14 The Baily Star **EDITORIAL**



LATE S. M. ALI **DHAKA FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 6, 2013**

Jamaat-Shibir men run amok

Rein them in

AMAAT-SHIBIR activists struck terror in different parts of the city on Wednesday damaging police and public vehicles, hurling brickbats and cocktails. They were said to be protesting government's decision to debar war crimes convicts from getting registered as voters,

Clearly, the Jamaat-Shibir activists by their violent acts were demonstrating their support for those who stood against the people's struggle for independence in 1971. This is an instance of unabashed display of arrogance, lack of remorse and open defiance of our independence and its history.

And it is also not for the first time that they have been wreaking havoc on public life by destroying public properties and engaging in bloody skirmishes with the police. Since last November they started such street violence protesting the verdicts pronounced by International War Crimes Tribunal against those who committed crimes against humanity. Dozens of people have died and scores hurt so far in the violence.

What are they trying to convey with their destructive activities? To establish the voting right of war criminals by attacking police and terrorizing the public? Do they think the people can be clubbed into yielding and accepting their outrageous demands? They must put a stop to this madness and behave.

The public have long been silently watching their violence in the name of protests with sufficient tolerance. But their tolerance should not be taken for granted.

Yet another eviction drive

Fix river demarcation first

HERE have been perhaps a dozen eviction drives by the authorities to remove illegal structures that continue to encroach on the Buriganga River. The latest one launched on September 4 by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) removed dozens of such structures. But to what end? The reality is that concerned authorities do not go the whole hog. The high and mighty or the politically-connected residents or owners of establishments who have illegally set up shop get left out of such eviction efforts.

And once the drive is over, it is business back to usual and soon new structures pop up like mushrooms to replace those that have been removed. The unfortunate truth is that the demarcation of the river was not done properly. This paper has raised the issue many times. Until the landmark ruling on demarcation handed down by the Supreme Court in 2009 is properly implemented, there will continue to be cases of encroachment.

The erroneous setting up of demarcation pillars along the Buriganga river has only helped further the cause of encroachers and narrowed the river down to a mere shadow of its former self. With little by way of monitoring by BIWTA, it is little wonder that such violation of the law continues to take place. And the long interludes between eviction drives only help unscrupulous quarters to manage illegal documentation to lay claim on landfills that should not be existing in the first place.

people think ?



Do you agree with BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir that BNP is ready to sit with the government to find a way out of the current political impasse over the polls-time government?

Saturday: August 31, 2013 Do you think it was justified for BNP to term 'nothing but a drama' the attorney general's handing over of the

cheque for a portion of money that was laundered by Arafat Rahman Koko?

(45%)Sunday: September 01, 2013

Do you agree with the prime minister that when BNP assumes office, they resort to corruption?

Monday: September 02, 2013

Do you agree with BNP leader Moudud Ahmed that the government is planning a new amendment to the constitution to prolong its stay in power?

Tuesday: September 03, 2013

Do you think an amendment to the constitution will ensure continuation of democracy and peaceful handover of power?

Wednesday: September 04, 2013 Do you think that the newly drafted police act will help increase political influence over the force?

(76%)(24%)No 🚃

Thursday: September 05, 2013 Do you think that the next general election would be

held within the last 90 days of the parliament's tenure?

(56%)

Why can't our elections be peaceful?

Because both sides have become too fearful of defeat

As the time for elections is drawing nearer,

all sections of the society are becoming

more and more apprehensive as to what is

likely to happen before, during and after

elections. Parents are worried about their

children's education, business people about

running their factories, traders about

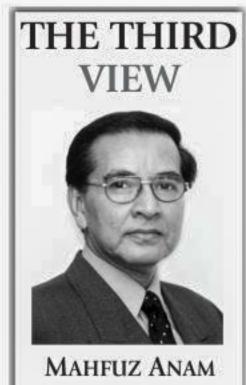
imports and exports, professionals about

implementing their annual plans, etc. It

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festival of expression of Public Will is being turned into, as we can foresee now, a destructive encounter between our two giant parties with voters becoming increasingly fearful of what is likely to happen. Theoretically, elections are when voters reign supreme. Tragically in Bangladesh, it is when the voters are cowed down the most.

Except for the one in 1991, which was preceded by the fall of the autocratic government of Gen. Ershad, all other elections were preceded by months, if not years, of mass agitation leading to violence and deaths. At the end of it all however, because of the caretaker government (CTG) system, we were able

able elections, leading to a peaceful transfer of power. With the abolishing of the CTG system this time around, such a prospect has become less likely. As the time for elections is drawing nearer, all sections of the society are becoming

to have highly participated

and internationally accept-

more and more apprehensive as to what is likely to happen before, during and after elections. Parents are worried about their children's education, business people about running their factories, traders about

imports and exports, professionals about implementing their annual plans, etc. It would not be an exaggeration to state that we are all in the grip of fear -- fear for our future and everything that it entails.

And all this is because Sheikh Hasina refuses to go to polls under a caretaker government and Khaleda Zia refuses to do the same without it.

Last Monday the prime minister announced, as she had done innumerable times, but this time before the highest level government functionaries, that it will be under her government and within the present parliament's tenure -- that is by January 24, 2014 -- elections will be completed. It is basically a reiteration of her stance that she will not move "a single hair-breadth" of distance in accommodating the opposition.

With this announcement, Sheikh Hasina can be said to have drawn the curtain on any possibility of talks. All the imploring of the UN, US, EU members and, surprisingly China, (surprising because China does not usually publicly say anything on such issues) that elections must ensure participation of all parties, basically meaning BNP and its allies, obviously did not impress her.

Sheikh Hasina wants to hold the elections very much like the way she ran the country in the last nearly five years. It was her wishes that her cabinet and her party always endorsed. There has not been one known instance where her cabinet or party was able to dissuade her from what she wanted to do.

Similarly, she now wants to hold the election precisely the way she proclaimed that she would. She first abol-

THAT should be a ished the CTG system and has now said that it would be under her government and with the parliament remaining in place, that the coming polls will be held. What surprised all those who have been following her statements is that only a few months ago Sheikh Hasina promised to dissolve the parliament before the polls.

So why, knowing as she does that her proposition will not be acceptable to the opposition alliance, is Sheikh Hasina pursuing a course that is bound to lead to stalemate at best, and serious violence at worst? What has made the PM change her mind? What gives her the confidence that she will be able to pull off something which everybody, including her crucial supporters, are advising her against.

There are many people openly saying that Sheikh Hasina does not want the opposition to participate in the elections. So she will take all sorts of outrageous positions that will force the BNP to boycott the polls. The argument here is that AL cannot win a free and fair election and hence wants to create conditions that will force

> BNP to boycott. Then using the 'walkover' Sheikh Hasina will do everything possible to make it look like a 'free and fair' election including taking less seats than she has now, thereby trying to give the impression that the polls were well fought in spite of BNP's absence.

> This argument does not answer the question as to how Sheikh Hasina will run her newly 'elected' government in face of opposition's agitation, which will likely to be

from day one?

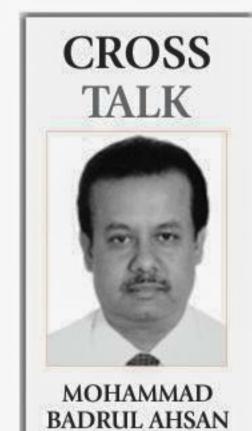
We are not convinced by this line of thinking simply because AL has never been a party that shied away from elections. If anything, this party has always, in spite of Herculean obstacles at various stages of its chequered life, participated in elections. So the question resurfaces, why is Sheikh Hasina taking positions that are making her look increasingly inflexible and making it impossible for the opposition to participate in the polls?

We do not pretend to know the answer. However, we would like to think that being a leader of the masses that she is, having suffered at the hands of undemocratic regimes as she has, having tasted the fruit of democracy for the last 23 years, she will do everything in her power to preserve the system even if it means that her arch rival may come to power.

We can understand her reluctance to see BNP in power again because of the post poll violence in 2001 that was carried out against her party. But the truth is all that violence did not weaken the AL. On the contrary, the party emerged stronger. For a party like AL, setbacks are not new and re-emerging from them is also nothing new. Given that history behind her, and given the fact that the pendulum is likely to turn in the AL's favour next time around, Sheikh Hasina should really offer some workable options that will break the present political stalemate and save the nation from the inevitable clashes that we now seem to be certainly heading for.

The writer is Editor, The Daily Star.

Don't follow leaders who can't change



and bad news for us. Bad news first and it is obvious: Our leaders aren't showing any sign of change. Good news is that in the next five to ten years many of them will be changed. In a decent democracy people leaders, who are not willing to change. In our kind of dismal democracy, destiny will have to come to its rescue in the end by effecting that change. Most of our leaders, strutting and fretting on the political stage, will disappear from the scene. Death and old

age are bound to remove from the scene..

Once I read in Harvard Business Review (HBR) that if you can't change the leader, then change the way you follow. Perhaps it's easier said than done, more so in reference to political pathology than corporate contention. But the issue is nonetheless relevant for us, because we have miserably failed on both counts. We have neither been able to change the way we're led nor the way we're asked to follow.

But in next five to ten years change will come. It will come for sure simply because many of the existing leaders will either cease to exist or lose physical or mental capacity to lead. Even if we can't minus them now, they will be "minussed" by what Kahlil Gibran calls the inevitability of "life's longing for itself."

If we have learned from the past, we should start planning. We should start planning for the next crop of leaders instead of crying over the bad harvests of yesteryears. Our present leadership is as much our creation as we are theirs. That explains why a third force never emerged, because they couldn't distinguish themselves for us. Neither could we distinguish ourselves for them.

The opportunity is now knocking on the door. The next election at the most before the changeover starts, before the leaders pass their mantles to sons, sisters, daughters or brothers. Blind followers create blind leaders for the same reason it's also true the other way around. Leaders may control this election, but we should absolutely control the election after that.

First we should agree what sort of leaders we want. If we look for character and honesty when hiring domestic

T can be both good news hands, should we settle for less in our leaders who will run the country? You see this country is in the clutch of an octopus, its eight hands being the politicians, businessmen, bureaucrats, professionals, intellectuals, media, donor agencies and foreign diplomats. They are sitting around a dinner table breaking bread, and the more

they eat the more breadcrumbs fall on the floor. The common people are like pets fattened by these have the power to change their crumbs. They eat more when the eight hands of the octopus waste more. Here is a spine-chilling example from a faraway land. It's estimated that the United Sates has 80 million dogs and the annual amount spent on these pets is \$60 billion. In comparison, Bangladesh has 160 million people and the highest budget in its history, proposed for this fiscal year, comes to \$27.8 billion when Tk.2.224 trillion is converted at the rate of Tk.80 to a dollar. Twice the population with half the budget, we should know where we stand.

First thing first, we must disabuse ourselves of the urban legend of what it means to be a prosperous nation. At the very centre of our national misery is selfish arrogance that justifies comfort and luxury of a few at the cost of many. Bank scams, corruption, bribery, market manipulation and sycophancy stem from that preposterous assumption which zealously promotes money as the only measure of success. Our future leaders will have to have proven credentials that they don't have monetised minds. Nothing will work until first that has happened.

In the same HBR article, its author Li Xin Bai, a senior IBM consultant in China, talks about three types of leadership. The sun-like leaders are entrepreneurs who take the lead, just like the sun illuminates everything. The moon-like leaders work like the moon reflects the light of the sun, open-minded and trusting to reflect the light of his people. Then there are the star-like leaders, who only indicate a direction like the North Star. They need followers who can step up and light the way for others. Only leaders with great wisdom have the confidence to be star-like.

To use similar astronomy analogy, our present leaders are like black holes. They absorb the lights coming towards them, reflecting nothing. It's absolutely the last call to change these leaders before they pass that blight to their next generation. Citizens of the country unite. You have nothing to lose but your pains: Don't follow leaders who can't change.

The writer is Editor, First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR letters@thedailystar.net

SAPA for Adilur's immediate release

The Solidarity for Asian Peoples' Advocacy (SAPA), a network of regional and national civil society organisations in the region, expresses its disappointment and frustration over the detention of Adilur Rahman Khan, the Secretary of our member-organization, Odhikar.

We cannot help but notice that his arrest and detention came after his organisation, Odhikar, released a report implicating the Bangladeshi security forces in the deaths of dozens of Islamist protesters in May of this year. This clearly shows that the action taken by the Bangladesh government is meant to instill fear among human rights defenders in the country. There is no way to interpret his arrest other than as an attempt to silence the government's critics and stifle dissent.

We join the calls of international human rights organisations and other regional and national civil society groups in the region for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Khan as his arrest and continued incarceration has no basis at all. Odhikar and Mr. Khan only wanted the truth to come out when they released the report.

Inaction over the case of Mr. Khan will only add to the already tarnished image of Bangladesh in the international stage. If Sheikh Hasina wants peace and stability ahead of the national elections, she should release Mr. Khan and provide a safe environment for activists and human rights defenders who want to engage in the political debate in the country.

Mr. William Gois (Migrant Forum in Asia) Ms. Dorothy Grace Guerrero (Focus on the Global South)

Ms. Clark Militante (Focus on the Global South) SAPA

Article 70 stifles democracy

The headlines of UK's dailies on August 29 went like this: Cameron loses parliamentary vote on Syria. I am longing for the day when our newspapers will print a headline that goes like: PM loses parliamentary vote. I would rather consider it a landmark victory for our democracy. Alas, I will never be able to see it since our MPs are not allowed to vote against their party position. Article 70 of our constitution forbids that. Those who fail to comply with this article run the risk of losing their membership in parliament.

You cannot have democracy and at the same time have this undemocratic article in the constitution. How could we call it Westminster type of democracy? What we actually have is a mockery of democracy. You will not find another country in the world where its PM and opposition leader are locked in a quarrel about uprooting each other's hair, either by pulling or by blowing. Our people deserve better.

Dr. Kamrul Hassan Professor Department of Physics Dhaka University

Rabindra Kacharibari being grabbed

I have gone through a report published in TDS on September 2 titled "Encroachments spoil Rabindra Kacharibari." The report reveals that Rabindra Kacharibari is no longer safe from the hands of greedy encroachers who have already built a cloth market in front of the heritage site and are hoping to expand the market to accommodate more shops. Making such an infrastructure near a heritage site goes against the law of Bangladesh. Not only Rabindra Kacharibari but almost every heritage site is under the threat of extinction today. Recently, I visited the Panam city. I noticed many families were living in the old buildings. The government must show zero tolerance to the grabbers; otherwise, our heritage sites will be lost soon. We have the laws to protect our heritage sites; all we need now is the implementation of the laws.

Md. Abir Hossain Department of English Government Titumir College Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Crisis to deepen," published on September 4, 2013

Abul Kashem

There's no denying the fact that the situation is going from bad to worse day by day due to the whim and ego of our politicians.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

The political hurly-burly is in the offing. Hasina would not budge from her stubborn stance and Khaleda would not give up anything unchallenged. Obviously the outcome is deep crisis.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Can you expect anything different when you vote the same old outdated and stubborn leaders to power who value their own egos more than the well-being of the country?

Manjur Rahim

Between the two women, the incumbent PM is more responsible for the country's present situation.