

Children exposed to violence

Stop holding their future to ransom

VIOLENT political programmes like hartal and blockade are not only causing enormous suffering in public life, but also traumatising the children who are directly or indirectly exposed to these incidents. What is of greater concern is that the adult world of irresponsible politics is gradually sucking into its maw the innocence of children who are being forced to witness, even made to take part in violence.

It is unfortunate that at the critical phase of character formation in the lives of children, they cannot be kept safe and sane even within the four walls of their homes. Sickening sights of mutilated, burnt and blood-stained bodies are screaming out at them from TV screens and newspaper pages. More unfortunate are those whose parents, their near and dear ones, or even themselves are becoming the direct victims of violence. Worse still are the cases where children of poor households, especially of slums and shanties on pavement are being recruited by the political operatives and used as shields to engage in arson attacks on vehicles or pelting stones and explosive devices at buses, cars, trains, or law-enforcers or rival political groups.

Little do these young victims know that their childhood is being thus stolen to fulfil some adults' selfish and mean ends. The children being put through such experience are undergoing a violent psychological transformation gradually turning them into virtual monsters. If it is not our politicians, who are then to answer for this crime of holding our future generation their political hostage?

Political parties and their leadership, in particular, must come to their senses and stop making children the pawns of their cruel political game.

Railways suffering from insecurity

Authorities need to roll up their sleeves

WITH seemingly unending blockade and people unable to utilise roads for inter-district travel, railway is the only alternative for thousands of ordinary commuters. With railway suffering repeated acts of sabotage that have led to several derailments of trains, we are forced to ask precisely why security has not been beefed up sufficiently to protect this national asset. It is not only derailment, but the acts of arson that have led to the burning of train bogeys. Indeed, by the railway's own assessment, there are no less than 630 points nationwide that are considered susceptible to sabotage.

We are told that security has been beefed up at these locations. As it turns out, "security measures" turn out to be the deployment of four Ansar members at each point. Precisely how four members of Ansar are to deter a determined group bent on causing havoc appears to have eluded the authorities. Such half hearted measures have not brought desired results. Deliberate acts of sabotage continue to happen and people remain at the mercy of higher powers. The situation is not just sad, it is pathetic. Obviously, the authorities need a reality check. Serious security measures like deployment of armed police or paramilitary personnel, deployment of a shuttle train to check rail line safety prior to departure of a regular train service, etc. are all planned but have not been executed as yet. We strongly urge the authorities to treat the matter seriously and, among other steps, bolster cooperation of the people

Ershad: The great contortionist

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

HUSSAIN Muhammad Ershad has done what he is famous for: changing his colour at the eleventh hour through switching sides. If you vigilantly pore over the traits of political leaders of the 21st century then you would surely find no one as erratic as a politician as the former general. It is difficult to comprehend the logical grounds behind Ershad's most recent political move since there are more incomprehensible reasons behind the comprehensible ones. However, he has announced his party's exit from the upcoming polls.

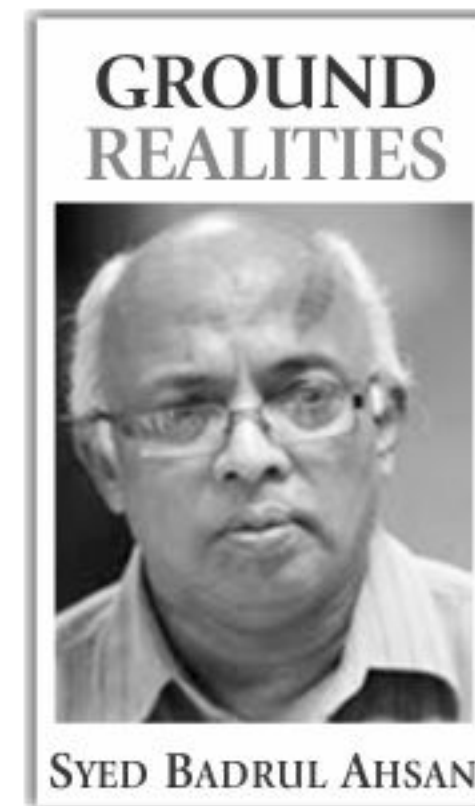
What's exciting to observe after the Ershad-led JP fraction is the painstaking efforts by the Jatiya Party candidates already filing nominations for most of the 300 parliament seats. What would happen to them? And Ershad's definition of a 'Proper Environment' for the polls still needs to be known since there wasn't much difference between the ongoing political stalemate now as then. Frankly speaking, parliamentary seats won by his party surely matters to the two major political parties in Bangladesh. Moreover, it will certainly be a decisive factor in the upcoming national polls (if it happens). Some may ask if the two parties can compete without his alliance -- well, the answer is 'No' because our two parties have failed to learn the political lesson: ignore Ershad at your own peril.

Perceptions created about Ershad despite such political turmoil sometimes seem different from reality. Ershad's urban-public perception contrasts with his rural-public perception momentarily, especially in the northern regions where his brand of politics is interpreted differently. Given the facts about a fallen dictator a question naturally arise 'what have our two political parties -- as yet achieved -- to become more popular within the JP constituencies than Ershad?' Not much so that they could outsmart the general. Instead, they have swung towards the dictator too. May be Ershad's swinging nature is also a reason that both the parties find tempting. However, we are yet to see for how long his recent swing lasts.

His recent impulsive political behaviour could be a subject of debate as well as his tumultuous nine year tenure as the head of the country, but there is no denying that Ershad is an ambitious power player who has survived upheavals of all sorts. Though he is yet to be the Knight in local politics, it's time to see which of the 'to-be-Queen' gets him in his ever shining armour!

The writer is Current Affairs Analyst, The Daily Star.

This December . . . that December



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THIS December is not that December. That winter is not this winter. This country is not that country. That generation is not this generation. But that dream, that old dream of an egalitarian society taking all Bengalis in its fold, is this dream of a state decisively founded on secular democratic expressions.

In December 1971, it was a twilight struggle we waged, the final phase of it, in defence of liberty in this land. It was a dream coming true, through the sacrifices of millions, through the courage of the Mukti Bahini in confronting the Pakistan occupation army across a soon-to-be Bangladesh. In December 2013, the old dream of a people inhabiting a land of freedom resting on individual and collective dignity is threatened with nightmarish visions of all-enveloping despair.

In December 1971, once the land stood liberated, the Mujibnagar government decreed a ban on the Jamaat-e-Islami, Muslim League, Pakistan Democratic Party and Nezam-e-Islam Party in the interest of an inclusive, non-communal and modern political dispensation. In that season of euphoria sailing in on the wings of battlefield triumph, those who had helped the enemy in humiliating the Bengali nation were put to shame and were on the run.

Forty two years on, this nation wages a new war against the successors of the generation of fanatics that picked up teachers, engineers, lawyers and journalists through nine months of a war for freedom and never let them come back home again. In that long-ago December, it was bullets and bayonets that mutilated lives in this land. In this December, it is petrol bombs that are hurled into moving vehicles, the fiendish goal being an incineration of citizens in the sordid interest of bad politics.

That December was a time when democracy triumphed through bringing seventy five million Bengalis together in what was surely a great experiment in pluralism and constitutional government. This December is a long spell of agony democracy suffers from through an unbridled struggle for power that leaves a nation of a hundred and sixty million people reeling from the consequences of the conflict.

This December is a season when the global community implores us to do nothing that will imperil the march of government based on the consent of the governed. That December was a time when the world witnessed the birth of a nation spontaneous in its determination to have the rule of law underpin its institutions. Back then, the world went out of its way to save this nation from being destroyed by a medieval occupation force. Today, that same world worries hugely on the need for this nation to save itself from its brazenly ambitious men and women in

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the corridors of politics.

In December 1971, international diplomacy stayed supportive of our yearning for nothing less than political sovereignty. As Indian forces assisted our freedom fighters on that final leap to liberation, the Soviet Union made sure that its veto worked long enough for Bangladesh to emerge before a halt to the war could be called.

In December 2013, the United Nations, the United States and the European Union remain busy in the thought that Bangladesh cannot be permitted to fall apart, that its future course depends on the kind of democracy it means to pursue for itself. That December was a point in time when we became the arbiters of our destiny. This December is a winter where foreign powers remain intent on informing us of the course we need to take because we have collectively lost our way.

In 1971, the country roads we knew so well before the war took us back home at the end of it. In 2013, our roads are vulnerable to violence and our homes have mutated into metaphors for despair. In that December, the nation's political leadership exuded energy and held high the idealism that revolutions build on. In this December, it is a fractured land our political leaders squabble over, with crass materialism gnawing away at our collective vitality.

This December is that harrowing time when statecraft gets increasingly frayed at the edges through a decline of politics in the country. In the struggle for power, parochialism puts paid to all our aspirations of enlightenment.

That December was a dawn when new possibilities rose out of the mist, new dreams took shape on the wings of national ambition, with our revolution being the road map to a territory of political liberalism and cultural creativity.

Now is the winter of our discontent. Then, it was a season that awaited the advent of spring.

Then, it was a spacious Bangladesh, in terms of expression, thought and belief, that was our world. Now, an endless stream of images shows, in slow but sure degrees, the consistent shrinking of space in political discourse.

That December is not this December. That December was when sovereignty cast its cool shadows across the landscape. This December the sense in us grows that perhaps the old revolution was unfinished, that the mountain-top is yet to be reached.

In that December, politics ruled the land in all its fragrant glory. In this December, anti-politics runs riot on the streets and citizens cower in their homes.

In December 1971, Bangabandhu prepared to come home; the Mujibnagar men came home. In December 2013, we wait by the village road in the falling light of day for new, purposeful national leadership to emerge through the sparkle of the stars in our bleak skies, to tell us the future is again ours to seize.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.
E-mail: ahsan.syedbadrul@gmail.com

Creeping China



BRAHMA CHELLANEY

CHINA'S growing geopolitical heft is emboldening its territorial creep in Asia. After laying claim to 80% of the South China Sea, it has just established a so-called air defense identification zone in the East China Sea, raising the odds of armed conflict with Japan and threatening the principle of freedom of navigation of the seas and skies. Meanwhile, the People's Republic continues to nibble furtively at territory across the long, disputed Himalayan border with India.

Few seem to fathom the logic behind China's readiness to take on several neighbours simultaneously. China is seeking to alter the status quo gradually as part of a high-stakes effort to extend its control to strategic areas and resources. President Xi Jinping's promise of national greatness -- embodied in the catchphrase "China dream" -- is tied as much to achieving regional hegemony as to internal progress.

China's approach reflects what the Chinese General Zhang Zhaozhong this year called a "cabbage" strategy: assert a territorial claim and gradually surround the area with multiple layers of security, thus denying access to a rival. The strategy relies on a steady progression of steps to outwit opponents and create new facts on the ground.

This approach severely limits rival states' options by confounding their deterrence plans and making it difficult for them to devise proportionate or effective counter-measures. This is partly because the strategy -- while bearing all the hallmarks of modern Chinese brinkmanship, including reliance on stealth, surprise, and a disregard for the risks of military escalation -- seeks to ensure that the initiative remains with China.

The pattern has become familiar: construct a dispute, initiate a jurisdictional claim through periodic incursions, and then increase the frequency and duration of such intrusions, thereby establishing a military presence or pressuring a rival to cut a deal on China's terms. What is ours is ours, the Chinese invariably claim, and what is yours is negotiable. For example, China says "no foundation for dialogue" with Japan exists unless the Japanese accept the existence of a territorial dispute over the uninhabited Senkaku Islands.

Here, as elsewhere, China has painted its rival as the obstructionist party. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi put it, "Japan needs to recognise that there is such a dispute. The whole world knows that there is a dispute." But there is a dispute only because China has succeeded in shaking the status quo in recent years by popularising the islands' Chinese name ("Diaoyu") and staging incursions into their territorial waters and airspace.

After steadily increasing the frequency of those incursions since September 2012, China has recently begun increasing their duration. The establishment of a new air defense identification zone extending over the islands is its latest cabbage-style security "layer" -- a unilateral power grab that US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel quickly branded "a destabilising attempt to alter the status quo in the region." The zone even covers the sky over the Leodo (Suyan) Reef, a submerged rock that both South Korea and China claim. As China escalates its campaign of attrition against a resolute Japan, it increases the risk of armed conflict, whether by accident or miscalculation.

China's strategy has had more success -- without provok-

ing serious risks -- against the weaker Philippines. This is apparent from China's effective seizure last year of Scarborough Shoal, located well within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, and the controlling presence of Chinese vessels this year around the Second Thomas Shoal, part of the disputed Spratly Islands. China has not yet tried to evict the eight Filipino marines still living on the Second Thomas Shoal, but Zhang has included this shoal in the country's "series of achievements" in the South China Sea.

China is not aiming for control of just a few shoals or other tiny outcroppings; it seeks to dominate the South and East China Seas strategically and corner maritime resources, including seabed minerals. The combined land area of the Senkaku and Spratly Islands amounts to barely 11 square kilometers; but the islands are surrounded by rich hydrocarbon reserves. While seeking to enlarge incrementally its military footprint in the more than 80% of the South China Sea that it claims, China's aim in the East China Sea is to break out of the so-called "first island chain," a string of archipelagos along the East Asian coast that includes the Senkaku Islands and Taiwan.

By contrast, vast tracts of disputed land are at stake in the resource-rich Himalayan region. Here, too, China's



incursions, after increasing in frequency, are now being staged intermittently for longer periods.

Make no mistake: China's territorial creep is contributing to Asian insecurity, fueling political tension, and turning the world's economically most vibrant continent into a potentially global hot spot.

To be sure, China is careful to avoid any dramatic action that could become a casus belli by itself. Indeed, it has repeatedly shown a knack for disaggregating its strategy into multiple parts and then pursuing each element separately in such a manner as to allow the different pieces to fall into place with minimal resistance.

This shrewdness not only keeps opponents off balance; it also undercuts the relevance of US security assurances to allies and the value of building countervailing strategic partnerships in Asia. In fact, by camouflaging offense as defense, China casts the burden of starting a war on an opponent, while it seeks to lay the foundation -- brick by brick -- of a hegemonic Middle Kingdom. Chinese leaders' stated desire to resolve territorial disputes peacefully simply means achieving a position strong enough to get their way without having to fire a shot.

The writer is Professor of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research.
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

PM should stand down

The present government led by Sheikh Hasina is not likely to bring the desired confidence of the opposition, no matter how strong the election commission may be. The solution to our problem lies in opposition's demand that Sheikh Hasina should resign from her post as the PM and a neutral person accepted by both the camps is appointed in her place.

This will also bring an end to the current sufferings of the people.

Engr. Shaheedul Islam
Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Creation of artificial blood

This remarkable and extraordinary medical discovery reported in your back page on 2nd November could well be the most salutary event of this decade, or may even be of this century.

In the days to come, blood will be available like any other medicine across any druggist's counter. Importantly, it will ease the matter of blood transfusion that now requires matching of the blood type and grouping. This will be a great boon as blood is needed in case of accidents, injuries and during surgery or other medical situations. There will be no need any longer for a matching human donor that quite often is not readily available.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

President should intervene

The country has been in turmoil for the last few months. The two major political parties are responsible for this situation. How many deaths, burnt bodies, scared faces of children would satisfy these two ladies? President Abdul Hamid, please help the nation heave a sigh of relief by solving the political crisis. We are looking forward to your intervention.

Iqbal Ali Khan

Director

Admin & Customer relations

Naseem Group

Comments on news report, "Tainted figures on AL ticket," published on November 30, 2013

Vikram Khan

In Bangladeshi politics, crime, corruption, murder etc. look good on your CV.

Shahin Mahmud

If Syed Ashrafur Islam's words are to be believed that "The party finalised its candidates based on grassroots opinion gathered over the last one year," then why has the name of our beloved MP Shafiqul Islam from Sirajganj-4, whose name was in the leaked list yesterday, been replaced with HT Imam's son today?

Saleh Tanveer

As long as anyone is sufficiently submissive to Hasina, all sins are forgiven. It really doesn't matter to her who is good for the country. What matters is who is good to her.

Ben10

The country is heading towards great progress under the first lady dictator.

Nds

If they try to exclude all the tainted figures they will not be in a position to give nomination to more than two or three AL members.

Binodbangali

Who is not tainted? No politician is a "dhoa tulshi pata" at least from the moral point of view.

"Ominous sign" (December 1, 2013)

Mohammad Rahman

Thank you for an excellent and thoughtful analysis. The conclusion truly reflects what we have been going through.

SM

In the final analysis we know what needs to be done—only two persons are behind this sliding dark path and we are still giving them chances! Grow up Bangladesh, smell the ashes and throw the garbage out.

Jakaria Bulbul

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon Bangladesh!!" Sorry, W. B. Yeats, for replacing the last word "world" with "Bangladesh." Nothing can describe Bangladesh now but these lines.

Saleh Tanveer

"Meanwhile, Sheikh Hasina is upholding the constitution and Khaleda Zia is fighting for a poll-time caretaker government." Yes indeed, Nero fiddled while Rome burnt.

SY

Very well written; I hope the biased and unbiased readers will ponder over it.

Zman7

Can't our journalists provide the authorities with information including the possible photographs of the arsonists?

Nrb

One wonders who will benefit from these senseless acts.