

Reconciliation before polls a pressing task

AL and BNP should strive to fulfill it

WE have said it before, and we repeat it with all the energy vigour at our command -- some sort of a poll time formula for reconciliation must be reached for peaceful election.

Going to the polls without any understanding is a sure formula for disaster.

There have been glimmers of silver lining around the clouds hovering the political landscape lately. On November 19, a 20 member opposition delegation led by Khaleda Zia met president Abdul Hamid urging him to intercede with the ruling party. It has been reported that he has just sent minutes of the meeting to the Prime Minister. On 21 November, the PM while exchanging pleasantries with BNP acting general secretary Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on the Armed Forces Day advised Fakhrul to engage with his AL counterpart Syed Ashraful Islam. Ashraful calls Fakhrul to fix a meeting with him. It appears both met in 'secret'.

We suggest that the EC should hold back announcement of the election schedule without upsetting the polls timetable. At the same time, the opposition should avoid using such language as bringing the country to a screeching halt with the announcement of the polls schedule. If the ruling party plays around as it wishes and the opposition takes plunge in a destructive swipe, the citizenry is dealt a body blow. Without any further ado, they must get to the brass tacks seizing every opportunity to negotiate a settlement of the political crisis.

Tazreen disaster anniversary

So many wrongs need to be righted

ONE year has passed since Tazreen disaster that killed 112 workers. Tazreen was an eye-opener to the callous disregard that the owners of RMG factories accorded to the lives of the workers. Tazreen was the primary reason that our GSP was cancelled and it is fairly representative of the shoddy environment of work in most of our RMG factories.

Neither the owners nor the BGMEA took the caution seriously, nor did they pay heed to the call from all quarters to rev up safety standards and working conditions of the nearly 5,000 RMG factories. And we had the worst RMG factory disaster only six months after Tazreen.

We are astonished by the inadequate compensation made to the victims' families. The BGMEA and the owner really paid a pittance. We are even more shocked by the refusal of the two largest buyers of our RMG to contribute to the compensation package on flimsy grounds.

We note too with great deal of concern that the owner of the factory is going about scot-free when he should have been booked for murder. It is regrettable too that the probe committee termed the actions of the owners, who had flouted all the rules while constructing the building and all the safety measures that such a factory should have, as 'unpardonable neglect' and recommended that they be booked under a section of the CrPC that carries a jail sentence of 5 years only. It was pure and simple murder and the owners should be

My traveling woes

ISRAT JAHAN RIVA

As a working young girl, my everyday life seems to be intertwined with travelling alone on public transports. A quick math suggests that I travel on public buses five hundred times a year on average -- common sense says that I should get used to the hustle and bustle that accompanies it but no, I still haven't.

Elders have taught the boys in our families that women need to be respected; the notion of the words 'ladies first' can clearly help us recognise that ladies, both young and old, should be given priority as a sign of respect. However, as I start my day and walk closer and closer to my means of transport, I question all these ideas that seem to be embedded in me so deeply.

The environment around me makes me feel that these teachings hold no significance to others at all. Every time I intend to get on a public bus, an array of rowdy men is always there to greet me. They do this by jumping out of the buses--often pushing away any woman in their way. Often carelessly wallowing young and old women alike and paving ways for their fellow companions to descend after them.

Many may think that I have crossed the hurdle, but there are ample battles to be fought before I can reach my destination. A major challenge in my journey appears to be finding a seat in the bus. This is not easy as seats are usually designated on a first come first serve basis. Many men often bypass the women and run inside to secure the best seats. As if securing a window seat with a good view is not enough, some people also like to make sure that their bags, luggage and jackets can take the seat next to them and be a companion in their oh so arduous journey!

If I get a seat next to a decent person, I consider myself to be lucky and enjoy my bus journey in peace. However, luck often seems scarce and I frequently end up sitting next to an annoying man trying to strike a conversation or a pesky multilevel-marketing salesman saying that I most definitely need a herbal face cream that can remove my wrinkles and make me look 10 years younger!

In addition to the pollution and traffic jam, travelling by bus and dealing with unruly fellow passengers is something that I dread every day.

The writer is trainee Sub-editor, The Daily Star.

Ruling AL should play the game

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

THE two major events of last week, US envoy Nisha Desai's three-day Dhaka visit and Khaleda Zia-led opposition delegation's meeting with the president, though they could not break the prevailing political deadlock, did at least present the country with a week free from hartal and its attendant violence. When the US envoy was explaining her government's position about the upcoming Bangladesh election, putting more emphasis on the urgency of a dialogue than forming polls-time administration, the president of ruling AL Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was busy forming her 'all-party' interim cabinet to run the next election. And the opposition leader Khaleda Zia's plea for initiating talks made to the president could not yet draw expected response. Thus the PM proved wrong all speculations tinged with the optimism that some formula to finally accommodate the opposition BNP in the upcoming election process would come about. She rather went ahead with renaming her old government, albeit in a somewhat shrunken and reorganised shape, as an 'all-party' election-time government.

Before that was, we all know, the farce of ministers' resignation followed by an attempt to qualify such action with the phrase, 'intention' of resignation, in the face of questions raised in the media and among constitutional experts on the constitutionality of the exercise. It was a travesty of democratic norms, even of morality, to have resorted to such play of words to bypass an issue of serious constitutional implications. Small wonder it prompted a constitutional expert and one of the framers of constitution, Dr. Kamal Hossain, to say with irony: "There is only one individual in the country -- it is the constitution what she says and it is the constitution what she does!"

Dictators have no faith in matters of principle or morality in their kind of politics. In order to usurp or stay in power, they would rather try to score points by breaking rules and trampling principles. But one man's meat is another man's poison. Former dictator Ershad, who is now a prized possession of ruling AL in its 'all-party' bandwagon, knows it too well to share it with AL. AL or its leadership certainly does not want to be in a dictator's shoes and play its game in the next general election!

Why the ruling party did resort to such a strange political manoeuvre is beyond comprehension. If anything, the public and political observers at home and abroad will smell only deceit and dishonesty and nothing good in it. And it is going to cost it dearly in the longer term. If truth be told, it has been even worse than Jatiya Party

chairman Ershad's last political somersault, which was only predictable.

If we compare election with the game of say, wrestling, the ruling party is trying to create such a condition that its major contestant, the opposition BNP, may not participate in the game. The strategy is clear: to ensure that it (ruling party) may get a walkover. But there is a catch. Unlike in a game of wrestling, the spectators, the public, are not passive onlookers here. They also participate in the game by casting their votes. And the voters supporting the absent player in the election won't simply leave the ground without being satisfied why their favourite contestant failed to appear. In fact, the real trouble will start not before -- as the opposition is threatening and what the ruling party is daring it to do -- but after the game. The victory, on which the present ruling party seems to be hell bent, if ultimately won in this manner, would be one in a technical sense, but a defeat in moral terms. It would be as shameful as it had been for the present opposition BNP, in the February 1996 election (when they were in power), or even



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worse. Why do the ruling AL and its leadership think things will be different this time? Or are they being driven by some dark force beyond their control to commit this avoidable mistake?

To take advantage of the mistakes committed by the opponent is but the beauty of the electoral game. But such advantages have to be counted in terms of the number of opposition constituencies or votes gained by playing according to the rules of the game and not by breaking the rules, or even by spoiling the entire game itself. The ruling AL is, in effect, trying to spoil the whole game. And this is where the moral defeat starts from.

Whichever quarter might be influencing the ruling party to play games with basic rules of democratic politics and thus goading it into the dark world of intrigues and machination, cannot be a friend of sane and clean politics. It must get out of its clutch and play the game by taking the main opposition into confidence in the 10th Jatiya Sansad election.

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China's Singapore swing



YAO YANG

final document unveils a plan for comprehensive reforms that will reshape China's economy and society in the next decade.

For starters, the household registration (*hukou*) system will be reformed. Small cities and towns will allow migrants to apply for the local *hukou* with no strings attached, and medium-size cities will do the same, with some restrictions. Although large cities will remain as closed as ever, the new policy will dramatically weaken the institutional foundation of China's long history of urban-rural and regional divides.

Similarly, the one-child policy that has been enforced for the last 34 years will be modified. In most provinces, parents who are both single children themselves already can have two children. The new policy recommends that provinces allow couples to have two children if either parent is a single child. While this will affect only around 10 million couples -- a small number in a country of more than 1.3 billion people -- the reform represents a gigantic step toward ending the one-child rule.

Farmers, moreover, will be granted the right to sell their residential land on the open market and will be much more likely to be compensated at market rates when their land is taken by the government. State-owned enterprises (SOE), meanwhile, are expected to surrender more of their profits to the government -- up to 30% by 2020. This extra revenue will be used to finance China's social-security system.

Indeed, from now on, the central government will take over social-security expenditure, establishing nationally unified pension and health-insurance systems, while the retirement age will be raised gradually. Currently, women can retire at the age of 50, and men at 55 -- ridiculously low by global standards and clearly unsustainable, given China's rapidly aging population.

SOEs' power will be curtailed in other ways. Their ability to stifle innovation will be weakened by a drastic reduction in the government's power to restrict the entry of new competitors into all areas of the economy, as well as a major effort to reduce bureaucratic red tape.

Financial liberalisation, too, will be deepened, which will help startups and private firms most of all. In addition to pledging to liberalise exchange and interest rates, the

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to curb local governments' role in economic activities, which is one of the sources of distortions in the Chinese economy.

This is related to the final document's most significant lacuna: political reform. In fact, a Singapore-style approach -- combining a free-wheeling market economy and an authoritarian regime -- has clearly emerged from the plenum.

It is an approach that awaits the test of time. Singapore is a city-state of five million people -- roughly the population of the Haidian district of Beijing. Given China's much greater size and complexity, the Chinese government's pursuit of the Singaporean model, with its suppression of any and all social disorder, would ultimately undermine economic dynamism.

To build the innovative economy envisioned by the third plenum, the CCP's leadership needs to find a new governance model that fosters a vibrant society. Sooner rather than later, the crucially important economic reforms that have just been unveiled will not be enough.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Advisers can talk two leaders into an agreement

The political parties of Bangladesh have been hugely influenced by bureaucrats from the diplomatic circle, civil society and other quarters. Diplomats like former state minister for foreign affairs Reaz Rahman still serve as Khaleda Zia's adviser on foreign affairs. Academics like Dr. Gowher Rizvi and AMA Muhith serve as PM's advisers. In the same way, several other bureaucrats serve as the PM's and Khaleda Zia's personal aides and advisers. To resolve the current political impasse, it is high time that the educated circles including ex-diplomats, businessmen, economists, etc., surrounding them took strong initiatives to convince the two ladies to work above petty politics and start a dialogue.

It is commendable that the business leaders have started discussions with both parties and tried to initiate a process of dialogue at the secretary general level. Such individuals should in fact try and initiate the process of dialogue, as they tend to have greater acceptability in both the major parties compared to other lifelong politicians.

Mir Aftabuddin Ahmed
Gulshan-2, Dhaka

BNP should change its strategy

I believe the BNP's recent strategy is wrong and they risk missing an excellent opportunity for their party. I understand their fear of election rigging, but there are better solutions than boycotts. If the BNP participates in the elections, international monitors will be present, and in exchange for joining the "all-party" government, the BNP can demand several important ministries, diluting the influence of the AL in the interim government. The International Crime Tribunal prosecutors' actions seeking AL nominations add credibility to the BNP argument that the trials are merely political. The clumsy steps around the resignations to form the interim government illustrate incompetence. The arbitrary arrest of several BNP leaders for street-level hartal violence lends support to the claim the AL is suppressing the opposition before the elections. The BNP should use these incidents to join the elections and make their case, leaving the violence and Islamists behind.

Neil Taylor
On e-mail

Comments on post editorial, "Ershad made a parody of himself," published on November 22, 2013

Mohammad Saiful Hosyn
General Ershad is always predictable.

Opee Monir
Absolutely correct; we all knew what his plan was behind his mind. He is a traitor.

Hafeejul Alam
The author seems to be rather angry with General Ershad!

SM
Well, Ershad and Sheikh Hasina have a good understanding since 1986. It is revolting to see Sheikh Hasina entertaining Ershad and betray with the sacrifices of Dr Milon and Nur Hossain...there are many more who sacrificed their lives following her call to oust Ershad.

She and her counterpart are not good at anything apart from sitting on the Dictatorial Chair. What legacy are they leaving behind that will impact positively on generations to come? The world is moving ahead and Bangladesh is falling behind because of just these two persons.

Salim Ullah
He has made himself the most ridiculous person.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA
Ershad never took a wrong decision to save his skin from ruling party's injustice.

**** "BNP threat lacks power" (November 23, 2013)

007ISI
Don't worry, ISI will help.

Mohammad Rahman
When political parties hold no democracy within themselves, they cannot be united and strong in their movements. Unfortunately, this is true of most of the major political parties in the country. In these parties each and every decision is dictated solely by the party chairpersons.

Jakaria Bulbul
Killing a few people with bombs or fire is not enough. It is only labelled as "poor performance"! How on earth can someone invite others to kill more people to get "rewarded" in return?

Touchstone
Mirza Fakhrul is not happy with the number of arson-related deaths; he is asking his goons to do more. How senseless! He is lucky that he was not arrested for openly threatening to inflict terror on general public to fulfil their political ambition. Nowhere in the world is such tactics employed. There is zero tolerance to such terrorist threats in western countries.