

CROSS TALK

Put a stop to Jamaat's violence

Enough is enough

THE country has had enough of Jamaat's violence. We have watched with surprise the repeated acts of violence perpetrated by Jamaat over the greater part of last three months in all the major cities and towns of the country. Private and public properties have been destroyed with gay abandon, and the police have been made to look rather amateurish in the face of aggression committed by the party activists.

And we restate our view that Jamaat's activities are no longer confined to the realm of politics but rather degenerating, alarmingly, to acts of terror. It is not politics that they claim they are being prevented from doing. Their activities on Tuesday and Wednesday in Dhaka and Chittagong expose their aim, which is to precipitate a situation, and gain political mileage.

We wonder why the police are being repeatedly caught off guard. Is the reaction of the party unpredictable? The agencies should have seen what was coming and prepared well for it. In certain cases the police against severe odds had managed to preempt Jamaat's vandalism while in certain cases they were not able to do so. We suggest that not only should the police revisit their operational procedures against Jamaat, they should also acquire the capacity to anticipate and thwart Jamaat's movements through timely intelligence before they are able to indulge in violent acts.

According to the police, Jamaat cadres are said to be gravitating towards Dhaka. We hope Jamaat will realise that the strategy it has assumed will not only fail, it will also prove disastrous. Violence will not earn it any advantage, because no amount of violence can deflect the trial of the war criminals or earn the party any reprieve politically. They must prepare for what is coming and accept the verdict of the court or contest it legally. It is not time for violence but for atonement for their deeds of 1971. Jamaat will do well to abandon the baggage of the past and start to live with the realities of the present.

Granting bail to Hall-Mark Chairman

High Court calls for explanation

THE Hall-Mark saga continues to shock us. In a much welcome intervention, the High Court (HC) has called for an explanation from senior special judge Md. Jahurul Huq on February 18 to explain why the group's Chairman Jesmine Akhtar was granted bail on eleven ACC cases. We too would like to know what special circumstances possessed the honourable judge to grant bail on February 7 to one of the principal accused of the most sensational financial scandal to hit the country.

We are fortunate that this decision by the honourable judge was halted by the filing of a petition on February 11. The petition could not have come at a better time. Had it not been filed, there would have been no barrier to Ms. Akhtar leaving the country. The petition specifically mentions that no constructive steps have been taken by authorities concerned to track down the money trail. That is, the billions siphoned off by Hall Mark and its subsidiary companies remain largely unaccounted for.

Granting of bail on eleven cases on a single day at this juncture raises some very valid and serious concerns about why there is no progress on the Hall-Mark scam. According to ACC lawyer since Ms. Akhtar has been mentioned as a prime suspect in the FIR, should leave no room for granting her bail. Hence, we are led back to our original question, on what grounds, was she being let off?

We can only hope that with HC's intervention in this sensational case, authorities will be propelled into taking action to unearth and track down the billions of taka which are essentially public funds. Such bold steps will help restore to a great degree, public's confidence in the

Three minutes of Shahbagh Spring



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE three-minute silence observed last Tuesday cut a swathe of profound introspection through the clutter of this land. Time stood still across the country for those three minutes when ministers, parliament members, bureaucrats and ordinary people joined in clockwork punctuality to create a rather absurd moment in our national history.

Absurd because never before had silence proved so eloquent in the life of this nation, and never before had this nation spoke so volubly when it didn't speak at all.

In those three minutes an entire country, save and except the pockets of dissenters, was submerged in an organised catharsis. It was a magical moment that forged more solidarity within minutes than was accomplished in almost 42 years that elapsed before it. The credit for this magnificent moment goes to Shahbagh Spring.

This moment wouldn't have happened without it. The youths who gathered in a city square to vent their frustration have created this tsunami. Imagine it hadn't happened. Imagine these youths were minding their own businesses, and their elders were still running the show. Hand on heart, how many people believe that those elders would have been motivated on their own to ask for a retrial? Would they have amended the law and gone for an appeal, if not for the roaring outrage that shook the country?

If we map the terrain of mass movements in Bangladesh from 1952 to 1971 to 1990 to 2013, roughly every twenty years on average this nation has experienced a spontaneous frenzy. Almost every twenty years people of this country have shown their exasperation against putrid

politics. They have risen in collective action to tell their politicians they had enough of misguided politics. It doesn't matter who sides with this movement and who doesn't. The growing popularity of this mass action is a moral defeat for the politicians of all denominations. Many of them are now visiting Shahbagh with the urgency of catching the last train. Many have been heckled and harassed by defiant youths. They have been repeatedly warned not to have their motivated fingers in this

The Shahbagh phenomenon has been dubbed as the resurgence of the 1971 spirit. For the politicians of this country, those who have expressed their solidarity with the movement and those who haven't, it should be equally shameful. Shameful because that spirit had to be revived by their children, the generation that never experienced it.

precious pie of national awakening. The Shahbagh phenomenon has been dubbed as the resurgence of the 1971 spirit. For the politicians of this country, those who have expressed their solidarity with the movement and those who haven't, it should be equally shameful. Shameful because that spirit had to be revived by their children, the generation that never experienced it.

Curiously, the politicians lived through 1971 and many of them also fought in the Liberation War. No matter how much they defend their positions, they have lost that spirit like a needle in a haystack. Now that the law has been amended and the parliament is going to approve it,

none of these would have been possible without the Shahbagh eruption. It's too early to predict the outcome of this Shahbagh movement. But those three minutes of silence further validated that the leaders have followed and the followers have led. It also raised a critical question whether going forward these leaders can be trusted with the remaining leg of this journey. Will the amended law eventually flower into a fruitful action? Will it give enough assurance so that these

tests against a court verdict that fell short of their expectation. It is the concerted expression of their concentrated anger that has infected this nation like a contagious virus.

How long can it sustain? The Arab Spring has overthrown four dictators and sparked civil uprisings in 14 other countries. The Occupy Movement that started in New York City's Zuccotti Park spread out to 951 cities in 82 countries. These movements wended down to winter like once they had the advent of spring.



SK ENAMUL HAQ/AMRAN HOSSAIN

youths can go back home? Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky used a metaphor in The History of the Russian Revolution to describe the inherent risk of a spontaneous mass movement. He said the powerful steam can evaporate for lack of a piston that would have compressed it at the decisive moment. Trotsky went on to explain that the piston without steam remains a hollow shell, while even the most intense steam is wasted in absence of the piston.

For last ten days, we have been watching the hissing and screaming steam radiator of this nation at Shahbagh. The country's conscientious youths are voicing their pro-

The longer the Shahbagh Spring sustains its momentum, the harder will politicians try to usurp its force. True, it gives us hope. But how long will future generations fight the degenerations of their ancestors? Can they break this vicious circle?

Today's generation will form tomorrow's ancestry. The circle will be broken if their children will be proud of them, not only because they have changed one verdict.

Hidebound by the past, they must know that mistakes of their parents cannot set their children free.

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BYLINE

Is Rahul able and capable?



M.J. AKBAR

NOTHING happens in a waiting room. 2013 is the waiting room for 2014. Do not expect too much excitement. Time

will disappear through the passage of the predictable, occasionally diverted by a faint dread of what might happen once the great surgeon of democracy, the voter, gets his scalpel on the body politic in a general election.

A huge yawn greeted Mulayam Singh Yadav's statement that there could be elections in September this year rather than March next year. Yadav's support is crucial to the present government's survival, and even a few months ago the shrill buzz provoked by this claim would have rattled window panes in every television studio. But no one took him seriously. He has become the boy who cried wolf and then laughed precociously at his little joke.

The only people predicting a 2013 election are a few astrologers, and they have been around the block once too often.

In real terms it does not much matter whether elections are held early or on schedule. Patience is a democratic virtue. Voters take time to decide, but once they have done so they do not easily change. Politicians who see public opinion

drift away always encourage the self-sustaining hope that some last-minute miracle will ensure survival. Bengal's Marxists were palpably surprised by their defeat in the last Assembly elections, when no one else was. The famous British dictum that a week is a long time in politics is often repeated. It is equally true that a year can be a short time.

Voters know already that Dr. Manmohan Singh is the last of the past. They are searching for the first of the future. If you cannot under-

stand why Narendra Modi gets a rapt audience at a Delhi college, turn to the duller news items. We now learn that, despite the long sequence of illusion strung by UPA's nominated cheerleaders, the Central Statistics Office predicts that GDP will grow at only 5% in the coming year, the lowest in a decade and down from 6.2% in the previous year. But, as poor as this is, it is less politically harmful than the conclusions of another government body, the Institute of Applied Manpower Research, a think tank of the Planning Commission. It reported that despite becoming the world's fourth largest economy, employment was not growing either in

India's non-agricultural sectors or overall. It described the Indian story as "jobless growth." The young like statistics as much as anyone else, but what they really want to read in newspapers is advertisements for jobs. Delhi's college audiences believe that Modi can engineer and encourage the industrialisation that will create jobs, and has confirmed his credentials in Gujarat. That, in their lingo, is "awesome."

The voter's question about Rahul

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Gandhi is uncomplicated: What precisely has he achieved to justify a claim to become prime minister? Genetic entitlement is passé. Rahul is 42 but has never held a job in either the private sector or public life. A fitful presence in Parliament, interspersed with long holidays abroad, does not constitute a job.

Rahul could have become a minister at any time in the last eight years, and proved he was competent, as, to take one instance, Sachin Pilot has done. Rahul has campaigned, sometimes with his sleeves rolled up, but that is not quite executive experience. And after three decades as a family borough, life for the poor in his constituency,

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It is a myth that the young are only searching for youth in a prime minister: they also want proof of competence. Age is less important than ability. When the young want glamour they go to the movies, not to Parliament.

This, of course, is only one factor in that complex potpourri called an Indian election; Modi's increasing appeal, to state the obvious, still has to cross the acceptability barrier for many voters. The parliamentary system is not as personality-driven as the presidential, so local variations will throw up their own patterns.

The big danger for UPA lies in the possibility that government could lose sense of purpose in a year of drift. Politics does not offer the luxury of a gap year in governance. Schemes that were meant to kindle embers are already wandering in limbo. The Budget could provide a fillip, but finance minister P. Chidambaram has a problem: there is simply no money left in the treasury for drama. Even defence is probably heading for a cut.

A waiting room does, however, provide both opportunity and time for prayer. UPA ministers should pray very hard that onion prices do not go berserk in February 2014.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 15

- 590** Khosrau II is crowned king of Persia.
- 1946** ENIAC, the first electronic general-purpose computer, is formally dedicated at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.
- 1965** A new red-and-white maple leaf design is adopted as the flag of Canada, replacing the old Canadian Red Ensign banner.
- 1976** The 1976 Constitution of Cuba is adopted by national referendum.
- 1989** Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan: The Soviet Union officially announces that all of its troops have left Afghanistan.
- 1991** The Visegrád Agreement, establishing cooperation to move toward free-market systems, is signed by the leaders of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.
- 2003** Protests against the Iraq war take place in over 600 cities worldwide. It is estimated that between 8 million to 30 million people participate, making this the largest peace demonstration in history.