

In remembrance of Bangabandhu

AL should live up to his ideals

WE remember with respect the stupendous contribution Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made to the creation of Bangladesh and pay our homage to him. We also recall with a heavy heart the tragedy that befell him and members of his family. The brutality and the inhumanity of the event is a matter of great shame for the nation. It is of great historical significance that the notorious Indemnity Act was repealed, paving the way for a trial of the killers and meting out justice to most of them. Some, however, remain absconding and efforts are underway to get them back to pay for their heinous crime.

On this sad day, we are further saddened by the fact that the values that this great man stood for have been eroded both nationally as well as within the AL party. AL has been elected twice to power and has been in the opposition twice. So, the manner in which it conducted itself contributed to the shape of politics and governance in the country. What we have seen over the long haul is a deterioration of ethics in politics, rampant abuse of power and intolerance of political dissent. Corruption has also crept into the system. In all, the party that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led to glories and a pride of place in the annals of the country, in many ways is left to look somewhat of a shadow of its former self.

To truly appreciate his sacrifices for the dream of building a golden Bangladesh, Awami League should have committed itself to strengthening the institutions of democracy rather than weakening them. We urge the Awami League to be reminded of the great ideals that Bangabandhu stood for and lived by.

Deferment of municipal polls

EC's waning independence worrying

IN yet another self-diminishing move, the Election Commission (EC) has postponed elections to three municipalities scheduled on 8th September at the government's diktat.

The EC defended its move saying that as per electoral laws, the LGRD ministry creates the ground for the polls, while the EC only conducts the election.

The LGRD ministry insisted on halting the polls until redrawing of the boundaries of municipalities.

The argument that EC has deferred the election at the instance of the LGRD ministry raises question about the wisdom of its having declared the election schedule in the first place.

One would have thought it had announced the election schedule after due diligence and deliberations. If the EC did not do so, then it is reflective of its incompetence. If, on the other hand, it changed its mind at the LGRD ministry's dictate, then it has wilfully abdicated its independence.

This is very unfortunate as well as self-demeaning for the EC to be completely oblivious of public perceptions about what its image should be like. Through this action, it has dashed the public's hope of reposing trust in EC's independence on which the prospect of free and fair election hinges critically.

Costs of hartals

FAARIA TASIN

ALL of us are familiar with the costs that emerge as a result of hartals and political violence. Inability of businesses to run smoothly, burning of vehicles, destruction of property, and hamper of education are just a few reasons among many that take a toll on the economic growth of the country. The costs of hartals are significant but who actually end up paying for these costs?

Let us take a look at a few of the costs and start by exploring the case regarding burning of vehicles. Ample public transports have been destroyed and its cost will be borne by the government from its expenditure. So are we on the clear since the government is paying? Not quite! There is an opportunity cost attached to the recuperation of these damaged vehicles. The money which is being used here could have been used elsewhere for the welfare of the general public; for instance fixing a broken road or for scenic beautification. These comforts would have been enjoyed by the general public but now they have to give it up. The effects of a slump in economic activity are much diverse. A company may incur losses due to political chaos which may trigger it to cut costs by dismissing employees or canceling bonuses. Hartals also discourage investments which could have in turn increased employment in the economy.

So if the cost of hartal is so high, then how come very few people take a stand against it? Apart from the obvious reason of guarding one's personal safety, eminent economists have used the concepts of 'rationality' and 'free rider problem' to explain these kinds of human behavior. The aggregated cost of hartal is hefty; however when it is divided by the country's total population of over 150 million, the cost per person does not appear to be significant. This stops people from protesting as they feel that investing much time and effort to retrieve this small amount is not worthy. This is a depiction of 'rationality'.

If a group of people devotes their time and energy into effective campaigning against hartals, then the whole country will benefit. However not everyone will be willing to help them in their endeavors. These are the 'free-riders' who will reap the benefits without giving any effort. This may act as a disincentive for many to take steps to eradicate the problem.

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Who will win the war of attrition?

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

opposing commanders because it violated the principles of war, or even a battle involving the entire army. Differences were sought to be resolved by engaging two best soldiers of the two camps in combat. And whoever yielded, conceded victory to the other camp. That spared many lives at the end of the day.

Alas! We do not have such arrangement for the political parties to adopt. But can we not? Here are some suggestions which I offer at the risk of being considered tongue in cheek and insensitive, but which, if adopted, would spare the country some harsh consequences, at least avoid the repetition of the 'logi - baitha' episode of October 2006.

We could have a 'shouting' contest between two of the most vocal members of the two alliances. They would be left to do all the shouting from the highest building in the capital at each other with no holds barred and no time limit till one stopped, either out of exhaustion, or loss of investives in their kitty, or rupture of the epiglottis. And we could have both male and female categories in the 'combat'.

We could also have two pairs of boxing gloves on two braves chosen by the two alliances, to resolve the impasse. The only caveat would be that there would not be more than 2 kilo difference in weight between them. Here too no holds would be barred and hitting below the belt would be allowed. That would perhaps ensure a quick termination of the combat and end of the standoff.

A more serene and peaceful option has been left out. I had in mind a poetry reading contest but gave up the idea

M. EMDADUL HAQ

CONFLICT resolution at the national level is a demand of the day, especially in the context of political impasse in today's Bangladesh. In the school text there is a tale of an old man who in his death bed provided a morale to his feuding sons 'united you stand, divided you fall.' In this account, every son was separately asked to break a bunch of sticks tied together, but none could succeed. In the light of big examples set by great minds, the present article would argue about the strength of 'unity out of diversity' and the merits of 'integration rather than assimilation' in a pluralistic democracy.

The earliest reconciliation amongst the conflicting parties dates back to 620AD when Prophet Muhammad (SWA) forgive His challengers after about 66 battles in 23 years. Following the victory of Mecca by Prophet's army, the Charter of Medina turned a historical document between Muslims, and their arch rivals Jews, Christians and pagans. It set the foundation of unity and brought to an end the bitter animosity amongst the Arab tribes on their religious faith. It instituted a number of mutual rights and obligations for all the clans and communities within the fold of first Islamic state in Saudi Arabia.

If a government is to manage diversity well in politics, it must overcome discrimination of any particular quarter and prevent their marginalisation. David J. Whittaker in his book Conflict and Reconciliation in the Contemporary World (2002) examines the processes of dispute resolutions and compromise in eight countries from four continents. In each of these case studies the author looks at likely causes of the conflict, outlines developments and considers the likely risks in the long-term healing process at the reconciliation stage.

Whittaker shows harmonious co-existence achieved in almost half of the countries whereby politically minorities were not forced to follow the tune of the majority dictatorship. To resolve differences and hostile action, the author observes the importance of the psychological willingness for building understanding and tolerance to live together in a new framework of peace and well-being.

Led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) laid the foundation of latest successful examples in post apartheid South Africa. Comprising 17 high profile members in three committees, the TRC functioned in line with the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995. TRC procedures represent a ventilating process -- to hear testimonies about human rights abuse, to document them, to present them publicly, and to facilitate the granting of amnesty.

Much other similar settlement had been reached in different parts of Europe at the early stage of the modern era. The ideal of 'fraternity' used in the French Revolution of 1789 became the basis of French nationalism that combined working class people with nobility in the post-revolutionary period. During the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Vladimir I. Lenin urged the members of the Russian bourgeoisie and the Czarist mon-

archy to help construct a socialist society in Russia. Instead of placing defeated forces into death squads, Lenin slated the importance of their support in a critical juncture.

The unspeakable barbarity and atrocity of the Khmer Rouge and its leader Pol Pot filled everyone with dismay and disgust after Prince Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown in a military coup in Cambodia in 1970. Upon resuming his power, Sihanouk's Royal Government saw 'national reconciliation' as the ultimate solution for burying hatchets and bringing unity to rebuild the Cambodian economy.

The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 marked the integration of East and West Germany after four decades of Cold War hostility. After ten years, Charles Hermann, et.al. (eds.) book Violent Conflict in the 21st Century: Causes, Instruments and Mitigation focuses further accounts on the subject. In line with this amity much of the large scale violence that had occurred during the Cold War era came to an end in Eastern Europe and Russia apparently in a non-violent manner by the early 1990s.

Atrocities in Kosovo by the armies of Slobodan Milosevic were mounting before he decided in June 1999 to accept NATO's conditions for terminating the conflict. In his book The Conflict Over Kosovo: Why Milosevic Decided to Settle When He Did Stephen T. Hosmer (2001) examines the reasons why the then president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia went for a surrender. In the Nuremburg spirit, Milosevic faced trial at The Hague, but he was found dead in his cell on March 11, 2006 before a verdict was implicated for his crimes against humanity.

Many fleeing leaders of the Nazi Army have been tried by the Nuremburg Court for their atrocities during the World War II. Nevertheless, there has not been even a mock trial organised against the pilots for dropping of atom bombs that killed about 166,000 people in Hiroshima and 80,000 in Nagasaki in August 1945. No reparation was also made by the British authorities for their ruthless policies that took 10 million human lives in 1770 alone and caused many other deaths in the resistance wars against the British in 190 years.

Having discussed the successful practices of conflict resolution and reconciliation in the post-revolutionary societies across the globe, we should raise our awareness to resolve our differences amicably in the domestic environment. Otherwise, low morale, ambiguity, conflict, tension, and confusion will lead us to acute instability problems.

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because it would be difficult to find judges to adjudicate the competition who would be acceptable to both the parties.

Believe me, I am not being facetious, neither am I trying to make light of a serious situation. My reaction stems from pondering on the likely outcome of the current confrontation between the two parties with ever increasing hardening of positions that brings to mind the ominous developments of 2006. It seems nothing else except retaining power or getting back to power matters to the two parties. Even our foreign friends are worried, and at least one ambassador has offered to mediate between the two, whether that falls within his remit is a different matter. People are anticipating with anxiety the next few months, particularly October, when several developments are likely to occur including the start of the countdown to the 90 days of election according to the 15th Amendment.

The AL is firm on holding elections like in 'any other democratic country'. And they are saying so without feeling any qualms of having participated in four elections unlike in 'any other democratic country', or even feeling remorse for having put the country through untold misery to introduce the caretaker system, a system not to be found in 'any other democratic country'.

It is ridiculous that the AL leaders should be advising the BNP to shed the ghost of CTG from their shoulders, without realising that it was they who created the ghost in the first place. One wonders too whether the AL has been able to shed the CTG ghost from their shoulders. The mode and manner in which the 15th Amendment was brought about suggest that they have not.

BNP's threats to force the government to accede to their demands convey an undertone of coercion, of which it is the general public which will be in the receiving end. Standing firm on the demand of 'nothing but a CTG' does not speak of their political wisdom.

And amidst all these, the specter of 'third force' coming to power is being flaunted without realising that it is a very important institution of the country that is being made the object of suspicion. That should not happen.

If the war of attrition is allowed to continue we cannot predict the winner, but we can certainly say who the loser would be - the people.

The writer is Editor, Op-Ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Reconciliation in national politics

archy to help construct a socialist society in Russia. Instead of placing defeated forces into death squads, Lenin slated the importance of their support in a critical juncture.

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Having discussed the successful practices of conflict resolution and reconciliation in the post-revolutionary societies across the globe, we should raise our awareness to resolve our differences amicably in the domestic environment. Otherwise, low morale, ambiguity, conflict, tension, and confusion will lead us to acute instability problems from which nobody can avoid his or her responsibilities. People from different thought-process have the right to develop a shared goal in a pluralistic democracy and effective participation in the political process.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Trauma of growing up as poor

Broadcast on the night after thanksgiving in 1960, Edward R. Murrow's "Harvest of Shame" exposed us to the callous exploitation of the migrant workers who pick our fruits and vegetables. This is an American story that begins in Florida and ends in New Jersey and New York State with the harvest. It is the story of men and women and children who work 136 days of the year and earn average nine hundred dollars a year.

Believe it or not, more than fifty years later, the life of a migrant labourer is still an ordeal. And not just for adults. Perhaps as many as half a million children, some as young as seven years old, are out in the fields and orchards working nine to ten hour days under brutal conditions. That was one of the most traumatic things growing up. Being poor and powerless to withstand the mistreatment, to watch my mom and dad be mistreated and is being fooled about the wages is traumatic. There was no way for us to complain. No way for us to appeal to anyone.

Ted Rudow III, MA
Encina Ave
Palo Alto, CA

Eligibility for BUET admission test

I am a GPA-5 holder of this year's HSC exam. But instead of celebrating my achievement, my parents and I are literally in a state of mourning. This is because I missed the A+ in English. I got A. With this score, my long cherished dream of studying at BUET now looks uncertain.

Last year, BUET authorities made it mandatory for candidates to have 20 points to be eligible for its admission test instead of the previous 19 points. The points are counted on the basis of 5 for each of the three papers of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and also English. In the past, A for English was enough. This year's result is poorer on all counts. The BUET authorities might have assumed that results were getting better with every passing year. But there has been a reversal this year. If the BUET authorities revert to the criterion of 19 points, allowing only those who have scored no less than A in English, we will be able to sit for the admission test. Let the authorities do this in the interest of better competition among students excelling in science subjects.

Anish Halder
On e-mail

Growing good quality potato

Only a few companies in Bangladesh are producing potato chips which are yet to reach international standard. No doubt, potato chips and other snacks made from processed potatoes can be a profitable business in Bangladesh. I think the government should provide necessary support to such type of entrepreneurs and the Department of Agriculture Extension should encourage farmers to grow quality potatoes especially for potato chips.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture
SAU, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "No change in GB structure," published on August 8, 2013

Ash C.

That's not good enough, Mr. Muhit. You must respond officially to Prof. Yunus's rejoinder in response to the statement you made against him and Grameen Bank on the floor of the House during the last session. Your own self-respect should take precedence in this instance.

Khan from Ottawa, Canada

I do not understand why Mr. Yunus is still sticking his nose into Grameen Bank?

Fazlul Bari

You are absolutely right. He does not have any share in Grameen Bank, although he created it with borrowers' money.

Sheikh Monirul Islam, Opec

This one alone will cost Awami League 12 to 15% votes. Dr. Yunus has many foes, but Hasina and Muhit have made too many negative comments against this scholarly person making him more popular.

"The State versus Adilur: Facts against innuendoes" (August 13, 2013)

Nds

I humbly want to disagree with this author. The false and fabricated report that Mr. Rahman has made with a highly malevolent objective decisively disqualifies him to be identified as a human rights activist. Using the label of human rights activist he has distorted the meaning of human rights. But it is agreed that police should have followed the lawful procedures in arresting him.

Khan from Ottawa, Canada

Thanks to Mr. Abrar, President, Odhikar, for his comments. He wrote a nice article in support of Adilur, but unfortunately, he avoided the point which police raised -- the technique of photoshopping the picture published in the cover page. In a country where an ex-home minister was beaten by the police, what happened to Adilur is, perhaps, only normal.