

Now it's 72-hour hartal

People suffer, while 'let's-talk' joke continues

WE now have a 72-hour hartal in hand, while both the opposition leader Khaleda Zia and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina keep on assuring us that they are ready to initiate talks. We have been getting these assurances for the past weeks yet neither of the leaders was forthcoming about the specific date and time for holding such dialogue. The two leaders have been evading the issue of fixing a firm date for the talks for too long, so much so that it now borders on pure mockery. To the public in general this is as good as showing total disrespect to their concern, the threat to life and property they now face.

It may be recalled that the PM during her October 27 telephonic conversation invited the opposition leader to a dialogue on October 28. Since both still seem to be seized with the idea, it is not understandable what is stopping them from fixing a second date for holding the talks. And being in the government, the responsibility falls squarely on the ruling party, particularly the PM, to make that happen.

At this point, we are aghast at the opposition BNP's decision to call another spell of three day long hartal from next Sunday. The people have already gone through untold suffering during the past two shutdowns that stole 120 hours from their lives. We condemn this highly irresponsible and destructive decision by the opposition.

Monir's battle ends

A victim of senseless politics

WE are saddened by the death of the 14 year-old school boy Monir, whose pitiable condition in the hospital, writhing in agony, was published in this and other newspapers. His is yet another name added to the long list of unfortunate victims of hartal. We share the grief with his family and condemn his death in the strongest possible terms. His tragic, illogical and brutal death defies any logic. He is the victim of our crude politics that is becoming increasingly violent and irrational by the day.

We have been repeatedly calling on the political parties, particularly the BNP led 18-party alliance, to refrain from coercing and intimidating the people to conform to its political programme. Our plea has fallen on deaf ears. Monir is just another figure in the statistics of casualties of political violence who will soon be forgotten like many others before him. Who, may we ask, is responsible for his death? Can anyone compensate his death and the deaths of many others like him?

In most death cases such as Monir's – the police fail to indict the criminals. And even more, the cases are dropped since they can easily be labelled as politically motivated. We want a change in this trend and see justice done to Monir, his family and to all the other families like his.

When will our conscience rise against pointless deaths as Monir's? Will the political parties ever change for the better?

Failure of DAP

ABDULLA MD. MASUM CHOWDHURY and NOORULLAH PATWARY

RAJUK had adopted Detailed Area Plan (DAP) with a view to controlling the unplanned sprawling of Dhaka city. The hope of living a beautiful and prosperous city life in Dhaka city was expressed by city dwellers when DAP was finalised and published in the official gazette by Rajuk in June 2010. But all the people's hopes collapsed because the government has not implemented it as a law.

The major purposes of DAP are to retake the lakes, canals, wetlands, ponds, roads, open spaces belonging to the government -- which have been seized by the local cadres -- interconnect the centre of the city to the edge of the city, and relocate the factories which are polluting the air.

According to media reports, DAP is now resting on the table of seven cabinet members for review. It is alleged that real estate owners give huge amounts of money to Rajuk officials for passing their plans. If DAP is strictly implemented then real estate owners will not be able build anything they want if it is not permitted by DAP.

In some cases it is also alleged that many city dwellers have registered their plots by giving wrong information to hide tax. Many of them mentioned much lower price in the deed of the plot to reduce the tax. When the government takes over the land and gives price according to the mentioned amount in the plot or land registration to the owner then the owner gets much lower price. So those land or plot owners do not want to give the land to the government.

Some says that developers companies have much more power and money then Rajuk officials. So these people use their optimum political power to protect their business. Some people think that failure of DAP shows the irresponsibility of the government for not negotiating with the developers and real estate associations, and for not taking any suggestions from them.

Though it is impossible to say whether DAP is going to be implemented or not, it can be said that the government's indecisiveness and corruption are the main reasons for failure of DAP.

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STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

The question is, shall we render ourselves ungovernable under the present constitutional setup? Such premonition arises because although we gave unto ourselves a lofty constitution we do not appear to retain the ability to keep it. Are we destined to suffer and endure in patience without the perception of our potential?

The country is now sharply and dangerously polarised with political adversaries bent upon discrediting each other. The language of reason and moderation is absent while there is hardly any trace of tolerance. This, however, should not come as a surprise as forebodings of a perilous polarisation were there for any keen observer to realise. One feels constrained to comment that the country is held hostage to the partisan ambition of an immoral and acquisitive class whose kleptocratic instincts are no secret.

The unfortunate reality in Bangladesh, as of now, is that on almost every aspect of national life, the people are being ominously divided into two deadly hostile groups. The tragedy is that when consensus is the need of the hour, at least on fundamental national issues, the two main political parties are continuously imposing their partisan dogmas on the public and are not hesitating to brand the dissenters as traitors to the national cause. Dissent, according to them, is an unpatriotic act. Such a mental frame is taking us on a suicidal course by obstructing national integrity and promoting confrontationist postures leading to violence.

In the not too distant past Bangladeshis had to witness the unfortunate plight of the workers of the defeated political party following the national election. Their miseries had demonstrated the pathetic fugitive existence of hapless workers who, in the absence of their leaders, were forced to live a miserable life. Their misery was further compounded by the filing of politically motivated criminal cases with a view to psychologically and socially crippling the political opponents. As a result, political identity did become a hazard for some individuals and groups and consequently politics turned into a dangerous business. In such a scenario physical annihilation of the opponents often became the dominant objective.

The polarisation of different occupational and service organisations along political lines has assumed a disconcerting proportion. Professional organisations have, unfortunately, moved away from the desired objective of advising the authority by their enlightened counseling. By forsaking their intellectual independence the profession-

Colombo to host Commonwealth Summit amid controversy

MAHMOOD HASAN

THE 23rd Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is scheduled to be held in Colombo on November 15-17, 2013. Celebrations for the summit began on November 5 in Sri Lanka.

Since Colombo was declared the venue for the 23rd summit a serious controversy arose regarding Sri Lanka's human rights record.

To recall, Sri Lanka fought Tamil insurgency for 26 years (1983-2009). The insurgency came to an end in May 2009 after a brutal and violent war between the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE. A UN Panel of Experts found "credible evidence" of "crimes against humanity" and "war crimes" committed by the army during the final stages of the war. The Panel found that more than 40,000 civilians (Tamils) caught in the middle of the fighting were brutally killed. This is in addition to 27,000 LTTE fighters killed in action. The army lost more than 23,000 men. LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was captured and killed during the war.

War crimes are prohibited by Geneva Conventions. The problem arose when President Mahinda Rajapakse, fearing that he would be held accountable, denied any atrocity committed by his army and refused to allow international investigation into the allegations. Since then, the UN Human Rights Council headed by Navi Pillai (a South African lawyer of Indian Tamil origin) visited Sri Lanka and accused Rajapakse of ordering the massacre of civilians. She also accused Sri Lankan government of massive discrimination against the Tamil population. There has been no progress on reconciliation and integration of Tamils with the rest of the society.

Sri Lanka's problems compounded when Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI) joined the United Nations with similar accusations and mounted a campaign that CHOGM should be boycotted by member states.

Both HRW and AI say that holding of the Summit in Colombo will: (i) compromise Commonwealth's legitimacy, and (ii) provide a seal of approval to Rajapakse's violent and authoritarian rule.

The problem here is that since 1999 the summits have been electing the head of the government of the host country as "Chairperson-in-Office." With the hosting of CHOGM Mahinda Rajapakse will become chairperson for the next two years until the next summit is held in Mauritius. Being "Chairperson of Commonwealth" will go a long way to boost his national and international image. He hopes to bury the allegations against him. Rajapakse is thus keen that all heads of government attend the meeting.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has already announced that he will not attend the summit. Britain's David Cameron has said he believed in "engaging" rather than boycotting the Sri Lankans on human rights issue. He said he will deliver a "tough message" to Rajapakse. Labour MPs have been asking Cameron to boycott the summit.

India's stakes are much higher than those of Canada or

Eroding institutions in polarised society

THE cynics in the current hyper-charged socio-political situation would say that "the banality of evil" has come home to us with a strange poignancy. They cannot be blamed, because violence has characterised our national life on a scale so widespread and so unchecked that even the incorrigible optimists have lost hope of orderly and civilised reconciliation of opposing political views. One is perhaps frustrated to ask if we have made life too easy for the rough and the rowdy and the brats and the deviants and too difficult for the law-abiding citizens.

als have compromised their integrity and independent thinking. The partisan behaviour of public servants has degraded their esteem and status.

Polarisation of public servants is admittedly an area of heightened concern. Needless to say, a biased person cannot truly become a servant of the Republic. There are credible allegations that politically activated public servants are succeeding in cornering the upright meritorious ones. The appointees of particular years are being considered more loyal than others and are rewarded as such. Such developments, undoubtedly, sap the morale of public servants.

Let us bear in mind that behind the acrimonious debate over revival of non-partisan government to oversee the national election, the conduct of public servants, particularly those in police and the general administration, especially at the field level, assumes significance. Unfortunately, public servants are not trusted to act neutrally under a political government. The factors behind our reaching such a deplorable state are the deliberate dilution of state and government interests. The denigration of services of the Republic has quite clearly not been in public interest.

Coming to the social circuit, barring honourable exceptions, politicians of different shades of opinion in our society do not socialise among themselves and some are not even on talking terms. They are setting an unhealthy precedent that is vitiating the social atmosphere wherein revenge is strongly likely to replace healthy competition.

For observers, both internal and external, it is quite intriguing as to how Bangladeshis who have crafted such an admirably lofty Constitution could often be so foul mouthed in political exchanges. Such observers wonder about the treatment of criminals from a political viewpoint and cannot comprehend as to why the criminal liabilities of a particular time are condoned at another time without undergoing the test of legal scrutiny. To them, the integrity and veracity of our regulatory institutions appear less than credible.

In these circumstances the political parties have to come to an accommodation on the modality of holding the ensuing parliamentary election in a credible way. It is indeed difficult in a polarised environment marked by weakened institutions. However, failure to do so will mean "further erosion in people's confidence in state institutions, decay of social cohesion and a diminution of governance effectiveness."

One may need some guile or perhaps be wily to remain steady in the rough and tumble of politics, but must we stoop low and deadly to besmirch the regulatory and corrective institutions only to outwit the opponent and perilously clamber to power? Politics and politicians perhaps should not be reviled the way it is being done now.

We need to come out of the tribal mentality in transacting affairs of the state. The political cracks centering national election conduction and the ominous fling to disturb communal harmony will further degenerate our society. That has to be halted. Our politicians are surely under no promise never to become wiser. Major political parties have to be equally committed to shared principles of constitutionalism. If that does not happen, the situation will be much worse.

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Britain. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is in a serious dilemma. There are several reasons for his ambivalence. First, Manmohan Singh is a much weaker prime minister now following a series of corruption scandals surrounding his office. Second, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Ms. Jayalalitha, known for her strong support for Sri Lanka Tamils, has asked Manmohan Singh not to attend. Anti-Lanka sentiments are extremely strong in Tamil Nadu. Third, two senior ministers of Manmohan have advised him to stay away from Colombo. Fourth, Manmohan Singh has to keep in mind that Lok Sabha elections are coming up in less than six months. Despite opposition, it is unlikely that Manmohan Singh will abstain from the summit.

If Manmohan Singh skips the summit the fallout may be damaging for India. Already cool relations between Delhi and Colombo will become cooler. India will lose to growing Chinese influence in Sri Lanka. That will compromise India's strategic and security policies in the region. Indian media, however, suggest that Delhi needs to keep a robust channel open with Colombo to retain its influence over Colombo and improve the lot of Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

Member states have in the past been locked over debates to suspend or expel a member for not upholding the moral values and principles of Commonwealth. Nigeria, Pakistan, and Fiji were suspended for betraying democracy. Zimbabwe left the organisation in 2003 after it was suspended. In 2003, Nigeria hosted the CHOGM in spite of accusations of human rights violations by President Olusegun Obasanjo. In 2007, CHOGM was held in Kampala despite widespread allegation of similar violations by President Yoweri Museveni.

Fearing media revelations of Rajapakse's misdeeds, Sri Lanka has decided not to issue visas to Channel4 of Britain and other hostile journalists. Channel4 had produced a series of documentaries on atrocities by the Sri Lankan army during the war.

Commonwealth Secretary General Kamallesh Sharma (Indian diplomat) has not taken any position over the controversies surrounding the venue. He has made all preparations for the CHOGM. Prince Charles, representing aging Queen Elizabeth, will inaugurate the Summit.

Like some inter-governmental organisations, Commonwealth seems to have lost its charm and vibrancy. It is true that heads of governments should meet as often as possible to discuss world problems. But do these meetings really serve any good to the people? Some people have dismissed it as "old boys' club" and termed it a British colonial relic that serves little purpose.

The Bangladesh foreign minister is scheduled to be in Colombo on November 12 to chair the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). Bangladesh delegation to the summit is likely to be led by the prime minister. Bangladesh joined this 53-member intergovernmental organisation on April 18, 1972. One hopes that Bangladesh will host a CHOGM someday.

The writer is a former ambassador and secretary.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Throwing one's teacher to the wolves

This is a real life incident of a teacher. A few days ago this teacher, who was in charge of a cricket team of one of the top-ranked private universities of the country, was with his team on a school playground. Suddenly some 10-12 miscreants came and attacked the teacher with the stumps of cricket. The students including the players fled the scene leaving the teacher and some of the students behind to be beaten severely by the goons. This teacher and the few students were seriously wounded and rushed to a nearby hospital by locals. Later, it could be learnt that our team had a clash with the other team. If students run away without helping their fellow students and their teacher, what can we expect from them in the future?

Moeen Mamun
Mirpur, Dhaka

Sustainability's the key about power

The current goal of Bangladesh is to become a middle-income country within 2020. To achieve this goal, we need to focus on sector-wise development. Power sector should be given highest priority among all other sectors not just because it fuels the massive industrial development but because there is huge demand for electricity among the growing number of population. From this perspective, project like Rampal power plant should be considered a blessing. But this project will damage our environment and biodiversity. The project directly contradicts with sustainable water security, universal clean energy, healthy and productive ecosystems etc. So the government should follow sustainable mechanism to solve the paradox in case of establishing Rampal power plant.

Imranur Rashid
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Having a main gate for DU

Dhaka University is one of the oldest universities in the Indian sub-continent and undoubtedly the oldest and the premier academic institution of the country. No less than 50,000 students are studying in this institution. Unfortunately, the open green spaces of the university area remains littered with garbage. They are not cleaned regularly. Many roads go without lights. The toilets are stinky and without regular water supply. The vendors are to be found at every corner selling unhygienic food items. There is lack of supervision. The students should concentrate more on demanding these essential services rather than muscle-flexing and gun trotting over tender boxes and billboard business.

Interestingly and surprisingly, Dhaka University does not have any formal gate or entrance worth mentioning. The Shahbagh end is a nuisance with rickshaws and vendors jostling for space. The result is traffic jam at the very entrance of the university. This only speaks of poor management. The entire area should be fenced with pillars at regular intervals delineating the boundary.

Dhaka University should immediately have a grand entry gate similar to Jahangir Gate or BDR gate at least on two sides. One such gate should definitely be at Shahbagh end near the College of Fine Arts, while the other could be at the High Court end. I would request the authorities concerned to immediately take initiative to construct a formal gate of the university.

Dr. Shamim Ahmed
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Brutality beyond belief," published on November 5, 2013

Touchstone

No other animal but a human being does this to its own kind.

Sajal Das

My heart is filled with sadness after looking at this picture. Are Bangalees becoming a barbaric nation? Shame on all of us.

Sun Lion

Is there any way to know where we can donate some money for this kid for his treatment? At this point in time, I care very little about who is to blame. If we are asking who is to be blamed for this incident and all the ill incidents that happen in this country, then we only need to look at the mirror. But too much time has been wasted thinking and pointing fingers. I hope those of us who can and those of us who care should step forward and help out these poor people.

A freedom fighter

I am totally in tune with your humane thought. I am crying while looking at this tragic picture of a human soul who has nothing to do with this. I want to donate also. Please let us know how we can do that.

Alekanda

It's so heartbreaking to read this article, can't stop my tears rolling down. How barbaric we are!

S Rahman

The police force is pathetically inadequate to deal with the violence and ultimately it's the poorest of the poor who suffer, and it's the party leaders who gain.

Zman7

BNP secretary said they enforce hartal to ensure people's voting rights. So they ensure people's voting rights by killing and injuring people! We don't know how many innocent people will be slaughtered or maimed to ensure that right. I wonder how they will ensure the rights of those people who are being killed.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Heartbreaking and deplorable! As usual, instead of taking responsibility, these politicians play the blame game. Shutdowns cannot be a democratic way of protest.

Deepelejai

Please spare us and go to hell.

Joseph Gomes

The incident reminds me of what happened in 1971 during our independence war.