

Blockade took a serious turn

Targeting railway menacing

THE opposition BNP-led alliance seems to have singled out the railway as the main target of attack in their blockade programme. Since Monday morning that they started the blockades, long stretches of rail tracks have been pulled out, fishplates removed, train tracks and coaches torched in different districts disrupting train service and putting travellers at great risk.

It's not conceivable why the opposition has gone for increasing public suffering by extending their blockade by another 23 hours until this morning.

Day by day, the opposition's strange hostility towards the railway is taking menacing proportions. The unbridled vandalism unleashed on the railway and other communication systems in the name of blockade is fast going into the hands of hooligans and terrorists who thrive on violence. Anytime a big railway accident can take place risking hundreds of lives. Will the opposition take responsibility for such an eventuality?

The government cannot get away with just blaming it all on the opposition. First of all, it will have to strike at the root of the problem by engaging the opposition in a dialogue to sort out their differences and persuade the latter to withdraw their blockades and other programmes hazardous to public life.

The government must also be able to deal with the trouble-makers with an iron hand to protect the railway and ensure security of the lives and properties of travellers. But the security of thousands of kilometres of railway cannot also be left to policing alone. The people living in the areas through which the railway passes have to be made aware and mobilised to protect the national asset.

Education bears the brunt

Academic life disrupted totally

FOR the millions of primary education students, the ongoing blockade has served as a death knell. According to the academic calendar, nearly 3 million school going children belonging to various grades are scheduled to appear at final examinations between now and November 30. Unfortunately, the flexible timetable set up by the ministry of education has been thrown into turmoil due to the blockade having been enforced nationwide by the opposition alliance. Though the blockade technically is supposed to draw a noose around Dhaka city, has in reality, turned into a nationwide hartal including Dhaka city. It has become impossible for school and college administrations to reset a time for the examination given present circumstances.

With buses not plying the roads and cars keeping off the streets, parents are in a fix as to how they will take their children to exam centers. Given the extreme insecurity that has paralysed life in the city, it is not surprising to find parents and guardians unwilling to risk the lives of their children to travel to institutions. The repeated cancellations and rescheduling of examination dates is playing havoc with children's study preparations. Unfortunately, our political masters seem least bothered with the future of our children. That obviously is the case since repeated appeals by parents and educationists have not been heeded by the opposition. Such indifference towards children and their studies merely goes to show precisely how much politicians and parties care for the country.

What people think



Friday, November 22, 2013

Do you think there is any chance of participation of the opposition alliance in the all-party cabinet?

Yes

22%

No

78%

Saturday, November 23, 2013

Do you agree with BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir's claim that no opposition leaders or activists were involved in vandalism or any criminal activities during opposition's programmes?

Yes

37%

No

63%

Sunday, November 24, 2013

Do you agree with chairman of the US foreign affairs committee Ed Royce that the Awami League-led government was not doing enough to protect minorities?

Yes

79%

No

21%

Monday, November 25, 2013

Do you think international pressure will have any impact on the rigid stance of the two major political parties?

Yes

48%

No

52%

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

Do you agree with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury that the two major political parties should sit for a dialogue, without any precondition, to resolve the ongoing political crisis?

Yes

70%

No

23%

Wednesday, November 27, 2013

Do you think that the opposition leader will accept Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's latest offer to choose a ministry in the interim-time government?

Yes

79%

No

85%

Thursday, November 28, 2013

Do you agree with Prof Al Masud Hasanuzzaman of Jahangirnagar University that the announcement of the polls schedule might obstruct the dialogue process?

Yes

81%

No

19%

The Pyrrhic victory of our politicians

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

GREEK king Pyrrhus, whose army suffered irreplaceable casualties in defeating the Romans, expressed his joy saying that one more victory like that would have undone him. That's the origin of the phrase 'a Pyrrhic victory,' which describes a victory with such a devastating cost that it is tantamount to defeat. Now that our political confrontation has escalated from the mean streets to the highway, it's no longer the question of which political party is going to win. Instead the question is at what cost to the country it will win that victory.

We should no longer suffer from the delusion that a victory for the politicians is also a victory for the country. Politics has turned into a con game by which ordinary citizens are tricked into a trance so that politicians can plunder the country. Patriotism, democracy and freedom are nothing but hypnotic chatter that lulls people into sleep.

After the chief election commissioner announced the election schedule last Monday, the simmering discontent came to a boil, and it's still boiling. The violence that erupted since then has led to deaths and havoc across the country. Victor Hugo defines civil war as a war between the Europeans. If Bangladeshis are killing Bangladeshis and they're also destroying the property of their fellow countrymen, what's it but silent civil war smoldering in the guise of political conflict?

The nature of this war is that its virus remains hidden most of the time, active only in the months preceding national elections. Our political contention can give Romeo and Juliet a run for their money because a street brawl had turned the Capulets and Montagues into sworn enemies. For all practical reasons, we are now one nation divided into two mutually exclusive parts. This country is like two gangs vying for the same neighbourhood.

But where is this heightened tension going to take us? How long is the government going to suppress the opposition? How long is the opposition going to resist the government? What if the elections are held? What if the elections are foiled? What if the ruling party comes back? What if it's defeated?

There are many subjunctives that make the future all the more uncertain. What if the government goes ahead with a

one-sided election? How long will it last in office? If it's eventually forced to reconcile with the opposition demand, will it have more at stake than an electoral defeat? It's almost certain that the opposition will retaliate blow by blow if it wins.

This country by all means is caught between a rock and a hard place. No matter which way the election goes, the country will have to brace up for more troubles. If the opposition is entirely crushed and wiped out from the political scene, the ruling party and its allies will be tempted to become more tyrannical. In that case we shall see more of what we have seen in the last five years. More scams, more shams and more hammed up attempts to manipulate politics.

The word zeitgeist means spirit of the time and it's attributed to German philosopher Georg Hegel. He said that no man can surpass his own time, for the spirit of his time is also his own spirit. Our politicians are made in the image of that spirit as much as we are also made in that same image. Yet they're different from us. They're the victimisers of that image and we're the victims.

Unfortunate is that politicians don't have our best interest in mind.

Thomas Carlyle presented the great man theory, which stresses that leaders do not become leaders by fate or accident. They become leaders by virtue of possessing characteristics of great leaders. And these characteristics allow them to obtain positions of power.

Our politicians start backward. They obtain the position of power first, which is why they don't have to care about greatness or its characteristics. They never graduate into leadership because they already begin from where they are supposed to finish. Blood ties and money land in their laps the rare privilege, which politicians have to earn in other countries.

Here's the ultimate tragedy. We don't allow callous drivers to drive our cars, but callous leaders are running this country. The country hits ditches, skids and swerves off the road from time to time. It goes through lowdown showdown, bitter bickering, virulent violence and binge of bloodshed only because politics has been in the wrong hands.

The failure of our politics is rooted in mutual delusion. While people see politicians as leaders, politicians think of people as ladders. Neither knows what to expect of either. Politicians lead a political party. Leaders lead a country. A bunch of parochial folks, our politicians are a breed apart. They're busy roasting their potatoes, when the house is burning.

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COMMENTARY

The story of a picture

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Anwara Begum, an ordinary citizen who worked as a cook at a bank, was returning home. She saw the opposition procession and stood aside not knowing that her death was yards away. Why should somebody throw a cocktail at a woman standing on the roadside, someone who had nothing to do with what was going on, is beyond comprehension, except that the purpose was to kill some people to create panic.

Sabed Ali, a CNG driver, was set on fire by a petrol bomb thrown at his auto rickshaw. His face and 15 per cent of his body was burnt. His flesh on his left hand was burnt to the bone.

A similar story is of Rubel, another CNG driver set on fire by a cocktail. In his case his vehicle was first overturned with him trapped inside, and then the bomb was thrown. Clearly the attacker wanted him to burn to death. He was saved by a brave passerby.

Then there is the seven year old Rakib who was 15 per cent burnt by boiling water that fell on him as two activists of AL and BNP tried douse each other with it.

Sixteen people died between last Tuesday and Wednesday, with seven on the last day alone. From January till November a total of 290 people have been killed due to political violence. In the same period two children died and 19 were severely injured or burnt, including 14 year old Monir who was set on fire on 4th November last as he slept in his father's van parked at a roadside.

Then there is the story of Chittagong bound Meghna Express, carrying 500 passengers that averted being derailed in the Chandpur and Laksham section due to a timely warning by two farmers. Sixty feet of the track was uprooted at the dead of night so that the early morning train, scheduled for departure at 5 in the morning would meet with an accident. Uprooting railway tracks is similar to planting a bomb on a plane to be detonated once it takes off. How can this be our lot? How can we be citizens of a country where, for political reasons, one section of citizens will willfully plan the death of ordinary people who have nothing to do with party politics?

Politics that aims at killing people cannot be politics for the people. Today killing people has become a deliberate act. It is as if some killers are let loose on the streets in the name of political activism, whose main purpose is to kill, set vehicles and shops on fire-in other words cause maximum fear and panic. Otherwise, how can we explain the case of human-haulers being set on fire by people pretending to be passengers? They tried to block the escape of the driver so that he would burn to death. Such killers board public transport pretending to be normal passenger and at one stage suddenly get up, spread gunpowder and jump out of a running bus while lighting a match at the last moment.

How can this be a part of a movement for free election?

In Bangladesh today, opposition activists are killing people at random- a passerby here, a school student there, a CNG driver at another place. These deaths are deliberate and must be condemned for what they are -premeditated murder.

Clearly, Khaleda Zia's hands are soiled with the blood of all those who have been deliberately killed since political agitation took a violent turn from early this year. We hold her particularly guilty for never condemning the death of innocent bystanders, especially of the children who couldn't have been in anyway involved in politics. There has never been, leave alone regret, a single word of sympathy or condolence at so

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Protestors of RPP not a vested quarter

We thought that prime minister Sheikh Hasina must have realised by now the danger of building the Rampal Power Plant (RPP) because concerned people, experts, scientists, and ecologists were protesting against it. If the plant is built, it will ruin the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest.

But all our hopes were dashed. On November 13, 2013 prime minister Sheikh Hasina declared that the power plant would not harm the Sundarbans and terming the protestors 'vested quarters' asked them not to create obstacles. She even saw in such protests a conspiracy against development. We want to inform her that it is not a section of people but the whole country that wants to save their precious heritage. India is supporting this for its own interests, not caring about how it would affect us.

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina is inaugurating projects one after another at the fag end of her tenure. Is it a ploy to come back to power again?

Nur Jahan

Chittagong

Punish high beam abuse by drivers

Vehicles are equipped with two head lights -- high and low. The rule is to ply the street at night always with low beam and flash the high beam to signal pedestrians and other vehicles. But most of the unscrupulous drivers always keep the high beam on creating severe problem for the opposite-bound vehicles. When the ray of high beam from opposite direction falls into the driver's eyes, he can not see anything until the high light vehicle crosses him.

The BRTA addressed this issue a few years ago and made it mandatory for the cars to colour the headlights black. Since the police went less vigilant on law offenders, buses with high beams are plying freely on the highways. This poses risk of fatal accidents. To eliminate the risk, traffic police should go vigilant, halt offending vehicles, and put black paint on their headlights charging a small amount. Raising awareness among the drivers can be another complementary solution.

Tashrif Billah

Dhaka

RMG workers' wage still not enough

We wouldn't like to see any more unrest in our garment sector. The minimum wage for the workers has been settled at Tk 5,300 with yearly 5 percent increment and Tk 4180 will be paid for the new entrants from the next month. But this is not enough for the workers and it will not play any significant role to improve the living standard of garment workers. According to BTUC, the workers of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and Indonesia get 71.1, 71, 83.2 and 72.8 US dollars respectively.

Although the minimum wage has been increased a little, yet there are some flaws here. New entrants will receive tk 4,180 and existing workers will receive tk 5,300. It is clear that the owners will not upgrade the status of the new entrants. The government should take necessary steps to plug the loopholes in the law regarding the wage.

Md. Maskurul Alam

Department of Statistics

Comments on news report, "Reach consensus," published on November 26, 2013

Abul Kashem

Though it is difficult to reach consensus, it is not impossible.

Zman7

Is this land truly devoid of any wise intellectual who can convince the inflexible BNP to participate in the election and also suggest that if the election performance is found to be faulty or not credible, then the opposition can start their protest movement? What is the point of unleashing violence and destruction now?

Nds

Quite the contrary. This country is overburdened with intellectuals. And they are the real trouble-makers and stand as the insurmountable obstacle to reach any political consensus on any issue. The ruling party is also hell-bent on staying in power by any means no matter whatever cost the people are made to pay for their unprecedented obduracy.

Aasfisarwar

The CEC and his master have willingly decided to remain on the wrong side of history. Their fate has been sealed, their voice will be silent. It's just a matter of time.

"JS polls on Jan 5" (November 26, 2013)

SM

Sadat should get a prize for his wonderful cartoons.

Anas Dorga Sylhet

This sudden announcement showed that EC is controlled by someone.