitler announces extermination of the Jews at a meeting in the Reich Chancellery

1991 Russian Federation gains independence from the USSR.