

Welcome suggestion from Khaleda Zia

Govt. should come forward

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia at a meeting in her party office with Chinese ambassador in Dhaka, Li Jun, on Monday suggested that talks might begin at the general secretaries' level between the two major parties to resolve the issue of election-time government.

We welcome this offer coming from the opposition leader. As eminently eloquent spokesmen of their parties, AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam and BNP acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir seem well-suited to carry out the task.

The ball, however, is now in the ruling party's court, because it is them who have been instrumental in bringing about the 15th Amendment to the constitution. Now instead of verbally defending their position, it is expected that they sit down, talk and thrash out their differences.

The contention rests on one point which is, who should head the interim poll-time government. AL says it is the PM, while BNP insists that it should be a non-party neutral person.

International development partners including other friendly nations as well as civil society in the country are all for an inclusive, broad-based and fully participated general election.

Thus the rationale for a negotiated settlement on the poll-time government is overwhelming. It is inconceivable why so much waffling should take place on initiating a talk.

With only a few weeks to the constitutional time-frame for the election, the major political parties can ill-afford not to go for a dialogue with a real sense of urgency.

Fire in garment factory, again!

Could not have occurred at a worse time

THE casualty this time is ten dead due to a fire in a garments factory in Sreepur. Palmal group, a leading name in the RMG sector with sales worth US\$250million annually experienced a breakout of fire in the dyeing section of Asward Composite Mills in late evening of October 8. The fact that fire fighters were quick to contain the fire that engulfed two floors of the factory is a commendable feat.

What is not totally clear is how a compliant factory could not get all its workers out and prevent the death of quite a few workers. Perhaps the fact that a boiler detonating had something to do with it but we will not know for sure until investigators complete their fact finding mission. What is clear is that after the Tazreen fire and Rana Plaza collapse, Bangladesh's RMG sector has been under the international spotlight. That, coupled with the ongoing labour unrest over wage hike, has kept the negative press on garments for some time now.

One cannot overlook the point that 170 workers were working on the two floors that were engulfed by flames. Yet, we remain concerned as to why 9 people had to lose their lives. It certainly leaves some questions unanswered as to the fire preparedness in the RMG sector. If this is the situation with a top ranking RMG manufacturer, it certainly explains why factories like Tazreen end up the way they do. At the end of the day, the loss of even one worker to fire is one too many.

Bangladesh could have done better

ABU AFSARUL HAIDER

BANGLADESH faces many challenges like corruption, dysfunctional parliamentary government, a poor human rights record, communal conflict, periodic environmental disasters, and poverty and so on. But despite all these, it has some positive achievements in the social and economic areas. In 1970, our Gross National Income (GNI) was \$ 6.2 billion and per capita income was \$93. During the year 2012-13, our Gross Domestic Products (GDP) stood at \$ 158.58 billion and per capita income rose to \$1,044.

The current GDP comprises agriculture (30%), industry (18%), and services (52%), and is mainly driven by three major sectors: agriculture, remittance and export. We have successfully established globally competitive garments, pharmaceuticals, ship building, and leather industries. Thanks should go to our poor farmers, workers at home and abroad, entrepreneurs and all the hard working people, who are showing us the signs of hope, prosperity and stability, despite all odds.

But these achievements are also reminders of the fact that much more could have been done in the last 42 years since independence, if only we could have set our priorities right. For many, South Korea is a model of growth. In 1960, in the aftermath of a devastating war it was one of the poorest countries in the world with only \$79 per capita income. The country, which was heavily dependent on foreign aid and loan, is now richer than the European Union (EU), with average GDP (2012) per capita income of \$32,272 compared with \$32,021 for EU.

There are a number of factors responsible for this magical growth, such as education, saving culture, good governance, well-directed export-oriented development strategies, low-interest bank loans, tax breaks and foreign-based funding. Bangladesh has also undertaken most of these strategies, if not all. But differences between us and Korea was that the then government of Korea, with the help of the country's economists and planners, established five-year economic development plans to address the economic issues. The plans were repeated for four consecutive periods that lasted from 1962 to 1981. Whereas, in Bangladesh, our plans and policies change every time that the government changes and, as such, there is no continuity in the development programmes.

Bangladesh now aims to become a middle-income country (MIC) by 2021 to mark its 50th year of independence. There are numerous challenges ahead in achieving the status. At this moment in time, our political paralysis is perhaps the most challenging of our problems. We need domestic peace and stability; clean and stable government with a strong economy; a vigorous private sector fully supported by the government; rule of law; zero tolerance for corruption; highly efficient civil administration based on meritocracy; and depoliticisation of all vital organs of the state and government.

Our main objective must be to end poverty, provide productive employment and satisfy the basic needs of all people. Basic development strategies assert that development is a process of self-reliant growth achieved through the participation of the people acting in their own interests as they see them, and under their own control.

We can only hope that both the ruling and the opposition parties will learn from the success of other nations and that once again they will join the difficult battle to take Bangladesh forward.

Other conditions necessary for long-term growth, social stability and economic prosperity include core infrastructure such as roads, electricity and telecommunications, a stable political environment, an educated and healthy workforce, access to finance, and integration with regional and global markets. Only when these positive factors exist together can the economy, and in particular the private sector, expand sufficiently to create job opportunities for people. People come out of poverty when they get a job, or get a better job—and these opportunities can come through strong private-sector growth.

One needs to understand that economic growth alone is not always enough to achieve higher levels of human development unless one invests in education, health and social protection. In the early years, Korea invested heavily in education. The country's share of adults with no formal schooling dropped from 36% in 1960 to 8% in 1990, whereas the percentage of adults who had received some secondary schooling soared from 20% in 1960 to 76% in 1990.

By the early 1960s, as a result of its early investment in education, Korea already had a substantial stock of human resources. In the decade following the shift to export promotion, per capita output doubled, and South Korea became an industrialised country: from 1960/62 to 1973/75 the share of agriculture in GDP fell from 45% to 25%, while the share of manufacturing rose from 9% to 27%.

Bangladesh spends only 2% of its GNP on education whereas an average income country spends about 3.2% and high-income countries spend 6% on education. Economists have stressed for a very long time that education has a significant role to play in poverty reduction in various ways. A study reveals that one year of schooling can increase a person's earnings by 10%; each additional year of schooling can lift average annual GDP by 0.37%. When education is broadly shared and reaches the poor, women and marginalised groups, it holds out the prospect that economic growth will be broadly shared.

From the present scenario, it seems like Bangladesh has made a tremendous mistake by not investing enough in education. Shortage of technically skilled human resources is a major impediment in the way towards becoming an industrialised nation. The government must shift its focus of attention from general education to science, technology and ICT-based education, and development of science and technology-based education should be given top priority. Quality education is the only permanent solution that we can give the poor so that they can help themselves climb out of poverty. For self-sustained development and poverty alleviation, the need for highly skilled manpower can hardly be over-emphasised.

We all make mistakes; the difference is that a wrong decision by a political leader entrusted to lead the nation, but who refuses to make amends, could have unpredictable consequences for the nation. We can only hope that both the ruling and the opposition parties will learn from the success of other nations and that once again they will join the difficult battle to take Bangladesh forward.

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A policy of convenience

SHAKHAWAT LITON

SOME ministers and senior bureaucrats of the government, at a cabinet meeting on October 7, expressed their resentment at the High Court's recent verdict declaring the contempt of court law unconstitutional and void.

In their view, the civil administration's functions and state interests are being affected by contempt of court rules issued by the High Court. The ministers and secretaries suggested to the law ministry to expedite legal steps against the HC's recent verdict declaring the contempt of court law void.

The ministers and bureaucrats are favouring the void contempt of court law as it had provided the bureaucrats with some protection against contempt of court charges.

The way they spoke at the cabinet meeting showed that the government will try to do something to address the issue.

But what the government has already done centering the contempt of court law issue has exposed its policy of convenience. How? The Supreme Court had declared unconstitutional and void two laws, one on the non-partisan caretaker government system and the other on contempt of court. In an ideal situation, the government was supposed to apply the same policy to respond to the verdicts to uphold the rule of law.

But Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government has not applied the same policy. Rather, it is evident that her government has opted for a policy of convenience to deal with the verdicts.

Take first the verdict on the election time caretaker government system. The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on May 10, 2011, declared unconstitutional and void the Constitution's 13th Amendment act that had introduced the caretaker government in 1996 amid growing political unrest.

Hasina's government did not take much time to implement the court's ruling. Her government did not even wait for release of the full copy of the apex court's verdict. The government repealed the constitutional provision on the caretaker government system through passing the Constitution 15th Amendment act on June 30 the same year.

In doing so, it did not pay heed to the apex court's observation that the void non-partisan government system might be practiced for holding two more parliamentary elections for the safety of the people and of the state.

Why did the government do it so hurriedly? It is clear that the government took advantage of the verdict to scrap the caretaker government system. Cancellation of the system has cleared the way for Hasina's ruling Awami League to get benefit from staying in power during the next general elections.

The cancellation has put the BNP-led opposition alliance in an awkward position. They have been demanding resto-

ration of the non-partisan election time government, and threatened that they will not join the polls and exert to all means to resist it.

So, uncertainty looms large over the fate of a participatory parliamentary election. The people are apprehensive that there may be political turmoil after Eid-ul-Azha.

In defending their scrapping of the caretaker government system, Hasina and her colleagues in the cabinet and the party have been saying that they cannot use the parliament to make the illegal caretaker government provisions legal. They have been reiterating that they will do whatever is needed to uphold the constitution and they will in no way allow any extra-constitutional activities.

But their arguments fall flat as they have ignored the apex court's verdict on the contempt of court law and enacted a new law on contempt incorporating the same void provisions.

How did the government do this?

The past caretaker government-led by Fakhruddin Ahmed made a new law on contempt of court through promulgation of an ordinance in 2008. The ordinance had repealed the contempt of court law of 1926 made by the British colonial regime.

The law made in 2008 exempted the government officials from personally appearing before the court in contempt of court charges. It also made provision for engaging government lawyers for the official facing contempt charges.

The then government had made these provisions to provide the government officials with some undue protection against contempt of court charges.

In 2008, a High Court Division bench consisting of Justice A.B.M. Khairul Haque declared the contempt of court ordinance of 2008 unconstitutional and void as it undermined the judiciary and discriminated against people. The then caretaker government accepted the court's ruling and did not file any appeal with the Appellate Division challenging the verdict.

Sheikh Hasina's government, however, did something different. It used the parliament to enact a new law on contempt of court incorporating almost identical provisions which were earlier declared unconstitutional and void. The parliament passed a bill to enact the new law in February 2013.

Why did the government do this? It was done to protect its officials from contempt of court charges. But its efforts were in vain as the High Court declared it unconstitutional and void on September 26. The government has decided to challenge the verdict by filing an appeal with the Appellate Division.

Before this, the attorney general's office, in line with the government's directive on September 29, filed a petition with the apex court seeking a stay order on the HC verdict.

The two incidents discussed above have clearly exposed the government's policy of convenience.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Rumi's teaching of divine love

Syed Rezaul Karim has outlined the background and appreciated some of the messages of the greatest Sufi Jalaluddin Rumi in his article published in The Daily Star on September 28, 2013. The writer has not gone any deep to analyse the literary value of Rumi's writings but only gave references. Perhaps he could point out how the lessons of Rumi could be adopted in our daily spiritual life.

One of the core problems with most of the religions today is that they compete with each other to establish their faith as the greatest of all. This viewpoint of religions has been nourishing the purpose for division, the ground for conflict and the reason for violence in society. Rumi has not only written the finest poetries for the world, but also has shown the way to master Sufism. We should convey his message of divine love and unity to bring harmony and balance in our daily life.

Dewan-Syed Abdur Rob

Inner Wellbeing Activist, London

Learn, but not by rote

Some students believe that reading for hours and memorising lessons will give them the knowledge they need to get good academic results. They spend all their times after memorizing lessons but fail to understand that mere memorizing, without understanding, won't bring any good to them. They should concentrate more on studying based on understanding of the subject matter. Sports and extra-curricular activities should also be a part of student life.

Ahmed As Sami

Anandaniketan School, Sylhet

No waste bins in Crescent Lake area

The other day while I was walking in the Crescent Lake area, I noticed people sitting on the lakeside were buying foods from roadside vendors and throwing the leftovers and packets here and there. I thought why weren't they putting those in the waste bins instead of littering the area? Then I started looking for waste bins and to my surprise I found that from Gono Bhaban end to Bijoy Sarani there was not a single waste bin on this beautiful lakeside road. Perhaps the city corporation sweepers clean the area daily but if there were some permanent waste bins, people visiting that area would not have to litter the road. Just a few waste bins can keep the area clean and beautiful. The government or private organisations, especially the cell phone companies can set up waste bins in the city area which will do their advertisement as well. Will the authorities concerned give it a thought?

Khondaker Zia Hasan

Special Correspondent

Weekly Jogajog Canada

Comments on news report, "HC clears way for Rampal," published on October 7, 2013

Mahboob Hossain

For fair judgment, government should not interfere in court's affair.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

We have other places to implement this project. Why do we need it adjacent to the Sundarbans?

"Burnt over toll" (October 7, 2013)

Spiderman

This poor youth has been tortured by the so-called pro-Liberation party's goons. I can bet that no case will be filed and no action will be taken.

Nds

These are the forces with the service of which the AL is going to change the lot of the common people. Of course, the victims themselves are responsible for their lot because they are the people who stuff in the ballot box of the party that sustains these goons.

Vikram Khan

Who will protect us against this politically nurtured scum?

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Only Allah can save us from this ruling party savagery.

"Yaba-addict sets alight wife for money" (October 8, 2013)

Mahboob Hossain

Some drug Mafia are destroying our society, breaking our families, killing a very significant portion of our young generation but we can not fight with them. The reason is that a section of politicians including ministers and police are practically protecting them. The above mentioned people never think that their salary is coming from the taxes of the people whom they are destroying. Need a united platform of the people to free this nation from these evils.

Antik

Such a terrible piece of news! Praying for exemplary justice to be delivered. I think Laboni's family is also responsible for this tragedy. This marriage should have never happened. We as a society need to completely change our mindset and attitude towards women.

The Statesman

Brotherhood vs military

EDITORIAL

MORE than the number of casualties, it is the resurgence of Islamist militancy against Egypt's army-backed regime that is the striking feature of the violence that has roiled the country over the past days. There are no winners and losers in this relentless war of attrition, though for now the Islamists headed by the Muslim Brotherhood appear to have gained the upper hand. Three months after their ouster, they have been able to launch surgical strikes, notably with a car bomb explosion that ripped through the main security headquarters at El Tor, killing six soldiers and three policemen. No less damaging was the militant attack on the government satellite station in Cairo, the capital city that has thus far been free of extremist strikes. On Monday, it witnessed a brazen assault by the extremists—a sinister progress in the upheaval that was renewed in Tahrir Square.

From the people against the establishment in February 2011, Egypt now bears witness to a confrontation between the fundamentalists and the fauji. Substantial, therefore, is the risk of Islamic militancy—which has so far been contained to the country's north-east desert frontier—spreading to the mainland. It would be premature to speculate whether the militants are intent on the revival of political Islam so soon after their ouster; but that essay would seem to have been initiated with the backlash against the military coup in July that led to the removal of Mohamed Morsi. There is little doubt that the latest wave of violence is the reaction of the Islamists to their removal from power by the military.

The polity as much as Egypt's civil society gets ever more fractured with the storm-troopers of the Muslim Brotherhood now confronting the soldier-backed establishment. Stability is as elusive as it was in 2011; the Arab Spring has done but little to address the country's fundamental disconnect. Close to three years after the upsurge in Tahrir Square, Egypt is still floundering in search of its moorings. The political transition, including the drafting of a new constitution and the holding of elections again, has been hobbled in the absence of dialogue between the interim government and their antagonists in the Islamist camp. The pro-Morsi constituency remains potent enough; it has been able to court the support of the thousands who rallied in the streets on Sunday. For both sides, the relentless killings are untenable; a military solution against the Muslim Brotherhood cannot be feasible.

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