

Sit before the blockade

We have had enough

THE opposition BNP is reportedly set to enforce yet another programme of three-day long blockade of rail, road and waterways from next Monday. Added to this, the proposed AL rally on 3 November is likely to cause us to lose virtually the whole week. Wasn't the BNP programme of 60-hour hartal, which inflicted enormous damage to life, property and business, enough?

As we reported earlier, several thousand A-Level examinees were deprived of a chance to sit for the exam due to the BNP's three days of shutdown of the country. And the planned blockade is going to affect around 20 lac Class-8 examinees. Is this how the opposition is going to build our future? We would hope the BNP would shun violent path and opt for the peaceful one to settle the political dispute.

In a similar vein, after her first attempt to reach out to the opposition, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina cannot also sit tight. Being in the government, the onus lies on her to see an end to the stalemate over polls-time government. The ruling party can play an important role in defusing the tense and violent situation by reassuming the initiatives for holding the dialogue.

The first round floundered primarily because of AL and BNP sticking unreasonably firmly on 28 October - 30 October respectively, as possible dates for dialogue. The AL should consider Begum Zia's proposal to hold talks anytime after the end of hartal and renew its offer without sitting on its ego. And that must be done before 4 November.

Starting new businesses made easier

Red tape cut to help SMEs

IN the midst of all the gloom that pervades the political scenario in the country, there is some good news coming out of the business sector. According to 'Doing Business 2014,' an annual publication brought out by the International Finance Corporation, Bangladesh has made significant gains that make it easier to start and run a business in the country. The significance of Bangladesh jumping 21 places to rank 74 out of 189 economies cannot be understated.

The new ranking is testament to the fact that qualitative steps have been underway to speed up the process of business registration, simplification of rules and regulations and integrating automation in some crucial areas such as service delivery. Compared to the preceding year, days needed to start a business came down to 10.5 days from 18.5. Although, Bangladesh's overall ranking has improved only 2 steps from 132 to 130 in respect of doing business overall, the country remains ahead of the regional economic superpower India. Another area where starting up a new business has improved markedly is time needed for issuance and renewal of trade license.

Yet for Bangladesh to improve its ranking markedly, significant hurdles must be addressed. The country needs to improve its investment climate and successfully market its brand image as an attractive destination for FDI. Though held back by a myriad of problems, at the end of the day, the reform programmes initiated by government and regulatory bodies are

The flight, the report, the politics!!!

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

THE ongoing political stalemate, supplemented by a 60 hour long shutdown by the BNP-led alliance, has led the American envoy to Bangladesh land in Delhi.

As per the *Economic Times* (ET) report (October 27), he was there for consulting the ministry of external affairs (MEA) to seek India's views on the situation arising out of violent opposition protests in Bangladesh.

Rationally asking: what can the Indians do in this regard? Practically speaking: there is little the Indians can to do when it comes to widespread domestic political unrest looming large in one of its neighbouring countries.

What seemed rather confusing as per the ET report is that the US envoy was not invited by the MEA. His Excellency had merely acted upon the US government's instructions. If that be so, then he didn't need to discuss his concerns with the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka before boarding the flight for Delhi.

ET, an Indian magazine, in the last line of the report, stated an Indian-media-clashed line that "there are reports that terror groups are regrouping in Bangladesh with the help of the Pakistan based ISI."

We, the people of Bangladesh, believe that our internal political peace and stability, countering of extremism and terrorism, and restoration of democracy are exclusively controlled by our own, independent and sovereign leadership, and not influenced by any other nation.

US and India are, and we believe will be, strong friends of Bangladesh on the subject of sharing democratic values. But the very messy political impasse was created by the politicians themselves. So it's our politicians who need to clean up the mess.

The ongoing political deadlock is an old one, that has occurred with a 5 year gap before almost all the general elections in Bangladesh -- mainly caused due to a lack of political trust between our two political parties.

And, if the Indian bureaucracy could solve our political deadlocks then it could have done so years ago.

The Defence of the Duffer's Drift

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

ANY fool can get into a hole as a Chinese proverb goes. And I am sure most will agree that we, given the current political situation with little prospect of an amicable solution, are in the hole now. And we all know why we are there, but whether those that are responsible for the country being in the hole, meet the depiction in the proverb may be open to question.

I don't think our leaders are

inept, I think they lack the mental aptitude that makes up a successful leader. Here I recount a story of Lieutenant Backsight Forethought. And I apologise for drawing a military analogy with a political situation. In a fictional story, *The Defence of the Duffer's Drift*, the said British officer was given a piece of land, the Duffer's Drift, to defend. And with every encounter with the enemy he learned from his mistakes till the sixth when he finally defeated the enemy. He uses his experience to fulfill the task given to him to overcome the adversary. It seems our leaders have learned nothing from the past, from their experiences of the political follies they have committed, both while being in the opposition and, not surprisingly, are repeating the same mistakes to the detriment of the country.

We are presently in the hole, a situation that we have been finding ourselves in every five years at the end of tenure of the incumbent government. The situation is enacted with the script remaining exactly the same; the change is in the cast only. What the ruling party uttered exactly at the fag end of the last government is being uttered comma, semi-colon, full stop and all by the ruling party now; and vice-versa for the opposition. Of particular interest is the expression of their unmitigated love for the Constitution which, apparently, they hold more sacrosanct than the Scriptures.

Our hope for a resolution through dialogue was perhaps premature, but history also shows that dialogue has never been a successful mechanism to resolve our differences. Optimism has been replaced by an eerie sense of apprehension. We have had 60 hours of shutdown, and while we count the cost of it with 15 people dead, I am sure the BNP would not be able to show what political gains it has got out of it, or how the people have benefited from it. If anything, it has made the prospect of a dialogue more bleak, more so with the details of the conversation between the PM and leader of the opposition being made public.

And the less said about it the better. One was

initially pleasantly surprised that the two leaders had spoken for 37 minutes on the telephone, but listening to what transpired between the two one can only say that while it must have added to the mobile company's revenue it certainly did nothing to lift our hopes and expectations.

Both the AL and BNP must realise that the country cannot be held hostage to the inflexible position of the two parties. Laying conditions for talks is a non-starter, and yet that is what the two parties are doing. One party is willing to talk but only on the idea of an all-party government while the other is willing to sit for a dialogue only if that is about how to get a non-party dispensation in the interregnum.

How to get out of this situation is difficult to suggest, but it is hard to believe that our leaders lack the faculty to realise the gravity of the situation, the magnitude of its deleterious potential has even caused many a foreign



STAR

Has anyone ever asked the people what they actually want? The people want election. And that must be peaceful and participatory where odds are even for all the participants, whatever may be the mechanism of ensuring that. As of now that is not the case, and the 15th Amendment is the cause of the political gridlock that the country finds itself in.

ambassador not only to put their heads together among their ilk trying to figure out what might evolve out of the mess but also to make forays to nearby capitals.

Election must reflect the will of the people. The two parties froth in the mouth trying to prove how much they are doing for them. AL sees 15th Amendment as a guarantee for unhindered democracy and thereby a victory of the people, and the BNP's programme of hartal and blockade are enforced in the name of the people. Has anyone ever asked the people what they actually want?

The people want election. And that must be peaceful and participatory where odds are even for all the participants, whatever may be the mechanism of ensuring that. As of now that is not the case, and the 15th Amendment is the cause of the political gridlock that the country finds itself in.

The writer is Editor, OP-Ed and Defense & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

The problem with dynasties

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

WHEN the conversation is about political dynasties, it is a whole big prospect that opens out before you. You might begin to wonder at the beauty or the immensity of it all, which is why you cannot deny the place dynasties have taken in our lives and not just in this country. Consider what has been happening in Burma, or Myanmar as its military rulers would like to have it known. The daughter of Aung San spent an unrelentingly endless period of time struggling for democracy.

She has not quite succeeded in her battle, but neither has she failed. Aung San Suu Kyi keeps the lamps burning because it was her father who lighted them once.

But not all dynasties are symbolic of brilliance. When the kleptocratic Mobutu regime fell in Congo, it was Laurent Kabila (about whom Che Guevara had little of the positive to note) who took charge. His death at the hands of his bodyguards caused his young son Joseph to step into his shoes. It does not appear that anything much has changed in the country, despite a globally supervised election that the young man won recently. So much for light.

When you consider the tales of the many dynasties in our times, you cannot but note the debilitating consequences that have flowed from some of them. In Sri Lanka, democratic politics

has in a way remained stunted because of the long preponderance of the Bandaranaike and Senanayake in the country. And do not forget that all the troubles caused through the growth of Tamil militancy had their beginnings in the times of SDRD Bandaranayake. His wife and his daughter only made things worse. Today, the brothers Rajapakse have the country in their grip.

Political dynasties can over a period of time run out of breath or out of ideas. When you watch young Rahul Gandhi claim that his family had been responsible for the success of India's freedom movement as also for the military defeat of Pakistan and the rise of Bangladesh, you realise the huge gap that has come between Jawaharlal Nehru's intellect and his heirs' pretensions. And that is one very real problem with dynasties. They suffer from pretensions of various kinds. Pakistan's Ejazul Haque had no business being in politics, but since his father Ziaul Haque was around once, he and his acolytes thought that he ought to be on the national stage too. He became a minister, and then made a silly spectacle of himself when he went overboard in suggesting that all Pakistanis ought to have their religious denominations mentioned on their passports. How much more parochial can men in responsible places get to be? And, apart from the parochial, there is always

Dynasties are wonderful exhibits of arrogance in our times. They awe, they charm and they intimidate. But then a time comes when they cannot keep pace with expectations. And because they cannot, they tend to lean towards atrophy. Some might even give off some scent of the putrid.

Senator Prescott Bush was quite a brilliant man, which is not quite what you can say about President George Herbert Walker Bush. But even worse was to come in the shape of George W. Bush. One does not need to expand on that, does one?

There are dynasties which launch themselves in glory and then fall to earth in the silent thud of mediocrity. Think back on the inspirational leadership once provided to Indonesia by Ahmed Sukarno. Three decades after his death, his daughter Megawati Sukarnoputri fumbled for ideas. She departed from the presidency unmourned. And then there are the stories of men who go desperately into the job of trying to ensure dynastic rule for their families. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak had been grooming his son Gamal to succeed him in the top job when he fell. Nearby in Libya, Muammar Gaddafi too was busy projecting son Saif as the wave of the future. Egypt and Libya are changed places today.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Hartal hits examinees hard

Destructive politics is eating into the very foundation of the country. Things are getting from bad to worse -- there is no light at the end of the tunnel. As much as the economy, the education sector is hit hard by the mindless hartals. This year the schedule of the HSC examination had to be reshuffled because of hartals. And now as the academic year in schools is drawing to an end, the political arena has heated up. When will the politicians wake up and see the woes of the common people who are suffering just because of their stinky political games?

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

Is govt. illegal as Khaleda says?

I am surprised to see that a large section of the media is covering the interpretation of Khaleda Zia about the current status of the government. If Khaleda Zia thinks that the government is illegal from 27th October, how come she wants to sit for a dialogue with an illegal government? The print and the electronic media are just airing the politically biased words of Khaleda Zia and not informing the people what the constitution says about government's legal status.

A well-wisher of Bangladesh

On e-mail

The ordeal of travel in a private airline

On October 5, 2013, I went to Rajshahi by United Airways. Before purchasing the ticket online, I asked one of their sales representatives over phone whether their air conditioning system worked properly as I had a bad experience from Jessore flight in 2011. He assured me that the air conditioning worked fine. But when we were onboard, we realised that the air condition was not working. The sales guy either didn't know or lied to me.

First they flew us to Saidpur instead of Rajshahi. It was hot inside. We had a 50-minute flight to Saidpur. There we had to wait for 25 minutes so that Saidpur-bound passengers may disembark and Dhaka-bound passengers can get in. Then it took 35 minutes to reach Rajshahi. So, in total, we had to be on board in scorching heat for 110 minutes and the airline crews didn't even say sorry! One passenger complained angrily that she had been flying frequently by this airline for the last two years, and she never found their AC working. This is totally unprofessional. United Airways should either lower its air fare or get their AC working.

Khandaker Zia Hasan

Special Correspondent, Weekly *Jogajog*
Canada

Comments on news analysis, "Deliberate bid to confuse people," published on October 26, 2013

Touchstone

Somebody, maybe her advisers, who are senior civil servants, should give her some lessons in Bangladesh constitution.

Russell_443

The amended constitution of the Awami League government doesn't reflect the will of the people under the present situation. The constitution has been tampered to protect the party agenda only. Currently, people have no clear direction whatsoever.

"Relief? Not so much"
(October 27, 2013)

Spiderman

Should the nation celebrate or be ashamed? In any working democracy a phone call between two leaders would not make a headline at all. This proves that Bangladesh has a long way to go for real democracy as long as these two ladies are in power.

Touchstone

Headline or not, what is important is the outcome of overture made by the PM.

MistiKotha

That's what you get when you have arrogant people leading your nation!

Salim Ullah

Our two leaders should realise that Bangladesh is not for the two ladies alone; rather it's for 160 million people, for whose hard labour and unending sacrifice -- both at home and abroad -- Bangladesh has come to this position.

Russell_443

Expecting that a 30-minute telephone conversation is enough to pacify the years of enmity, hatred, mistrust, and rivalry between the two leaders seems very ambitious.

"A revenge for Sayedee?"
(October 29, 2013)

Aleksanda

How can people support the BNP and their ally Jamaat? Imagine what will happen, if BNP-led 18 parties come to power.

Touchstone

Is this what awaits when Jamaat and BNP will come to power? We as a nation sit back and watch our freedom fighters denigrated and say nothing.