

Justice after forty-two years

Genocide perpetrators answer to history

THE wheels of justice have turned full circle. One of the cohorts of the Pakistan occupation army, a collaborator in their crimes and nine-months of brutality in Bangladesh in 1971, and himself a perpetrator, met his deserved fate. It would be some solace to the relatives of the victims to see that justice will have been done, albeit delayed.

With the hanging of Quader Mollah the trial of one of the accused in the crimes against humanity will have run its full course. In what was one of the most transparent and open trials, where the accused was given all the facilities to defend himself, something he did not accord to his many victims, and where all the legal procedures provided in the Constitution, including appeal, were made available to him, the sentence of death was awarded by the highest court of the country. That will, we hope, answer the critics and detractors of the trial about the clarity of the entire process.

We congratulate Sheikh Hasina and her government for not only starting the trial after long 40 years of the commission of the crimes but also executing the final verdict of the court in one instance; that, notwithstanding the dubious attempts by some quarters to malign the trial and make it controversial.

It was the aspiration of the people to see that the war criminals are given the highest punishment, and it would be unfair to the many victims of these criminals and to the martyred freedom fighters to see the execution as a revenge or retribution.

Jamaat's deliberate violence

It may boomerang on BNP

TAKing advantage of blockades and hartals as part of the opposition alliance enforced agitation programme for a non-party and neutral polls-time government, Jamaat, an alliance partner, is wreaking havoc on public life with unprecedented violence across the country. Evidently, Jammaat-inflicted violence is deliberate and is designed to produce a stronger reaction from the government.

We condemn such mindless violence that over the past two weeks has claimed around 59 innocent lives, caused injuries to some 250 persons and inflicted incalculable collateral damage to public and private properties.

Two issues are involved here that must be delineated. First, the political one, which centres around the question of caretaker government (CTG), or more specifically, of how the next general election could be held in an inclusive manner where a level playing field is created enabling all parties to participate. Obviously, as a partner of the BNP-led opposition alliance, Jamaat has also its stake in this issue.

The other no less important an issue is the trial of the war criminals of 1971. But the violence being perpetrated by Jamaat to stymie the prosecution of the war criminals has no connection whatsoever with the ongoing movement on caretaker government issue. Jamaat is, in fact, exploiting CTG issue to protect its own vested interests related to the war crimes.

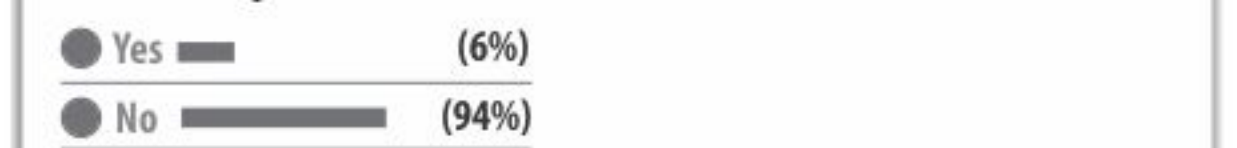
Even though the fact that Jamaat is in a political alliance with the BNP is understandable, yet will or should BNP own all the barbarity being committed by Jamaat? Does BNP endorse Jamaat's position on war crimes? Violence enacted by Jamaat won't serve BNP any good; rather it may boomerang on its political cause.

What people think

Friday: December 5, 2013
Do you think FBCCI will succeed in convincing political parties to leave the path of violence?



Saturday: December 6, 2013
Do you think major political parties are sincere to solve the political crisis?



Sunday: December 7, 2013
Do you think there is still hope for an all-inclusive national election?



Monday: December 8, 2013
Do you think the international pressure to hold dialogue between the two big parties will have any impact?



Tuesday: December 9, 2013
Do you think deferring the polls date will help political parties come to a solution?



Wednesday: December 10, 2013
Do you agree with Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad that the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from her post is the only way to resolve the present political stalemate?

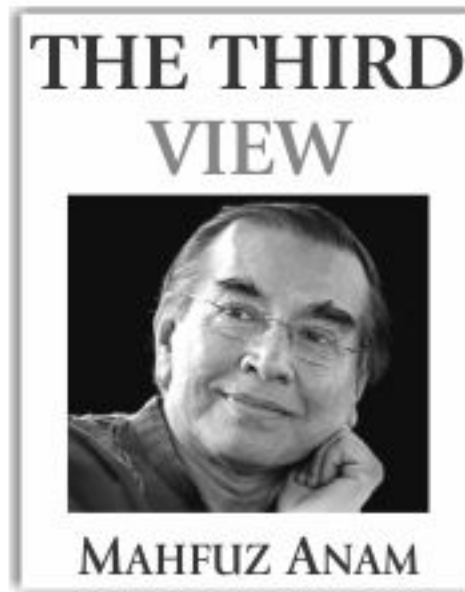


Thursday: December 11, 2013
Do you agree the government has failed to give protection to the witnesses of the war crimes trial?



Ha! Ha! We fooled the UN

We actually have fooled ourselves



MAHFUZ ANAM

poist and endless cajoling to find out the hard way that ours was a much harder "political nut" to crack.

He was sincere, earnest and full of energy with of course his disarming smile all along. But this veteran of many negotiations never faced a bunch of political leaders so myopic, shortsighted and self-defeating.

The UN Special Envoy's biggest 'success' (for this word can only be used within inverted commas) has been that he was able to make the second tier leaders of AL and BNP sit together across the table. Considering the fact that this has never happened in the last two decades one can credit Mr. Taranco with performing a miracle of sorts. But as the saying goes:

"You can bring the camel to the water but you cannot force it to drink." You may somehow persuade our leaders -- and it takes the likes of the UN to do that -- to sit face to face but you cannot force them to talk sense.

That is exactly what had happened. They met, they regurgitated their hackneyed stances, they accused each other of weakening democracy, and then they left -- not forgetting to thank the hosts profusely -- promising to meet again, we have no doubt, to do the same again.

We want to shame our politicians by reminding them that 300 killed in the last few months, continuous, painful and heart rending deaths of burn victims, destructive hartals and crores of takas worth of property destruction did not motivate them to sit for talks. Persuasion of the UN did. Now that the UN Envoy has left, where are the talks going to head? Is there any chance of an understanding?

As we understand, the talks are stalled where they have been ever since 2011. The AL wants to hold the election under their leader's government, while BNP wants it under the, now abolished, CTG. AL is unwilling to re-amend the constitution to bring the CTG back and the BNP is unwilling to trust the incumbent to hold a free and fair election.

As far as we can understand AL is bent on going forward with the election regardless whether BNP comes to the election or not.

The plan appears to be that the election process itself will put severe strain on BNP as a party as many local leaders, given AL's unpopularity, felt confident of winning. These local leaders differed with the central leadership on



the decision to boycott and believe that giving a walkover to the AL constitutes a blunder. These leaders are very unhappy and, AL feels, will lose interest once the election is held. Some of them may even be persuaded to shift allegiance when the new government comes into place. The majority will lose interest or cease to be active, AL believes.

If, however, the BNP is able to weather this storm and maintain its unity then the new government -- with however tenuous and controversial a mandate -- will be able to force forward its activities even if there is resistance from the opposition.

Here AL's calculation is that the legitimacy of the elections and the full force of state power will see them through. In case the opposition is able to mount a serious threat then the government will go for a snap election after a period, hopefully two years. By then, the AL logic is, the government will be able to implement many useful and popular projects, and also the present memories of its failure will become distant, which will give them a special edge in the snap polls.

Contrarily, the BNP is well aware of all this and, as can be expected, hell bent to spoil this game plan of the ruling party. BNP and Jamaat are determined not to allow the AL to hold the elections. They have already indulged in the most violent, cruel and destructive political agitation that Bangladesh has rarely seen. It is now expected that they will up the ante and push things towards further destructive confrontation.

Given this background, it is no wonder the UN brokered talks went the way it did. We have been told that both sides have agreed to continue the dialogue which is unlikely to produce any breakthrough.

Thus these two parties are now set for a massive showdown which is likely to be a no-holds barred contest of street power, which is most likely to further disrupt normal life and cause greater damage to the economy.

Both parties still don't seem to be fully aware of the cost of the political unrest. People dying, getting burnt alive, children being killed, shops being destroyed -- all seem to have become a part of a game being played by the two sides.

However, what is not being fully understood is the cost to the economy. One needs only to talk to any serious businessman to find out the state of our economy, the threats it is confronting and risk of losing markets that we are encountering -- all of which are grave.

So while we have may have fooled Mr. Taranco and played the "Dialogue-Dialogue" game with him, we have actually fooled ourselves in not recognising the real, present and serious danger that the country is facing.

The writer is Editor and Publisher, The Daily Star.

Plus one, not minus two



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

need of the hour. Instead of faltering to banish two politicians, we should focus on finding a new one.

Indeed, the Minus Two formula has been a waste of time. Politics in a democracy is always at its best in the natural state, because manipulation brings distortions. The Minus Two postulation was a preemptive strike seven some years ago, when a leadership change was contemplated before devising functional succession. The result has been an atrocious disaster.

That experience has taught us that political problems should have political solutions. A leadership crisis can't be resolved unless a competent leader is identified first. But it's important to know what makes such a leader before we go scouting for one.

It's not bloodline, foreign education, bank balance or glib tongue that should underscore a person's ability to lead. A true leader needs three things to start with, which are character, courage and conviction. One may be impressive because he or she is a charmer. One may be knowledgeable because he or she is learned. One may even be convincing because he or she is articulate and rational.

But all of these can make one either a good actor or a scholar or an orator. These are the necessary conditions of leadership, but not its sufficient conditions. A leader should have two things more than either one of these professionals. Like icing on the cake, this person must have vision and wisdom.

This nation needs to do a collective search to find someone who fits the bill. Popularity isn't the true test of leadership since a gang leader is immensely popular amongst his minions. So is a holy man amongst his devotees, a singer amongst his admirers and an actor amongst his fans.

A national leader is when the whole is greater than the

THE golden rule of algebra is that what you do to one side of the equation is what you must also do to the other. It must have been the spirit of this axiom that once drove us to the Minus Two formula. Removing two top leaders of two political parties was considered necessary to strike a political equilibrium. Here's another axiom that should work better. Two minuses make one plus, which is our sum of its parts. That means a leader is someone who at once can be an actor, a scholar and an orator, but the total person must have the combined effect of someone larger than life. In our case individuals are inadequate in their respective roles. So, anyone who must combine all of those roles in him also has to carry the cumulative effects of their shortcomings. It's not surprising that our politicians appear dismally deficient in human qualities when compared with ordinary citizens.

This is the crux of the crisis. Larger-than-life roles have been thrust upon Lilliputian minds. It's never going to work if one Lilliput is replaced by another. Our current political gloom can't give us the light at the end of the tunnel unless we can find a giant amongst us. Petty politicians have, contrarily, given us a tunnel after they snatched the light.

Where do we look for such a giant? Can we find him or her in the midst of this despair? Where should we start the search?

In the turbulent years of the 1960s in the United States, the Free Speech Movement at University of California, Berkeley tried to galvanise students over the right to engage in political speech on campus. Free Speech activist Jack Weinberg had urged students not to trust anyone over 30. Does that give us a cut-off line for the search? Should we look for someone young because the older generation isn't to be trusted anymore?

Rightly or wrongly the older generation is still living in the past, their minds trapped in a time warp. These people have mastered the art of hypocrisy, exploiting public function as an opportunity to aggrandise private fortune. They're also responsible for the dubious double speak in politics, blurring the line between truth and fiction.

Like an antidote to a virus, we need a leader to save us. It's unfortunate we haven't yet found one decisive leader in a divisive country of 160 million. No need for a smooth talker or a telegenic face or a master of evasive answers. No need for a charismatic leader with maniacal manners. No need for an ambitious person with lofty pedigree or hefty credentials.

Let's start with the basic. We need a man of character, and then build on him with courage, conviction, vision and wisdom. He has to be selfless not self-seeking, profound not pretentious, gumpitious not greedy, one who'll know how to seize the opportunity without being opportunistic. He's our only hope for the plus, others doomed to give us the minus.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Road-rail vehicles to protect railway

I was saddened to see the recent violence against innocent people and destructive activities on railway. The government should take immediate steps to enhance the security of railway passengers and protect railway properties. A very simple scientific, engineering plan can solve this. This can be done with minimum amount of time and cost.

A truck/jeep or similar motor vehicle should be converted into "road-rail vehicles" by mounting them 'on two sets of rail wheels and a transformed chassis. Rail wheels from "CJ type goods-carriage" can be used. The transformed road-rail vehicles can be driven on the rail-tracks at a speed of 45-50 miles/hour. The trucks can be used to check the status of railway tracks and related systems. The railway police officers will be able to ride these vehicles to check the railroad track several minutes before a train passes the track. Engineers from BUET, similar universities or Bangladesh Railway's workshops can help to design and produce such vehicles in large quantities.

Jamal Uddin, Ph.D
Rochester Hills, Michigan, USA

Now cricket is the victim of our politics

It is really a matter of shame that the West Indies Under-19 team has been withdrawn from Bangladesh due to safety concerns just three months before the T-20 World Cup. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials tried to make an effort to persuade the team to stay as the security forces of Bangladesh also ensured them top level security. But they felt insecure due to political unrest across the country such as bomb blasting, blockades, etc.

Isn't this situation tarnishing our image? Now the next cricket series can also come under threat. What if Sri Lanka doesn't visit us or ICC takes away the T20 World Cup tournament to somewhere else? Aren't we going to have the same fate as Pakistan has?

Md. Arshad Ali
Mohakhali, Dhaka

Well done, Khaleda Zia!

The front page news report of an Indian daily published on 7th. December has very clearly proved the great success (!) of strikes and blockades imposed by the opposition leader Khaleda Zia. Her excellent effort over the days has succeeded for the first time in Bangladesh in losing garment export orders to India, as US imports are being diverted from Bangladesh.

Khaleda Zia is the real friend of the Indian businessmen. Well done Khaleda Zia! Carry on and lead us to the destruction of our industry.

A BNP supporter
On e-mail

Mandela's wise words

Hats off to Mr. Mahfuz Anam. I have read and re-read the quotable quotes of the great leader of the world. "Wise words from Mandela" published in TDS on December 7 was a very timely reproduction of his 1997 statement. Will our political leaders reminisce and follow his advice for the sake of our nation?

A F Rahman
On e-mail

Are we a hopeless lot?

Need for external examiners in public universities and caretaker government to hold national elections provide clear evidence that we don't trust each other. Perhaps we are the only nation in the world where a teacher doesn't trust another teacher; one person does not trust another person; and political parties don't have minimum trust and respect for each other. There is a saying that 'an extraordinary situation demands an extraordinary measure.' It applies for Bangladesh well.

Dr. Kamrul Hassan
Professor
Department of Physics
Dhaka University

Comments on news report, "No good news yet," published on December 10, 2013

Zman7
Violence—such as hurling petrol-bombs at packed public buses to burn and kill innocent passengers, arson attacks on train or uprooting rail lines knowing that innocent passengers will be burned or killed—is not acceptable.

OpeeMonir
Everything is acceptable in this country. Are we not witnessing that? Are we not witnessing how the whole system is being paralysed? Where are those student politicians from Dhaka University and the rest of those glorious universities who were on the street to save the nation? This is a perfect example of how student politics was undermined in a calculated manner.

Mohammed Ismail
We never get any political good news from our bad leaders.