

Vandalism on Dhaka-Ctg highway

This must be stopped

DEATH of a Jamaat leader at the hands of unidentified assailants triggered unprecedented vandalism and arson by the activists of this party and its student wing, Shibir, in the Sitakunda area on Dhaka-Chittagong highway. Dozens of vehicles were smashed and the traffic came to a halt in miles-long tailback for over six hours on Wednesday.

We are aghast at such outrageous act of violence and condemn it in the strongest possible terms.

Why did the Jamaat-Shibir activists come down on unsuspecting road users destroying vehicles indiscriminately and disrupting traffic on a vital communication artery of the country? Were the passengers and owners of the vehicles they destroyed behind the death of their leader?

Such behaviour of the Jamaat-Shibir people defies all rationality. If anything, it only demonstrates their total disregard for the life and security of the general public.

This is also not for the first time that they perpetrated such vandalism; especially those who have had the misfortune of travelling along the Sitakunda section of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway know it too well.

They can demand arrest and punishment of those responsible for the death of their leader. But to go for such mind-boggling reaction is unpardonable.

Except severe public opprobrium, they can't hope to achieve anything by acts of violence. They must stop behaving hysterically and thereby cause untold sufferings to public life.


HC order flouted openly

Public playground grabbed forcibly

DHANMONDI public playground at Road 8, supposed to be a space for public use, has been grabbed by a club claiming exclusivity. What is interesting to note here is that the High Court has issued a number of orders to allow the space to remain in the public sphere. Yet, as per media reports, a private organisation by the name of Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club has taken possession of the park and outsiders are now barred access to it. Such open defiance of HC ruling, and that too right in the middle of one of the most important residential areas of Dhaka city, is unbecoming of people who are supposed to know the importance of a public park to the residents around.

The park authority that comes under the jurisdiction of the city corporation is strangely silent on the issue. What is to be noted here is that a senior police official is apparently a member of the organisation's governing body. Are we then to assume that the organisation is so powerful that even the corporation authorities dare not move against its actions that are clearly illegal? The knocking down of the park wall, construction of illegal structures on park premises, barring entry of citizens to what is clearly a 'public' park, are a disservice to the residents. The HC's orders in 2011 to the concerned ministry and Dhaka South City Corporation to remove illegally constructed fixtures have fallen on deaf ears. If the rulings of the highest court of the land are wilfully ignored, precisely where or to which authority do the citizens of the land turn for justice?

What people think



Thursday: November 14, 2013

Do you think it was justified for the four prosecutors and two investigators of the International Crimes Tribunal to seek nomination from the Awami League for the next general elections?

Yes

10%

No

90%

Friday: November 15, 2013

Do you think that the Election Commission could manage to ensure participation of the main opposition BNP in the next general election?

Yes

9%

No

91%

Sunday: November 17, 2013

Do you think unrest in the garment sector will end after fixing up Tk 5,300 as minimum wage?

Yes

36%

No

64%

Monday: November 18, 2013

Do you think any new political alliance by HM Ershad will bring any change to the current political situation?

Yes

26%

No

74%

Tuesday: November 19, 2013

Do you think the visit of US Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Desai Biswal would help make any progress in holding talks to resolve the political crisis?

Yes

25%

No

75%

Wednesday: November 20, 2013

Do you think it was justified for the Awami League-led grand alliance to form a polls-time cabinet without the participation of the main opposition BNP?

Yes

24%

No

76%

Thursday: November 21, 2013

Do you think this polls-time government could be called an all-party government?

Yes

19%

No

81%

Ershad made a parody of himself

CROSS TALK

IT'S difficult to define a man who barks more than he bites, and that ineptitude last week drove Hussein Muhammad Ershad to his wit's end when he made a Mephistophelean deal with his destiny and sold his soul for political pittance. He frantically went from pillar to post, holding clandestine meetings, seeking holy blessings and hectoring avowals of political resurgence. In the end, his maneuvers proved nothing more than the centrifugal force of his mind tied to a post. A paradox unto himself, he created an illusion of change while reinforcing the constant.

For the first time in all these years even his most bitter critics should take pity on him. Never before has the former strongman looked so weak. Never before has the self-aggrandising giant shrunk into such a pitiable pygmy. Ershad must consider removing all the mirrors in his house after last Monday because he shouldn't be able to look himself in the eye again.

We don't know what compelled him to make a parody of himself. It could have been misguided ambition or the fear of being thrown in jail. After all it has been his choice in life to live in this fix. He has reduced himself into one dubious enterprise, repeatedly subjected to grievous humiliations for the sake of what nobody knows. It can be compared to strip poker when players remove a layer of clothing after each round they lose. Ershad has been doing that same thing before each round he wished to win.

In this winning frenzy, what we saw last week was a ribbon worm cannibalising itself when it got hungry. Ershad has been hungry for power ever since he lost it, but that hunger pushed him to the fringe of his mind and rendered himself powerless. His future looks no more promising than that of a domesticated opposition leader, now that the fallen dictator has fallen again.

For twenty-three years since he was ousted from power, Ershad has been waiting to restore his political balance. Frankly, that has been the raison d'être of his political existence, hoping to prove someday that he was no less popular than his opponents. Only a few months ago he

threw down the gauntlet to them that he could defeat both if elections were held under the presidential system.

It was a Freudian slip that gave away his subconscious thinking. If Hussein Muhammad Ershad has withstood so much opprobrium, it has been because of his undying hope to seek political restitution. He doesn't probably wish to regain power so much to be powerful again as to overcome his powerlessness. The public scorn has been haunting him since it toppled him in 1990. The man has been waiting for one last chance to prove himself.

Last week Ershad missed the last train. It was his absolute last chance to prove himself. He could have proved that at long last he had matured into a politician. Yet once again he succumbed to a dictator's instinct, and sacrificed conviction on the altar of convenience. The tragedy of Ershad's life is that whenever he thought he was winning over people, people hated him more than before.

The back flip Ershad performed most recently only showed that once a dictator is always a dictator. Yes, the disgruntled people of this country may have occasionally considered him as a better choice amongst the leaders. It may have convinced him that his popularity was growing. One wonders if he ever read the story of that washerman who threatened to marry his daughter with his donkey whenever she got him upset.

Ershad has rudely disappointed people again because he is not a politician. Politicians lie all the time, but he will not find another politician who has lied as blatantly and shamelessly as he did. In his blind imitation of politicians he has mastered only half the trick. He knows why to tell a lie but not when to tell it with a straight face.

The sum total of this 84-year-old life is that its supposedly hard-earned reputation gave way to ribald laughter. If one watches television shows, reads the newspapers and talks to people on the street, cartoons, criticisms and cynicisms embellish the smirk that forms on people's face at the drop of his name. Some day his name will be synonymous with comic proportions to ridicule frivolous things.

Ershad has taken people for granted, and people are catching up with him. A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma, he turned out to be a goat in a tiger's skin. If the last impression is the lasting impression, his future is sealed. Last week the curtain fell on the final episode of a slapstick comedy.

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A proposal for resolving the political impasse

WAHIDUDDIN MAHMUD

THE chances for a political settlement between the government and the opposition regarding the modalities of holding the upcoming parliamentary elections seem increasingly slim. Discussions on this have been so far confined to what concessions either side is willing to make to the other. Perhaps the time has now come to turn attention to what each side can and should do unilaterally. This will enable the citizens to judge the commitment of both to abide by the rules and norms of democratic practice. In the process, even a solution may emerge.

What the main party in power can do:

By removing the constitutional provisions for an election-time caretaker government, the prime minister and her party have taken upon themselves a daunting responsibility, namely, to create equal opportunities for all parties in the upcoming elections proposed to be held under a political government dominated by the main ruling party. They have, in effect, taken the challenge of fulfilling this responsibility in a convincingly credible and visible way that will be subject to citizens' scrutiny.

The expectations of the people about what can be called a level playing field for all parties are based on the standards set by the previous elections held under caretaker governments. The steps that need to be taken include: a drive for neutralising armed gangs irrespective of which political party patronises them; freeing BTV and other government media from partisan political influence and using them instead for voter education; identifying officials in key positions having strong political affiliation and removing them elsewhere; making enough changes in local level administration so as to convey an effective message for playing a neutral role; directing the law enforcing agencies in an open and convincing way to perform their duties without political bias; and above all, reconstituting the Election Commission partially or wholly as needed.

This is admittedly a tall order of things to expect from a partisan political government, albeit reconstituted for the election time. But the citizens will want to be assured of at least a minimum guarantee of a free and fair election environment. After all, ruling party leaders have time and again made assurances that they will be able to deliver on it. Another area of complications will be regarding the code of conduct of the Parliament members if they continue to hold their positions until the elections are over -- a problem that the caretaker governments did not have to deal with. As for the prime minister, she will have the dual responsibility of leading the election campaign of her party and at the same time ensuring that the administration remains non-partisan. This will be an extremely difficult task, if not impossible. In the more well-developed democracies, this is not a problem since the integrity of administration and other independent state institutions are not compromised by undue politicisation. If the prime

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minister in her honest judgment thinks that it is too difficult for her to perform this dual responsibility, she may consider handing over the responsibility of running the government to someone else, which will be considered an exemplary move in improving the election environment.

What the main opposition party can do:

The main opposition party can justifiably feel aggrieved by the way the system of caretaker government has been abolished by the ruling party. But in the absence of any compromise solution, they have to choose among the options that are available to them for unilateral decision. By declaring a conditional decision to participate in the election, they can throw a challenge to the prime minister and her party leaders to live up to their promise of holding a free and fair election. They can convert their negative agenda of foiling the elections into a legitimate democratic movement around demands for creating a fair election environment. By launching such a movement against many odds, they can contribute to the consolidation of the democratic system and in that way they can also gain public sympathy. On the other hand, agitation for foiling the elections may lead to violence and acts of sabotage, which will not help anyone, and public support for the legitimate demands of the opposition may even get eroded.

By not joining in the election-time government, they main opposition party will not have to bear responsibility for any failure of this government. But even if they choose to join the so-called all-party government, they will have the option of resigning from it and even boycotting the elections. And if they get defeated through vote rigging and election manipulations, they will be able to launch a mass movement by presenting credible evidences of the alleged irregularities. Experiences of other newly democratised countries tell us that a post-election mass movement, rather than election boycott, has a better chance of success in unseating a government bent on perpetuating its rule through unfair means.

What the civil society can do:

Once the main opposition party declares its intention to participate in the elections, the duty of the civil society will be to put pressure on the government to remove impediments to holding fair elections. In this task at least, the civil society can remain united irrespective of support for particular parties or ideological differences. This therefore will be a testing time for the civil society as well.

If the government is honest in its pledge to ensure a free and fair election environment, it can form an advisory body consisting of eminent and experienced non-partisan members of the civil society. It need not even necessarily be a formal body. All the previous caretaker governments regularly sought advice from such persons. There is all the more need for seeking such advice in the case of a political election-time government. Partisan advisors will not be of much use.

The writer is an economist and a member of the United Nations Committee for Development Policy.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Save S.D. Barman's home

The palatial building in Comilla where the musical icon Sachin Dev Barman was born is now falling apart. It was here that the singer had spent nineteen years of his life, did his graduation from the Comilla Victoria College. And what is more, he performed music with the rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam whenever the latter used to visit the place. The character of this memorable building however changed dramatically after partition. It came to be used for non-descript purposes which still continue unabatedly. Surprisingly, the name of the singer is still clearly visible on the plaque fixed on its wall. The present miserable condition of the building has been described vividly by Syed Muazzem Ali, former Foreign Secretary, in his recent article that appeared in the daily Jugantor (November 12). That was, in fact, a wake-up call for the government to take immediate step for restoration and protection of the building. Beyond historical inheritance, the building on restoration holds the promise to emerge as the star attraction of music lovers especially of the sub-continent. By all appearances, without government's initiative for restoration of the building, it surely is destined for ruination.

Syed Badrul Haque
Lalmatia, Dhaka

PM should follow the path of peace

I have become unable to write on any other subject except the political situation of our country because all other things have become insignificant. The future seems ominous and only one person can make all differences, and that person is none other than Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. She can turn the darkness into light, despair into hope, and everything negative into positive. As the prime minister of Bangladesh, she is in charge of the welfare of the country and its 16 crore people; we are praying to Almighty Allah to make her realise this, discard the path of animosity and follow the path of peace and righteousness.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

It calls for tougher action

BSTI, on behalf of the government, has just asked for an explanation from Pran group in the usual and normal bureaucratic manner. Why? I believe drastic action should have been taken for such deliberate act of poisoning food consumed by so many people through their products.

I would appeal to conscientious lawyers to please file a public interest litigation case against Pran, so that they are legally punished for this deliberate act of mass poisoning. The government should stop the sale of all Pran food items and carry out a total and thorough examination of all agricultural, processed, additives, local and imported materials used by Pran in their manufacturing process. The cost incurred by the authorities should be levied on Pran as a fine for their slack and callous attitude. The same measures should also be taken for all foodstuffs consumed by us all over the country.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Hasina leans on JP for 'credible' polls," published on November 19, 2013

Nds

I don't know whether it is an example of the adage 'birds of a feather flock together'.

Jafar Iqbal

Nothing will help Sheikh Hasina; she will fall from the government sooner or later.

Ash C.

I have a simple question: Will Rashed Khan Menon and Hasanul Haq Inu -- both once known as fire-brand left front leaders -- change their colour again to contest the upcoming election with AL party symbol 'boat' because they stand no remotest chance to win an election with their own party symbols which I can't remember now after watching their relentless sycophancy for the last 5 years!

"Ershad now asks BNP to follow suit" (November 19, 2013)

Zman7

No more wandering in the labyrinth of CTG, Ershad finally found the path of all-party polls-time government.

Mizan

Even ex-despot Ershad can claim his concern for the country and its people!

Jakaria Bulbul

He is a comedian on the political stage who gives people comic relief and he is also an important figure like the fools in Shakespeare's plays.

Mohammed Gani

I don't know what to comment on Ershad's position -- before this comment hits the board he might change his position again.