

Passing of Grameen Bank Act, 2013

Its intent is questionable

THE Grameen Bank Act, 2013 that was passed in parliament on Tuesday will now enable the government to exercise more control in day to day matter, and decisive control in policy matters, of Grameen Bank (GB).

We fail to understand the government's actual motive behind this move centring on an iconic international institution like the GB.

It may be recalled that, earlier, the government had set up two committees to look into the internal workings of GB, which, otherwise, was functioning without any problem all these years implementing its mission of empowering women and eradicating poverty in the rural areas. The committees did not find any flaw in the working of this very successful micro-finance institution.

We are baffled that when so many public banks are in the red because of poor management and lax control, why should the government be after the GB, if it is not with a mala fide intent of taking it over?

The government likes to flaunt the fact that it owns 25 per cent of the Bank. Could we now ask if it has taken the opinions of the rest 75 per cent shareholders of the bank before bringing about this change in the law that has enabled it to operate smoothly to reach the enviable position it enjoys at the moment?

We are forced to conclude that this decision has been motivated more by a personal feeling of vengeance than by the interest of the people. We deeply regret this action and condemn it in the strongest possible terms.

JU stalemate

Academic calendar in limbo

IT is simply astonishing that the stalemate between a section of teachers and the Vice Chancellor (VC) of Jahangirnagar University (JU) has been going on for the last six months without any sign of resolution; the teachers are demanding the resignation of the VC. Having lost faith in the ability of both the university administration and teachers alike to resolve the matter, the students of the university decided to organise rallies on November 6 calling for the normal educational activities to be restored immediately.

We have said many times before how politicisation of academic institutions has almost always ended up hurting the students. One cannot also but be flabbergasted at the general tendency of teachers and other associations demanding the resignation of VCs whenever there is any disagreement between them.

Students who until now had been mere spectators in this unwarranted development have borne the brunt of having lost four months from their academic calendar, since teachers have been abstaining from taking classes. They have had enough of rallies and protests and just want to finish their education.

This festering situation must be dealt with now. Surely the time has come for the government to step in. Given that the ongoing stalemate has done nothing but hurt students of the institution, decisive intervention on its part is needed to resolve the deadlock. We note that the VC has already expressed his intention to resign. He should do so immediately without further ado.

What people think

Friday: November 1, 2013

Do you think that the dialogue on polls-time government is a dead issue now?

Yes

63%

No

37%

Saturday: November 2, 2013

Do you agree with former election commissioner M Sakhawat Hussain that it is not possible to ensure a level playing field only by bringing amendment to the electoral code of conduct?

Yes

85%

No

15%

Sunday: November 3, 2013

Do you think that the opposition leader will respond to the Prime Minister's call not to enforce any agitation programme that could harm students' academic life?

Yes

9%

No

91%

Monday: November 4, 2013

Do you think the ruling and the opposition parties are sincere about holding talks to resolve the prevailing political impasse?

Yes

9%

No

91%

Tuesday: November 5, 2013

Do you think that there is any hope for the current deadlock in Bangladesh's politics through discussion?

Yes

18%

No

82%

Wednesday: November 6, 2013

Do you think it was justified for the garment factory owners to reject the government-formed wage board's recommendation of Tk 5,300 as minimum monthly salary for workers?

Yes

21%

No

79%

Thursday: November 7, 2013

Do you think violence, vandalism, bomb blasting and killing people in the name of hartal could be a democratic right?

Yes

18%

No

82%



CROSS TALK

AMUEL Taylor Coleridge wrote in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: "Water, water, everywhere/ Nor any drop to drink." A lesser known poet named James Casey took that lamentation further when he cried: "Water, water, everywhere and not a drop to drink/That's of course until this lovely ship does sink." That consternation strikes an uncanny resonance when extended to our political reality! In a country crawling with prattling politicians, having a dialogue is a difficult thing.

As a matter of fact, the politicians have already talked more about the proposed dialogue than they are likely to talk if and when they will sit for it. That only tells us that our nation has got this incredible penchant for idle talk. If there is no last word in our politics, there is no lasting word either. Like a rolling stone doesn't gather moss, our shifty politicians don't take responsibility for anything they have said.

Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman writes on his blog that he thinks the former US Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan isn't just a bad economist but also a bad person because he refused to accept responsibility for his errors. Where that leaves our politicians is anybody's guess. It takes more words to cover up than commit a wrong. In our delusional politics we don't know anymore where to draw the line between bad politicians and bad persons.

Ideally, politicians are in the business of talking and they should be eloquently addressing seminars, workshops, rallies and inaugurations. They should be talking to their constituencies and doing their bits in parliament sessions. They should talk to the newspapers, television, foreign guests and pressure groups from home and abroad. They also should be holding discussions amongst themselves on matters of national interest.

But our politicians are wasting their breath. Many of them have more firepower in their tongues than the country has in its arsenal! They are talking against each other, but not to each other. They are launching verbal attacks on their opponents with the verve of Visigoths destroying a civilisation. This swaying seething swarm of talkative people is like a vast sea, which can't quench thirst with its teeming waters.

What this country needs today is not so much of talking from so many directions, but only a few credible words in

KAMAL GABALLA

write this article on the day after an Egyptian court adjourned to January 8 the trial of ousted President Mohamed Morsi and 14 other Muslim Brothers on charges of inciting violence at the presidential palace late last year.

After the court delayed the trial pending more investigations, Morsi, who refused to wear his prison uniform and insisted that he was Egypt's legitimate president, was flown in a helicopter to Borg al-Arab Prison in Alexandria.

On August 3, 2011, Egyptians watched Hosni Mubarak behind bars, standing trial on charges of killing peaceful protesters and charges of corruption and, on November 4, 2013, Morsi stood in the same cage for killing peaceful protesters.

Morsi's trial proceeded under heavy security, raising many legal and political questions in both the regional and the international arenas.

On the legal level, some believe that the trial represents an important step forward in establishing Egypt as a law state while others view it as an unfair trial resulting from a "coup on legitimacy."

On the political level, Egypt's transitional government views the trial as an important step in fulfilling the roadmap and transitional justice as well as reaffirming its intention to build modern and democratic state institutions. Meanwhile, others believe it will worsen the political crises that Egypt is currently facing and leave room for more protests and instability, leading to more economic deterioration as investment and tourism suffer.

Among the most striking reactions to Morsi's trial was that of former presidential candidate Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood for decades. Aboul Fotouh posted on his Twitter account saying: "Honest Egyptians, including judges, are innocent from this farcical trial of the first elected president." He added that those honest Egyptians curse all those who are participating in the humiliation of the president.

The day before the trial, political scientist Ahmed Abdrabo wrote in Al-Shorouk newspaper that the Muslim Brotherhood and its leaders were responsible for the events that followed July 3.

The Brotherhood is looking for an injustice that will enable it to maintain power even if the cost is human life—and that is exactly what happened when its leaders encouraged supporters to protest, promising them heaven.

Abdrabo added that the discourse of Brotherhood leaders encouraged supporters to take to the streets dreaming of martyrdom for a failed organisation and an idiotic leadership whose only concern was political gains. This is how the injustice took place and many lost their lives for a state that uses violence to restore its standing through an organisation that looks for blood and offers martyrs.

Another striking analysis was written by Marc Lynch, an expert on Middle East revolutions, in Foreign Policy, where he argued that Arab Spring states are decomposing. He added that it is amazing that General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who head Egypt's army, took popular anger against the state and turned it against a domestic enemy. Lynch explained that the people should not surrender to oppression again for stability.

Before the January 25 uprising, no Egyptian could dream of seeing two autocratic corrupt presidents, not just ousted but also standing trial—one who ruled the country for 30



AL-AKHBAR.COM

the right direction. It's a pity that the fate of our people is so critically hinged on those essential words when we are wallowing in mudslinging of haters and bashers. And that mudslinging has trickled down from politicians to permeate all layers of life. If we are a divided nation today, it's the corrosive words that have created the rift.

So this nation has got this difficult moment in its life, when words, spoken or written, cannot heal the wound but make it worse. Writing is speaking with pen and speaking is writing with tongue. Reams of columns and rounds of discussions cannot solve our problem because the noise they make only deepens the silence in our hearts.

Late American writer Gore Vidal claims in *Imperial America*, published in 2004, that when societies grow decadent, the language also grows decadent. He then explained that it happens because words are used to disguise action, not to illuminate it. We speak too much gibberish so that we don't have to address the real issues. Our national affliction is that from ministers to minions everybody likes to talk, but nobody says anything. They beat around the bush so that they can hide in it.

If anything has happened over the years, a silence has hardened in the heart of sound. That largely explains why a dialogue cannot happen after turning so many stones. This nation is receding into the silence mode as people are becoming withdrawn. A fertile ground for despotism, democracy without the vigilance of people is like a computer without its motherboard. And it shouldn't take an Einstein to understand that a political environment which doesn't encourage compromise is bound to flourish extreme views.

That should be our biggest worry. Manipulation of national priorities is undermining public confidence. When people are disgusted with their leaders and find their concerns have no bearing on politics, they respond with indifference and the nation is reduced to a pile of dead meat. Politics becomes a plug put in a dead socket. It doesn't have the electricity.

Our politicians are gradually alienating people from politics. That's the real harm being done to the spirit of independence. A republic degenerates into a ridiculous entity when its people are switched off. The politicians may blame each other, but people know it takes two hands to clap.

Our politics is like a movie whose video isn't in sync with its audio. Images of suffering people flash on television, but politicians go on talking.

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The writer is Editor, *First News*, and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

(For unavoidable reasons, we are unable to carry this week's "The Third View.")

EGYPT

One cage, two presidents

years and another who ruled for a year only.

No matter what the verdicts are, what will remain important is the fact that the Egyptian people toppled both of them in less than three years. Hopefully, this will stand as a warning for following presidents; that Egyptian blood is not cheap.

Morsi is the third president to be ousted since July 23, 1952; General Mohamed Naguib was ousted in 1954 then Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and finally Morsi in 2013.

Morsi, who was once a senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was ousted by the army in July after mass demonstrations to denounce his rule, and millions of people signed a petition asking for his resignation. When Morsi defeated Ahmed Shafiq, who served as Mubarak's last prime minister, in 2012, he promised to respect the principles of democracy.

Morsi was not the Muslim Brotherhood's first candidate, he was pushed forward after the elections committee turned down the candidacy of Khairat al-Shater. This earned Morsi the famous title "the spare tire."

Mohamed Morsi was not prepared for presidency and started behaving as if the guidance office of the Muslim Brotherhood ruled the country. Last November, the ousted president issued a constitutional decree that many described as "dictatorial" and frowned upon. The constitutional decrees sparked the first wave of anger against the president, with protesters gathering in front of the presidential palace.

The difference between Morsi's and Mubarak's trials symbolises in a nutshell what Egypt is currently going through.

The most important differences between

Mubarak's and Morsi's trials are:

- Mubarak entered the cage 7 months after his removal while Morsi entered the cage four months after his removal;
- Mubarak arrived on a hospital bed from a known location while Morsi arrived from an unknown location and stood in his place in good health;
- Egyptian state television aired the sessions of Mubarak's trial live while the proceedings of Morsi's trial were not aired. (Some poor quality footage taken by the interior ministry was released though.);
- Mubarak wore the white uniform while Morsi wore a dark suit, forcing the presiding judge to end the session until the deposed president followed procedure;
- Mubarak was wearing dark sunglasses to avoid eye contact with those attending while his sons, Gamal and Alaa, tried to block him from the cameras. Morsi entered the cage smiling!
- Mubarak responded to the judge and followed the procedures while Morsi kept repeating that he was the legitimate president of the country and called the trial illegal;
- Mubarak did not speak during the entire first session -- his attorney spoke on his behalf, while Morsi refused to hire an attorney and instead chanted slogans from behind the bars;
- Mubarak and his sons were inside one cage while Morsi and his aides all stood inside another;
- Finally, Mubarak was sent to Torah Hospital -- which is in the middle of a vibrant neighbourhood -- due to health problems, while Morsi was sent to a remote location far away for security reasons.

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The writer is Managing Editor, *Al-Ahram* newspaper. E-mail: kgaballa@ahram.org.eg

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Keep sanctity of national poet's tomb

A billboard in front of our national poet's tomb struck my eyes while I was returning from my class. It was an advertisement of the present government's achievements in the field of art and culture. Those who planned to hang this billboard should have known that people of the country love their nation, its heritage, and culture. So they want to have a glance of the poet's tomb with passion and respect when they pass through the place. But the planners' greed for petty gains has contaminated the sanctity of the place.

Syed Asifur Rahman
*Department of MIS
University of Dhaka*

Condition of domestic workers

I wonder if we have slavery here as shown in the list of countries on the "Index" as published in an article in this daily a few days ago. However, I recall way back in early 1959, when I first went to a relative's place in a 'Zamindar Bari' at their remote ancestral village, I saw maidservants who received no pay, except for board and lodging by their owners. Today, many of us have domestic workers. They live in-house and are on monthly pay. All of their living cost is on the owners. They get yearly vacations and yearly increments in wages. They also get all medical help and medicines needed. During Eid, they get new clothes, plus cash tips. In my opinion, they are better off and much better fed than many unskilled daily rated workers.

Head of a household
Dhaka

Taking no lesson from the past

Present political standoff is a sharp reminder of the incidents that took place in 1996 owing to the then opposition party's firm demand for installing the provisions of non-party CTG. BNP refused to pay heed to that demand. Now we are witnessing the same old drama. This vicious circle will, no doubt, continue to haunt us until and unless political leaders of our country give up the culture of taking no lesson from the mistakes committed in the past.

Asaduzzaman (Jewel)
*Department of Law
University of Rajshahi*

Comments on news report, "Jamaat thrived on Zakat," published on November 3, 2013

Spiderman

Let all the political parties be under scrutiny. Raising funds from zakat is looting of national wealth.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Both BNP and AL are the beneficiaries of Jamaat. When BNP alienates itself from Jamaat, AL indulge in Jamaat and vice versa.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

It's unfortunate that Jamaat even abuse the zakat money donated by Muslims. With their existing ideology, they really have no right to call themselves an Islamic party.

Spiderman

Sir, show us one single political party that is not abusing people's confidence and funds. Also let all the other political parties' accounts be scrutinised to know their source of fund. Pretty sure all of them are in murky water.

Truthprevails53

Jamaat has been doing this with the poor Bangladeshi workers in Saudi. They extort money from them in the name of religion. The government needs to be in touch with the Saudi government as well as the British government to stop the free flow of cash to this terrorist organisation.

"152 to walk gallows" (November 6, 2013)

Shahin Huq

Bigwigs who provoked and encouraged the troops to kill have been spared from any punishment. Allegation of the involvement of ruling party MPs and other influential leaders is known to all. Looking through Dhaka airport records will show who went out of the country on that day and why.

Spiderman

Brother, this is AL's Bangladesh now. Which investigation agency can dare to question pro-liberation forces? Now the thieves are called patriots. God save Bangladesh from these so-called liberators and thieves.

"Though unclear, motives many" (November 6, 2013)

Molla A. Latif

When there was a sense of discrimination among the soldiers of BDR and the deputed officers of the army, then officers should have been recruited directly from BDR; we think that was the demand of the soldiers. The government may consider it for avoiding the feeling of discrimination in the force.

Abul Kashem

It is really unbelievable how fellow subordinates brutally killed their commanding officers, causing irreparable losses for the nation.

Jakaria Bulbul

It's time the authorities concerned took proper steps and made sure that this kind of cataclysm never happens in future.