

# Deadlock pushes country to the brink

## No alternative to dialogue

WHEN the need for a political reconciliation has become more urgent than ever before, the chiefs of the ruling and opposition parties have chosen to move further apart by toughening their respective stances. This has dashed the public's hope for easing the ongoing political deadlock clouding the prospect of holding the next general election in an inclusive, free, fair and participatory manner. Worse yet, the situation will only contribute to prolonging the state of unforeseen ordeals life has recently been going through, thanks to the opposition-enforced hartals, blockades and attendant violence, trail of devastations and deaths.

This is extremely disappointing for the nation and its people. Will the prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who is also the president of the ruling AL and opposition leader and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia think for a moment to take stock of what they have so far gained through their ego-driven political decisions? Are they aware that through their stubbornness and antagonistic postures, they have traced a path of politics that is self-destructive and palpably anti-people? Small wonder they have not achieved anything other than increasing public sufferings and pushing the country to the brink of a major social, political and economic catastrophe.

We want to believe that they can still make a difference and save the nation from the impending disaster. The imperative is to defuse tension, normalise life and move towards peaceful resolution of the political stalemate. To this end they should create a congenial atmosphere by releasing the detained opposition leaders and start a dialogue in earnest. Time is running out and they will have to move fast.

# Blockade is ruining trade

## Exports take nosedive

THE blockade of Dhaka enforced by the 14-party alliance is playing havoc with export-oriented industries as goods produced have no way of reaching the port city for shipment out of the country. The largest foreign exchange earning sector, the readymade garments (RMG) industry is badly hit. Across the board, apparels industries are overflowing with finished goods since trucks are unable to make the journey to the port city of Chittagong. Though some shipment is taking place by airfreight, this constitutes a marginal portion of total output of the RMG industry. The other major hurdle that is adversely affecting production in this vital industry is the failure to import raw materials like yarn to produce apparels. All in all, the situation is grim.

It is not only RMG that is suffering. According to the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation which has 24 jute mills and a workforce of some 89,000 people has been forced to suspend production. Since raw jute cannot be procured as the markets are not operational, there is no finished jute to sell. As workers get paid on sales proceeds of finished jute, there is no money to pay workers. Indeed, this is more or less the scenario with all manufacturing sectors. No production translates into no-pay for workers, which in turn translates in to no food on the table for their families. With prices of essentials soaring through the roof as the supply chain is disrupted and irregular pay on top of it, what are the common working class people to do?

What people think



Saturday: November 30, 2013

Do you think there is any necessity of early army deployment ahead of the next parliamentary election?

Yes

50%

No

50%

Sunday: December 1, 2013

Do you agree with Gono-forum President Dr Kamal Hossain that the people would not accept any election under a partisan government?

Yes

82%

No

18%

Monday: December 2, 2013

Do you think the two major political parties will be able to reach consensus on holding the next general election?

Yes

17%

No

83%

Tuesday: December 3, 2013

Do you think it is justified for the ruling Awami League to nominate controversial candidates and local godfathers for the next parliamentary elections?

Yes

15%

No

85%

Wednesday: December 4, 2013

Do you think UN assistant secretary general for political affairs Oscar Fernández-Taranco's visit will help improve prevailing political deadlock?

Yes

30%

No

70%

Thursday: December 5, 2013

Do you think Ershad will stick to his latest stance of not participating in polls?

Yes

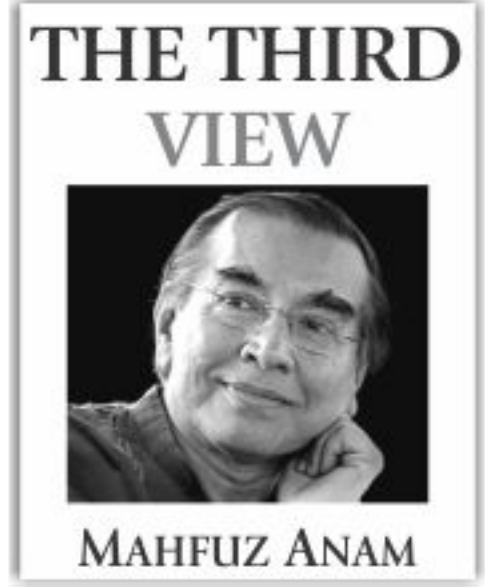
31%

No

69%

# People caught between cruelty and arrogance

## This politics can only damage democracy



THE THIRD VIEW

MAHFUZ ANAM

AWAMI League says it wants an election at any cost. BNP says it wants caretaker government at any cost. Neither explains what they mean by "at any cost" and who will pay that cost. The truth is political parties do not pay any cost. It is the people who are paying all the costs in terms of lives, injury and property. Our politicians and their leaders have brought us to a situation where already more than 300 people have been killed, several hundred injured, many burnt to death, many others crying out in pain from burn wounds and property worth thousands of crores of takas destroyed -- all from recent political violence.

We are used to antagonistic, confrontational and destructive politics. We are used to irrational hartals. However, we had never seen such wanton and ferocious killings and burning of our own people. What political motivation can permit throwing firebombs in a running bus carrying ordinary public? (One could understand, however perverted the logic, if those buses were carrying supporters of the opponent party.) What thinking can permit the uprooting of railway tracks so that passengers face death? What logic can permit political activists to kill or put at life's risk children, some as young as four?

Today we want to clearly say that people of Bangladesh are in the clutches of a cruel opposition and an arrogant ruling party.

The politics that the opposition is indulging is cruel, inhuman and devoid of the minimum concern for public safety. The most important demand of the people is security of life. BNP's politics is threatening that. It is playing with the lives of the people in every manner imaginable. Public transport is being set on fire so that people die. Trains are being derailed so that people die. Factories are being set on fire so that people die. It is as if people are the enemy.

Can there be any justification for killing children? Except for a perfunctory press statement in which she urged her party workers not harm people's lives and properties, the leader of the opposition has so far showed no remorse for destroying lives or properties. Even in saying it she tried to blame the government and the ruling party saying that these are works of government or ruling party agents, being done to blame the opposition. Her accusation could have been taken seriously if she accepted responsibility in some cases which was clearly evident from TV footage. This attitude that 'my party can do no wrong', which pervades both sides, prevents our leaders from facing the truth and taking corrective actions which may have helped to improve our politics. But the tendency to blame all the wrong on the opponent and claim all the virtues for one's own is one of the prime reasons for political parties becoming disconnected with the people.

In additions to the deaths, the continuous hartals and aborodhs have destroyed the lives of the poor. Many who are well above the poverty line are coming closer to it, and those just above are, once again, falling under it. Those who were already below it and were looking at some prospect of making progress are now falling further down.



STAR ARCHIVE

*This is not politics. This cannot be democracy. This cannot be for our good. This cannot serve public interest. Hence we need to reject it with all the force at our command. Time has come to raise our collective voice against such politics.*

was that they will be so cornered by and busy with the war crimes trial that they will be too distracted to mount any effective agitational programme.

This assessment of their opponent's strength led the AL to make highly irresponsible and damaging decisions that revealed the bankruptcy of its position and strengthened that of the opposition's.

The combination of opposition's cruelty and government's arrogance has brought the country to a near standstill. The threat of further continuous shutdown by the opposition is making the public desperate. People feel helpless and totally frustrated. Children are suffering emotional and psychological damages that we are yet fully to assess.

We have said so before and we say it again. This is not politics. This cannot be democracy. This cannot be for our good. This cannot serve public interest. Hence we need to reject it with all the force at our command. Time has come to raise our collective voice against such politics.

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The writer is Editor and Publisher, *The Daily Star*.



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

OTHER nations claim to know precisely when they lost their innocence. The Americans believe it happened on the day John F. Kennedy was killed in Dallas. Norway lost its innocence on July 22, 2011 when in the first attack a car bomb killed seven people in Oslo and two hours later in a second attack a gunman killed 69 youngsters of the ruling Norwegian Labor Party on the island of Utøya. Does anybody know when exactly our nation lost its innocence? When and how freedom-loving people have deflected their course to become an insanely contentious nation?

One definition of innocence is the state of being not guilty of a crime or other wrongdoing. In 1971 we were a united people fighting against injustice and oppression. Forty-two years later the table has turned. We're an oppressive and unjust people, who're still fighting. This time we're fighting against each other.

How has it happened? Did it happen with a sudden impact or did it happen in gradual progression? A lot of people argue that it happened on the night of August 15, 1975 when a patriarch of this country was killed along with most of his family members. Others contend the critical date goes further back in time. According to them, this nation lost its innocence when one-party rule was introduced through the creation of Baksal.

Politics aside, most people agree the loss of innocence in this country has been a continuous process. One devious deviation led to another until the heart of this nation hardened so much that nothing could touch it anymore. There was a time when people used to bite their tongues at the mention of anything shameful or unethical. Bards wrote poems about disturbing deaths and sang them in marketplaces or public squares, their audiences overwhelmed by sympathy and horror.

All of that has changed. There's nothing left to make us embarrassed and ashamed anymore. There is nothing left to give us a shock. Scandals don't surprise us, and lies don't make us sad. Deaths fail to stir our emotions, because a little something has died inside each and every one of us. This is a nation of living people, who're partially dead.

This nation needs to agree on two things in the midst of its confusions, because identifying the problem is half the solution. It needs to know that it has lost its innocence and

also when that loss happened. One way to explain it is what I call the hole-in-a-sock theory. If one small hole in a sock is left untended and unattended, it grows bigger by the day. One toe slips through that hole first before the whole foot gives way.

Loss of innocence has crept in petty pace. It started on the day the first freedom fighter's certificate was sold for the price of a pack of cigarettes. Then came mad rush for licenses and permits, followed by the festival of fictitious academic certificates. When education turned into a pay-per-view like privilege, leaking question papers was its logical conclusion.

The hole in the sock widened further. Election rigging had the same underlying principle as the developments mentioned before. Politicians were emboldened to pretend even more, no longer hesitant to lie through their teeth. It also encouraged others as businessmen falsified documents to get bank loans. Now court orders can be manufactured, land deeds can be doctored, fake death certificates can be produced, post-mortem reports can be tampered and medical reports of all sorts are bought and sold. For the right amount of cash, name anything that can't be had.

If we complain why so many deaths fail to trigger enough outrage, it's because lies heaved on lies have choked our conscience. Today's insensitivity is the culmination of past indulgences. The wrongs condoned are coming back to haunt us incrementally.

Ernest Hemingway writes that all things wicked start from innocence. No doubt that once we also had started from that very same point. We sought independence so that we could be the master of our destiny. If people gave their lives and shed their blood, it was surely not out of any evil scheme but the exalted human spirit longing for freedom and dignity.

Is this nation losing its way, if not lost already? From small aberrations we have arrived at the gateway of gross violations. Our wintry hearts now fail to respond to human sufferings. Lately, there's a lot of clamour over how political violence is making victims of innocent people. Ironically, when a nation loses its innocence it also loses its ability to grieve.

We've given ourselves enough rope to hang ourselves. It sounds ridiculous when many of us shed tears for the innocent people after they did everything to destroy innocence. In false pretense, they're actually hiding their guilty conscience.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Power play in politics

We are familiar with the term power play in cricket match when batsmen try to crush the bowlers by hitting boundaries and over boundaries. On the other hand, the bowlers try to be economical.

In recent times, tension has mounted in our political field because of the power play between the two illustrious political gladiators. The "all-party government" tries to impede the pinch hitter batsmen of opposition party by sending them into the prison. The opposition, on the other hand, hurls more cocktails and petrol bombs at general public. Their scoreboard rises geometrically with the death of common people.

Md. Nahid Iftekhar

Muradpur, Chittagong

A busload of robbers

Your staff correspondent's front page report of 23rd. November titled "Heyday for robbers on bus" has terrified us. The bus was full with robbers disguised as passengers. The driver and the helper were also members of the gang. They robbed the other passengers during the 24-hour transport strike. They took away ATM cards of the passengers at gunpoint. The report makes it clear that this was done by urban and literate robbers, knowledgeable about ATM cards. Travellers now have to be aware of this new mode of robbing. The root cause of this incident is the dawn-to-dusk strike imposed by our indifferent political leaders. They only communicate with common people during election, which they avoid and boycott, when they are not sure of winning it.

S. A. Mansoor

Dhaka

My heart bleeds...

I'm a 17-year-old boy who has a lot of dreams of doing something good in life. Bangladesh is developing very well and I see a lot of hope among the people around me. But sadly, every time when I leave my home I think to myself, "What if I don't come back home in the same condition? What if today is my last day of life?"

Think of those people who died in the past couple of months. What was their fault? What could they have possibly done to deserve such gruesome deaths?

Tanveer Ahmed Fahim

Mastermind School, Dhanmondi

Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Child loses 5 fingers," published on December 4, 2013

Snr Citizen

Whether Lima gets well fully or not, we shall soon forget her like many others we have already forgotten. Will any of the parties come forward to ensure rehabilitation of Lima? Let us hope someone will.

Ashraf Ali

Very shocking for the innocent girl. I feel deep sympathy for her and her family.

Nds

In our democracy, the only loser is the common people. You will not find a single so-called democratic leader in the burn unit of DMCH.

Truthprevails53

Thanks to Jamaat-Shibir backed by BNP!

Jakaria Bulbul

Those soft little fingers could be the weapon to build a developed nation. This kind of violence is not only killing people but also threatening to cripple our future generation.

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"Ershad back-flips" (December 4, 2013)

Abul Kashem

In thousand years' history, this is the most unpredictable character known to us. Both the parties (AL and JP) are playing with one another with dirtiest tricks.

Aasfisarwar

I think he will flip flop again. A true national bufoon indeed! However, if he can stick to his decision for about a week, he can do a great service to the nation, because AL will have to recalculate their evil game plan. Time is running out!

Jafar Iqbal

It's just a bargaining trick of the ex-dictator to collect the rest of the payment from the new dictator.

Faisal

He hasn't back flipped. At his age, memory lapse is not uncommon.

Vikram Khan

The blessings of Hefajat did not work after all...

Rezaul Karim

Ershad should know it better that there is an end to everything. I hope this is last flip-flop. Be with the people, they will save you and if you go against them again, only Allah knows what will happen.

An Observer

Don't worry, he can change his mind again if he finds it convenient to take part in the election or if he realises that AL will come to power again.