

Our opinion survey

It reveals the challenges before AL

OUR national opinion survey published yesterday gives an indication of the people's perception of recent events in the country. The survey has revealed some interesting findings.

On the face of it, the findings of the survey may appear paradoxical, but a careful reading of it would clear that view. On the other hand, it reveals the political acuity of the public to whom government performance in the area of development only is just not enough. People's expectation from the government has increased greatly, and while good work has been appreciated, there is dissatisfaction because of a lack of good governance and the failure to curb corruption.

Insofar as corruption is concerned, apart from the bank and stock market scandals, at the local level it is the general experience of the people that nothing gets done without greasing palms, even for the services due to them. And good governance, among other things, was hampered by absence of rule of law and skirting of the legal process on partisan consideration. And the CTG issue has shaped people's perception regarding the outcome of the next election.

If the AL wants to find the reasons for the prevailing public sense of things, it should get down immediately to serious self-examination instead of putting the blame for all their reverses on the opposition. This was so apparent in the aftermath of defeat at the polls in all five mayoral elections when the cause was ascribed to everything else except the party itself.

Curb the 'cocktail' culture

Society will suffer otherwise

WE have watched with disquiet the increasing use of crude bombs, particularly during hartal. This has caused serious injury and death to innocent people, many of them children who unsuspectingly handle live cocktail with knowing it to be so. We condemn the use of all crude-explosive devices. These bombs, commonly known as 'cocktails,' are being produced, reportedly, by some 50 groups and costing anywhere between Tk.500-Tk.1000 in and around Dhaka.

During the recent 60 hour long shutdown, over a 1000 such crude bombs were used by the BNP and its ally, the Jamaat. Such devices were also used to attack the residence of both government functionaries and members of the opposition. Regrettably, this has become a part of our political culture and we are failing to stop its production and use.

The raw materials are easily available (empty cans and bottles, gunpowder, gasoline, pebble and metal-pieces). The need of the hour is to restrict accessibility, gathering, purchase and systematic monitoring of the raw materials. It appears that they are being produced in large scale given that less than a month ago explosions of a few hundred crude bombs inside a flat in Dhaka damaged a 6-storied building.

We hope the political parties would comprehend the severe impact of manufacture and random use of such devices on the society. Even if we were to see a resolution of political differences, the manufacturers will continue its manufacture and there will be those, disposed to violence, who will find use for it. That is what worries us.

Diwali: The Festival of Lights

NAUREN SAIF

THE "Festival of Lights," widely known as Diwali, is a five day Hindu festival. The word Diwali is a contraction of "Deepavali," which means "row of lamps." People decorate their homes with small clay lamps filled with oil, to signify the victory and ascendancy of "good over evil."

Diwali is celebrated in different parts of the world in different ways. In Bangladesh, Hindus celebrate the first day of Diwali by worshipping the goddess Kali with hand made clay lamps lit around their homes and in temples. Kali is said to be the saviour who banishes all sufferings of mankind. The Diwali celebration in Bangladesh involves decoration of homes with special Diwali flowers such as Orange Genda and Kalmi Genda, called Marigold in English.

In the region, it is mainly celebrated as the homecoming day of the god Ram after vanquishing the demon king Ravan. It took 14 years for god Ram to defeat Evil in the form of Ravan. The day in Bangladesh also honours the Hindu goddess of wealth Lakshmi.

In India, the specialty and main element of the eve are its handmade clay lamps which are kept lit during the night of the event. During Diwali all the celebrants wear new clothes and share special sweets called Matris, Laddoos, Barfis, Mawa Kachoris and Sohan papdis. They decorate their homes with "Rangoli," which is a Hindu folk festival art.

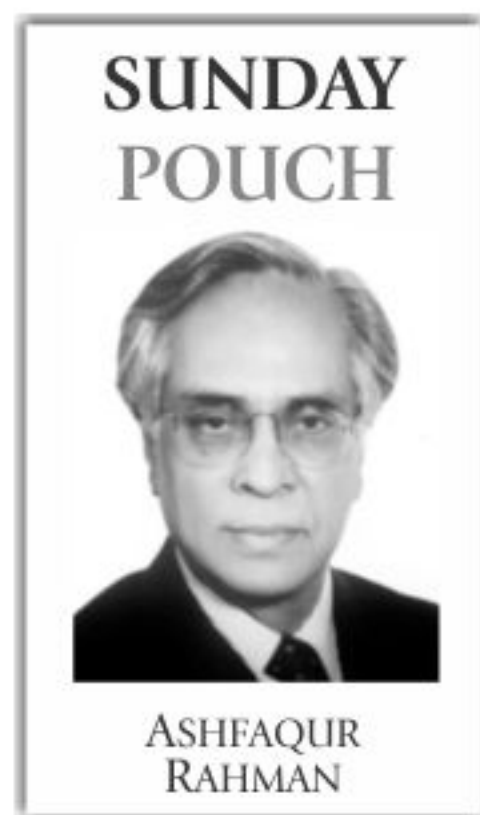
In Nepal, family gathering is more significant during Diwali. People in that country perform Deusi and Bhailo, which is a special kind of singing and dancing meant for Diwali. People also play with special swings made out of thick ropes, just for Diwali, known in that region as Dore Ping.

Sri Lankans take an oil bath in the morning, wear new clothes, exchange gifts amongst themselves and perform poosai, which is their "holy prayer" for Diwali, by visiting their temple known as "Koli". Lighting fire crackers in the evening of the celebration is a common practice in the festive eve.

Diwali is a great festival that comes once every year to lighten up the entire humanity. Through its lamps Diwali tries to resemble the inner light or consciousness of human beings, so that they always keep enlightening their inner selves by protesting against evil and triumphing over it.

The writer is an A level student.

Those 37 minutes: An optimist's assessment!



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

WHEN Prime Minister Hasina and leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia agreed to talk over phone last week, there were great expectations amongst the people. Political leaders of all shades as well as ordinary folk hoped that at last a way out of the present political impasse would be discovered. How realistic was this expectation given the past behavioural history of these two powerful ladies?

In fact, the 37-minute telephone conversation was a big letdown. To many it was an embarrassment as the leaders squabbled and repeated the same thing over and over again. However, this tele-talk seems to have within it the germs from which could sprout future possibilities of understanding and reconciliation between the two leaders.

Earlier this year, another important telephone conversation took place between two important leaders of the world. That was between President Obama of the USA and President Rohani of Iran for just 15 minutes. This conversation was the first contact between two leaders of these two countries after several decades. But according to political analysts the conversation opened up a new era in US-Iran relations. Leaders have their own way of prying open the closed door of negotiations and parleys. Their assistants use this opportunity to prepare their leaders to play a positive role. The conversation itself is just a catalyst that helps to energise all elements to work in tandem to resolve intractable issues.

So what happened in our case? The public wants to know whether the political advisers did their homework to see that the two leaders could sail through their telephone conversation. Or was it that they left the two leaders to work out between themselves what they would talk about and how they would fend for themselves on each issue? Did any contact take place between the aides to determine what would be discussed and what were the options open to each of the leaders to fall back on?

To begin with, there was first the matter of exchange of pleasantries. Next was the matter of the PM extending an invitation to Khaleda Zia to visit Gonobhaban and join her for dinner and talk about how to resolve the political crisis. It was a very decent proposal with no strings attached. But how did the conversation turn so adversarial from the first minute? What steps did the army of aides to the PM take to keep the situation under control? In any case, the PM's office did not ensure a safe, secure and clear telephone line to connect the two leaders. Did the aides not know that the red telephone line which is very secure was not always available for use by Khaleda Zia? After all, the leader of the opposition has the rank of a cabinet minister and, as per her constitutional right, she has the use of red telephone without let or hinder.

The question is what other alternate phone system was



kept in place by the aides for this critical dialogue over telephone between these two leaders. Is there any reason to suspect that there were rogue elements on both sides who may have wanted that the two leaders should not talk? The leaders wasted one third of the time over the matter of a telephone line to connect the two. In fact, it could be so comical under the present circumstances when a farmer in a remote coastal area can connect to anyone in the hills of Chittagong in a matter of seconds over a clear line.

Now to the essential part of the dialogue. When Khaleda Zia insisted that she could not call off the three-day hartal and join the PM for dinner till the opposition political agitation was over, the PM should have suggested an alternative date and time, which Khaleda Zia requested her to do. Her aides sitting around her were just spectators, not proffering the PM alternative dates. The people seemed to be disappointed by this paralysis of the mind on the part of the PM's team. However, at one stage Khaleda Zia did suggest that if the PM agreed in principle to discuss the matter of a caretaker government she could call off the hartal immediately. Hence, from this, one could understand that the leader of the opposition was keeping all her aces close to her heart and was just hedging her bets. Clever, but not very convincing to the public. Another big disappointment.

Though the telephone conversation did not defuse the present political crisis, it did, however, clear some things. Direct contact has been established between the two leaders, which can be followed up again if need be. There is no alienation as there was in the past. Also, the conversation, although not fruitful, did not descend into any abuse or derogation. The prime minister did say thank you to Khaleda Zia for receiving her call. This heralds a new sense of decent political behaviour.

Hope still rules the political landscape of Bangladesh. There is still time in hand. Circumstances can change. New opportunities can arise. The telephone talk could be used as the reference point to a future political resolution.

It may not be unwise to have a second telephone call between the two leaders. Whoever does this may get fresh support from the people. From now on, the people at large will support whichever party does positive things.

The Daily Star and Asia Foundation's joint political survey is indeed revealing for both parties. The government has got high points for doing good work. It can get electoral support in the next elections. But the opposition BNP has the electoral cake by asking for a non-party caretaker government. The prime minister must rethink her electoral strategy now if she has hopes to win the elections. She can do this if she agrees to a caretaker government system for this time round. There is no last word in politics. The PM knows this well. A second telephone call by the PM to invite Khaleda Zia to discuss the matter of installing a caretaker government can indeed get the ball rolling for the PM.

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Tajuddin's legacy of hope

TAJ IMAN AHMAD

THE son of one of the largest landowners in Gazipur, Tajuddin Ahmad could have lived a life of carefree comfort. Instead, in 1971, with a lifetime of service and sacrifice already behind him, he found himself saddled with the extraordinary weight of revolutionary war on his shoulders as the first prime minister of the fledgling nation of Bangladesh.

With no clear directives from the larger-than-life leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and with an imminent military crackdown, the then General Secretary Tajuddin had come to terms with a few hard realities as he escaped with his life minutes before his home was raided.

Ever the pragmatist, he realised that West Pakistan's brutal suppression would continue unabated. A government was needed to legitimise and represent the cause and aspirations of the more than 70 million Bengalis living under subjugation. Ever the man of action, Tajuddin would cross the boarder into India and form Bangladesh's first ever government in Mujibnagar.

Tajuddin, who as a boy single handedly arranged for food and relief to victims of a cholera outbreak in his village, would come to oversee the relief efforts directed towards the millions of refugees pouring into India during the War of Independence. Tajuddin, who as a forthright young man challenged the anachronistic politics of the aristocratic elite in pre-partition Bengal with the guidance of Abul Hashim, would come to challenge in 1971 the machinations of a genocidal Pakistan military. Nurul Qader, who was charged as a roving ambassador with the unenviable task of reaching out to leaders for international recognition and support at the time, contends to this day that so capable was Tajuddin at running the wartime administration that, had it been anyone else at the helm, Bangladesh may never have won the war as quickly as it did or even achieved independence.

West Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, during the days of debate over Awami League's famous Six-Points programme, had cautioned those close to him to "watch out for Tajuddin."

During the '71 war the United States' Nixon-Kissinger administration and CIA, while turning a blind eye to the ongoing genocide, had correctly assessed that Tajuddin's commitment to an independent Bangladesh could not be compromised.

They turned instead to Tajuddin's Foreign Minister Khondokar Moshtaque. Moshtaque began to push the notion that Tajuddin had to choose between either ensuring the safety of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by dropping the fight for independence, or continuing the fight for independence whereby their party leader's life would be placed in jeopardy. Tajuddin retorted that the two aims were not mutually exclusive and that in fact the safety of their leader in Pakistan's captivity depended upon Bangladesh's success in its bid for independence.

Tajuddin's political acumen and foresight during turbulent times aside, the quieter moments really give us insight into the

essence of the man's soul. The Theatre Road government headquarters would double as his office and makeshift home. He had sworn not to return to family life until the country was liberated to demonstrate solidarity with the men out on the battlefields. During an odd occasion when Tajuddin could not be found in his office, he was tracked down to the home of his office peon who had come down with a bad fever. Tajuddin was by his bed with a wet towel nursing him back to health. On another occasion Tajuddin would lose an entire night's sleep during a storm. His agitated heart bled that night for the refugees who had no shelter.

The sincerity and sheer grit of this man would see the nation through its most turbulent times into victory in 266 days. Shortly thereafter, Bangabandhu was released and returned. Tajuddin's jubilation, however, would soon be tempered by a lasting sadness. His plans to disarm, feed, educate, train, and employ the still impassioned freedom fighters in specially designed camps, to absorb them into a National Militia and government posts, and channel them towards reconstruction efforts were met with cool disinterest. Nor was he queried as to his war efforts.

Bangabandhu and Tajuddin had been inseparable as a pair as they rose together to the helm of Awami League's leadership through the Six-Point movement. After the war, while their personal friendship remained, the political rift between them would deepen. While his keen intellect secured him praise for being "the best finance minister in the world" by the World Bank president, despite Tajuddin's aversion to such lending agencies, he would become sidelined at home. Moshtaque and the faction of young student leaders who caused Tajuddin grief during the war were taken into Bangabandhu's confidence and trust.

Against a backdrop of increasing cronyism, decay in law and order, and plans to increase state power, Tajuddin finally resigned from the cabinet in October 1974, paving the way for Henry Kissinger to visit Bangladesh a few days later for the first time since its independence. As a dear friend, Tajuddin would continue to prognosticate to Bangabandhu of the dark days that lay ahead and warn him to be on the lookout for army plots.

Less than a year later Moshtaque would succeed in carrying out the assassination of Bangabandhu with military help. Tajuddin was placed under house arrest and later jailed along with three of his colleagues from the Mujibnagar government. Tajuddin Ahmad, along with his colleagues, was shot to death shortly after performing ritual ablution in the early morning hours of November 3, 1975, on the orders of President Khondokar Moshtaque.

The lives of men like Tajuddin, who toiled for their fellow man with nary a thought of receiving adulation, deserve reflection. His legacy entails standing up to friend, foe, party or even the entire world when principles are at stake. He saved potentially millions from genocide that could have lasted years, and helped establish a much needed political identity for his people. His legacy is one from which every one of us can derive hope as Tajuddin's narrative is a testament to the inner strength we all have lying within to make even mountains move.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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'Hirok Rajar Deshe'

Many of the readers must have watched the movie "Hirok Rajar Deshe" by the famous Indian movie maker Satyajit Ray. In reality there exists such a country, where real life incidents far exceeds the fiction shown in the movie. In this country, people are made to disappear without leaving any traces behind; here people are slaughtered in broad daylight and shown on television.

To add to this list, buildings are made to collapse killing hundreds of people, while the owner of the building lives in the comfort and protection of the government. Subordinates kill their superiors. Men kill their spouses and children. Innocents are made to suffer leaving the masterminds out of the purview of law.

Journalists are killed when they disclose or attempt to disclose the evil designs of the regimes in power and killers are never brought to book. Monarchy reigns in the name of democracy and the monarchs are two ladies and this country is no other than our dear motherland Bangladesh.

Saleh Mohammad Ayub
Houston, Texas, USA

Companies should better their CSR profile

Recently I learnt about a frustrating survey report from this daily that only 16 percent of private companies in Bangladesh are contributing to social development through their corporate social responsibility activities. We know that building good company-image is a desired objective for a company for ensuring its business growth. CSR activities help the company to build that sort of image in customers' mind. So expenditures for CSR activities should be treated by the company authority as an investment.

However, it is somewhat encouraging that 46 percent of the surveyed companies mentioned that CSR and compliance would increase their business opportunities. It is also undeniable that private companies coming forward to reduce unemployment through their CSR activities could boost the country's development.

We are happy to know that some 280 informal companies and 20 formal companies are collaborating with a project implemented by Save the Children - Bangladesh to combat child labour through CSR in Bangladesh. We hope all business houses in Bangladesh will carry out their due social corporate responsibilities. We also hope that the government would remove the loopholes in the existing laws in this regard.

Mobarak Ali
Gopibagh, Dhaka

Bangladesh should opt for solar power

Bangladesh has taken initiatives to import power from India through Rampal project. Bangladesh is also seeking Russian help in building a nuclear power plant. The country should focus on solar energy, which its neighbour India is tapping. It can seek Indian help in solar power. Except during monsoon, Bangladesh is blessed with sunshine. The government can formulate suitable policies to utilize solar power which is a clean source of energy. Another Asian country Indonesia is also serious on solar energy. In Indian states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, solar power is used to run televisions and charging mobile phones. If power is available, it will also help in educating people. People in villages where no power is available do not send their children to schools as children cannot study in the dark.

Deendayal M. Lulla
Mumbai, India

Comments on news "Inching back to '96?" published on October 30, 2013

Zman7

"Inching back to '96?" Or inching forward to a better democracy? That is the puzzle in front of us all. The main reason for the incumbent PM's determination to form the all-party poll-time government is her bitter experience about the last CTG, which not only placed her and the opposition leader behind bars but also remained in power by grossly violating the time limit of the polls-time CTG.

Nantu Lal

Let us be sensible. The nation needs people like Sir Abed and Dr. Yunus to run the affairs. They do not steal, they have conscience. Let us campaign to install them in power.

Deep purple blue

Bad history repeats itself as we don't take lessons from past mistakes. The two parties are two sides of the same coin!

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

The way I see it, it's all about payback. Back then, when the BNP had to concede to forming a caretaker government, their egos were severely dented and now they want to do the same to the AL government, who because of their inflated ego, are refusing to budge. In the middle, the common men, who had voted for these selfish leaders, end up suffering.

Tonmoy Ahmed

History repeats.