

Feel inspired for a dialogue

The only means to resolve crisis

Seldom, if at all, has the country been hemmed in by the foreboding of a doom as it is today. Ironically, this is happening in the prelude to or in the midst of two festive occasions: Eid-ul-Azha and Durga Puja. One would have expected the political parties to have aimed to resolve the political stalemate on poll-time government before the joyous events as gifts to the nation. But that was not to be. What we see instead is rising tension politically, socially and economically fuelled by a refrain of exchange of threats and counter threats to either mount or resist agitation as the case maybe.

The peaceful respite they have given themselves and to the people, barring Jamaat-Shibir's lethal distraction, should be an extended cooling time in the sequel to the festivities. Such a leeway should then be optimally utilised by both the political parties at some level to earnestly try and initiate a dialogue. There is no substitute for talks at this juncture. Nothing doing strategy is a prescription for disaster. The moot points are all known and so are the different formulas available to be chosen from in a mutually agreeable fashion.

The BNP is for talks and is persistently demanding caretaker system; but it has yet to give any specific formula of the kind of interim government it seeks to have. In the ultimate analysis, the onus is on the ruling party to engage the opposition in a process of negotiated settlement of give and take.

The triumph of good

Embracing the spirit of Vijayadashami

Vijayadashami, also known as Dashahara, Navratri and Durgotsav, is a celebration of the last of the 10 days of Durga Puja, a day which ends in Durga Bisarjan, or the submerging of clay idols of the Hindu goddess Durga. The biggest festival of Bengali Hindus, it marks the victory of Durga over the mythological demon Mahishasura. Durga, commonly depicted as a warrior goddess astride a lion with weapons in her 10 hands, is an embodiment of feminine power in Hindu culture and society. The immersion of her idols, magnificently crafted and painted, marks the end of the worship as the clay form merges with the waters and becomes one with the universe.

This year, again, the festive celebration of this auspicious occasion is testament to the communal harmony that characterises a secular Bangladesh. We thank the authorities and agencies responsible for ensuring the security of the devotees and the smooth carrying out of celebratory activities. We are also heartened by the spirit of people who have come together in celebration of this event.

Let this Vijayadashami be a time when not only families, friends and a community bond, but when the entire nation unites in communal harmony, and the establishment of justice and peace. Let it not be one but every day when we as a people believe in, and contribute to, the triumph of good over evil.

Warm wishes for a happy Vijayadashami!

Eid ul-Azha and sacrifice

MUSHTAQ AHMAD

Muslims from all over the world are eagerly preparing for the major religious festival of Eid ul-Azha. The objective of the Eid festival is to show our gratitude and praise Allah for all His blessings. This is the time when we reinforce our feeling of unity and understanding with empathy for the whole community. We think about everybody -- rich or poor -- with love and affection.

During the Hajj, hundreds and thousands of animals are sacrificed. This vast amount of meat cannot be consumed or distributed among the needy due to logistical problem. Some people donate a cash equivalent to overcome this problem. A vast amount of the meat is frozen and processed for distribution far and wide among the deserving people.

In Bangladesh, specially in urban areas, people buy their animals for sacrifice from the villages. A large number of them are imported from outside Bangladesh. The journey involved is quite stressful and the animals go through considerable suffering. In the overpopulated urban areas the last few days for these animals are quite distressing. The person sacrificing the animal does not get any chance to develop a bond or affection with the sacrificed animal

In Sura Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage verse 37) the Qur'an says: "Neither the flesh of the animals of your sacrifice nor their blood reaches Allah -- it is your righteousness that reaches Him."

In a changing world, needs and action change. During Hajj, the surplus meat is distributed among the needy. This also minimises wastage of food.

We can donate an amount equivalent to the price of the sacrificed animal to safeguard Allah's creations -- nature, vegetations, animals and human beings. According to our ability we can probably adopt a street child as our own, share the Eid festivity with a homeless family, maintain a safe area for the children of the community to play in, create a nature reserve, feed the wild birds -- the possibilities are endless. Some of these things can be done individually, some may have to be done as a co-operative depending on circumstances.

Looking after Allah's creation is the biggest form of prayer and Allah will be most satisfied with this sort of sacrifice.

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Brinkmanship or sheer madness?

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

gested that parliament might be dissolved on October 24, 2013 for holding 10th general election. But that she had backtracked from that position became clear last August when she told secretaries at a cabinet committee meeting that the election would be held under present AL government.

But then what will happen to main opposition BNP's demand for a non-party neutral poll-time government to conduct the election, if the present government continues after Octocer 24? A desperate BNP has thus threatened to take control of things from that cut-off date.

Thanks to the sinister policy of overreaching each other pursued by our two major political parties, they have forced the nation into this state of uncertainty and wild speculation.

In its endless political war of attrition, the ruling Awami League (AL) is now pitted against its arch rival the opposition BNP. Is it then any surprise that the nation is now in the dark about how the country will be run about a week later?

The crisis, which is unnecessary and created artificially, only points to the height of irresponsibility that the ruling political elite of the country has reached. Things could not have come to such a pass, if only the ruling party and the opposition been able to reach a minimum understanding on how the election-time administration would be run. But that is not to be. Why? Because, if anything, the leadership of these parties care only about their personal interests and egos and not about the people they are supposed to lead. And they don't really believe they owe their power and privilege to the people. On the contrary, they think the parties they command are the real source of power. And the people? They are but a faceless, gullible lot, who are there only to be manipulated at will.

Small wonder the leadership of these parties are least bothered about how the people might react to their excesses. Otherwise how could they hold the entire nation hostage to their stubbornness born of limitless arrogance?

What has been unfolding before our eyes is a power struggle between two social clans in its most primitive form. Hypocritically, they are masquerading as political parties with presumptuous claims of even being democratic! And in this mortal struggle for retaining control

THE speculation now going the rounds is what will happen on October 25 and after. But why should it be so hard to predict things about a time that is only a week and a half away?

That is because the government has deliberately left its decision on the timing of the next general election hanging as it has not yet come clean about the timeline of dissolving parliament. One may recall that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last year at the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) suggested that parliament might be dissolved on October 24,



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over state power or grabbing it by fair means or foul, they have been trampling all norms and ethics of civilised politics. All's fair in love and war. But then we are not talking here about parliamentary form of politics and election where some basic norms and values are maintained.

Some faithful acolytes of the reigning party political leadership might like to call this politics of brinkmanship, and exponents of one of these parties or other would even like to give the leader of their choice the credit for being the master player in this dangerous art. While they like to gloat over this Dullesian policy of brinkmanship, they often forget its historical context was different. In fact, using this diplomacy of pushing things to its extreme in the hope that the opponent would back down from its stance in most cases gave rise to no-win situations for the US government, of which John Foster Dulles, the Presbyterian crusader against godless communism, was the secretary of state. The brinkmanship diplomacy of containing the then-Soviet Russia during General Eisenhower's presidency only created a world order (the Cold War era) that was not safer, but more dangerous for humanity.

The present crop of leadership in the major parties have through their so-called exercise of brinkmanship been successful, at least in plunging society into chaos and uncertainty.

The reigning political elite by their irresponsible behaviour have only exposed their infantile nature and their incapacity for leading the country and the people.

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Rahul's leadership by theatrics

PRAFUL BIDWAI
COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

Mr. Gandhi's opposition echoed a sentiment shared by many conscientious citizens, who are appalled that 30% of the total of 4,807 MPs and MLAs elected since 2008 self-confessedly face criminal cases, and 14% face serious charges like murder. The ordinance would have encouraged criminalisation of politics.

Yet, the imperious manner in which Mr. Gandhi voiced his opposition to it brings him no credit. He could have raised the issue in the Congress or through it in government. Instead, he went public.

This wasn't impetuous, but calculated to raise his importance in the Congress. Being a fourth-generation descendant of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, Rahul, many in the Congress believe, is exempt from the rules of democratic inner-party debate and decision-making.

In essence, this exemption for a particular individual parallels the ordinance, which also sought to exempt a particular category, lawmakers, from criminal laws. This takes some of the shine away from Mr. Gandhi.

By setting himself up as the Congress's "insider-outsider"--both as a leadership heir, and as party dissident/critic--Rahul risks being seen either as irresponsible, or as unwilling to do what it takes to lead the party even while assuming a leadership role and declaring, as he did, that India's next government will be a "government of the youth."

Earlier, through the "insider-outsider" stance, the newcomer Gandhi earned goodwill by identifying with peasants struggling against the loss of their land, and empathising with Dalits by sharing their hovels and food--something few Congressmen would do.

Now, that image is becoming a liability. Mr. Gandhi is seen as arrogant. In January, when promoted as party vice president, he said, quoting his mother, that "power" is "actually 'poison'." But he seems to enjoy the poison.

Mr. Gandhi also made extravagant claims about his family's accomplishments. In 2007, he said the Babri Masjid wouldn't have been demolished had his family been in power. This ignores the political circumstances and power balances of the time. Although the Bharatiya Janata Party cynically exploited these, they were partly of the Congress' making.

Even worse, he spoke of the 1971 "division of Pakistan" as a great family accomplishment. True, Indira Gandhi handled the chain of events leading to Bangladesh's creation in a masterly way. But it's wrong to celebrate it chauvinistically as Pakistan's dismemberment rather than as the victory of a valiant liberation struggle.

More important, Rahul has betrayed the promise of revitalising the Congress through the ill-chosen instrument of the Youth Congress. He decided to induct fresh

CONGRESS Vice President Rahul Gandhi succeeded in scuttling an ordinance which would have enabled convicted lawmakers to hold on to their seats despite being sentenced to jail for two years or more.

Mr. Gandhi famously barged into a Congress press conference on September 27 and denounced the legislation as "nonsense." He advanced no argument against its purpose, which was to shield leaders like Rashtriya Janata Party leader Laloo Prasad from being jailed.

blood into the Youth Congress through democratic internal elections. These were all rigged, and returned the children of established Congress leaders.

Four years ago, he said: "The hierarchical [dynastic] system exists [in the Congress]. It is a reality... I can either propagate the system or change it. I am not the one to propagate it so I am trying to change it..." But the "hierarchical system" continues unchanged.

Similarly, Mr. Gandhi crafted the Congress strategy during the last Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. But the Congress's performance, particularly in Bihar, was indifferent. He hasn't shown much aptitude for national-level coalition-building--the key to the coming elections. The Congress is unlikely to win these on its own.

After the ordinance episode, it's apparent that Mr. Gandhi lacks the maturity, gumption or astuteness to become a political game-changer. Nor, going by his own statements, is he willing to become the Congress's prime ministerial candidate.

Deplorable as the Congress's obsession is with the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, as is its sycophancy, it has a "rational" self-interest core. Put bluntly, Congressmen value the dynasty only insofar as it can win them elections.

Rahul Gandhi hasn't passed that test, and seems reluctant even to take it. So the Congress would be ill-advised to look for a saviour in him.

What the Congress needs isn't a saviour, but a progressive social-political vision, a good pro-people programme, and new strategies of political mobilisation, social-group coalitions and secular alliance-building. Sadly, these are its weak points.

The Congress is compromised by its neoliberal policies and its lukewarm secularism. It can't articulate a vision that's radically different from the BJP's.

It has at best adopted "compensatory" neoliberalism through programmes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, a rickety Right to Education Act and a diluted food security scheme. It must get radical and give primacy to people's basic needs, not the market.

The Congress must combat the Sangh Parivar through a staunch secular orientation, express solidarity with the victims of communalism, and pursue investigations against violent Hindutva groups around Amit Shah, Col Shrikant Purohit, Pragya Thakur and RSS national executive member Indresh Kumar.

The Central Bureau of Investigation and National Investigation Agency have claimed for four years to have "strong" evidence of their involvement in various fake encounters and bombings, from Malegaon and Hyderabad to the Samjhauta Express. They must be formally charged and tried.

The Congress can't rebuild the traditional social coalition (the upper castes+Dalits+Muslims) which won it 40 percent-plus of the vote in the past. But it can better its 2009 score of 29% -- if it greatly strengthens its appeal to the poor, and specifically targets the severely under-represented Most Backward Classes, "Maha-Dalits" and nomadic tribes.

Equally vital would be anti-BJP alliances with regional parties, including the Janata Dal (United), Biju Janata Dal and Bahujan Samaj Party. A Congress-BSP alliance in UP, with each holding their present seats (respectively 22 and 20), and reaching an understanding in the rest, could be a big winner.

To succeed, the Congress needs serious re-strategising, not pious wishes.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Infected Indian cattle on sale

A large number of Indian cattle infected with different diseases, especially anthrax, came to Bangladesh illegally ahead of the holy Eid-ul-Azha. Now the border area markets are full of these infected cattle. People are purchasing these infected cattle ignoring the health hazards. It is surprising to see that these cattle are being sold without doing any health examination. If proper steps are not taken, I am afraid that people will have to suffer from various diseases after the Eid.

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Caught between two worlds

With the recent, "League of Denial", I want to comment. My parents are sport fanatics! My Grandfather, Bill Grimm on my mother side, with my Great-Uncle, Warren O. "Wedge" Grimm were named "Walter Camp's All-American" in America football on the West Coast. The only escape for me, I thought was sports. So I practiced and practiced basketball until I received few athletic scholarships included West Point but I decided to attend the University of California at Berkeley, in 1970.

The Vietnam War was going on, and Berkeley was the hot-bed of radical resistance. It also was one of the top academic schools in the United States. I was on the honour roll and was voted first-team all-Northern California freshman in basketball, Captain and Most Valuable Player in 1971 and still hold the freshmen rebound record of 17.3 per game. I felt pressures on many sides to really put out all my time and energy towards becoming a basketball star in college and pressing toward a professional career.

On the other hand, deep within my heart I felt that there was something wrong with all this! I felt caught between two worlds, one with the teachings of Jesus and His commandment to love thy neighbour, while in the other world, I was told to gain a near-maniacal desire to win and to physically punish my opponent in a defeat.

Sports really foster the spirit of competition. Of course, some form of sports is fine. It's good exercise and can be good fun. But things in the world are so different, and when athletes get to the professional level where they're being paid to win, it gets extremely competitive. It becomes almost a life-and-death spirit. See how this competitive sports thing has been the final stages of every great civilisation and empire.

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No teacher for ICT in colleges!

From this academic year which commenced in last July, students of higher secondary level are taking Information and Communication Technology as a compulsory subject. Surprisingly, the authorities have not created any post in the government colleges or appointed any teacher through PSC. This is an instance of putting the cart before the horse. At present the subject is taught by "guest teachers" who are employed by the college principals on a temporary basis. As a compulsory subject, ICT should be given due priority like other subjects.

We hope the government will look into the matter.
Zabed Wali
Chittagong

Comments on news report, "Tension rises over Oct 25," published on October 12, 2013

Mahboob Hossain

It is not BNP rather people are vowed to fight fascism in Bangladesh. So to avoid bloodshed, Awami League should change its fascist attitude. Changing constitution to rig vote is fascism and unconstitutional.

Truthprevails53

Lock up Jamaat people; ship them to Pakistan where they belong. All the madrasas should be raided, and hand grenades and chapatis should be confiscated.

MH Khan

Just relax. Those are all paper tigers.

"Dhaka's longest flyover opens" (October 12, 2013)

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

BNP's claim is totally baseless. AL government performed an extraordinary task. Thanks to PM for carrying out the uphill task amid hostile political environment.

Truthprevails53

Well done, government, for finishing the project in time.