

## Observing the Victory Day

*Renewal of spirit on a resolute note*

**A** S we embark on the 43rd year since achieving our national independence we are reminiscent of our finest hour of freedom wrested from implacable enemy hands. Much as we celebrate the occasion we solemnly express our gratitude to the countless we have been indebted to.

We have achieved a good deal in terms of socio-economic indicators, in the textile sector, in respect of empowerment of women, in primary and secondary education and, above all, earned an appellation as a 'model of development' among the LDCs.

Unfortunately, however, we are also having to contend with some inimical forces arrayed against the core values of our Liberation War. In this context, the AL government can be credited with having conducted War Crimes Trials, handing out convictions to those who committed crimes against humanity in 1971 (awaiting completion of legal processes) and carrying out maximum punishment against Quader Mollah.

We fondly remember Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his able lieutenants -- Tajuddin Ahmad, Syed Nazrul Islam, Captain Mansur Ali and Kamruzzaman -- who led us to freedom. We also recall the cooperation of the people and the government of India led by Indira Gandhi who stood by us in our desperate hour of need. Their soldiers' blood was mixed with our soil. We are grateful to numerous foreign friends of Bangladesh, international media and cultural icons.

But when the land of possibilities is pitted against suffocating and fiercely violent politics of egotism and expediency in which partisan agendas override national interest, we are left frustrated and exasperated. We must come out on the other side of the dark tunnel we find ourselves in.

## Flight of capital

*Another cause for concern*

**T**HE rate of financial outflow from Bangladesh to other countries has risen by no less than 28 percent. A news report published in daily Prothom Alo reveals this referring to a research report, recently published by the Washington based research institute GFI (Global Financial Integrity). However, flight of capital is not a new phenomenon as much as this is prevalent in other countries. But it's the steep rise in the rate of illicit flow from Bangladesh that concerns us. According to GFI's recent findings some Tk.1 Lakh 28 thousand and Tk.616 crore was whisked away between 2002 and 2011 from Bangladesh. As a consequence, in the list of 150 developing nations Bangladesh stands 47th in terms of flight of capital including money laundering. Moreover, the position is even dreadful among the south Asian countries -- Bangladesh stands second.

The massive sums of fleeing capital must strictly be regulated and stopped. According to banking experts it is the politically tense situations, and the last year of an elected government when bulk of the capital outflow takes place. Reportedly, politicians and the politically blessed business men are mainly responsible for shifting huge sums of their capital out of the country.

The flight of capital induced by weaknesses of our financial monitoring and regulatory agencies reflect adversely on the state of financial governance. This together with political violence and business insecurity contributes to the phenomenon.

## Brand Bangladesh

SHAHIN AHMED

**B**ANGLADESHI politics is once again at a crossroads. In recent months the situation has taken a violent turn as the opposition organised several *hartsals* which led to death and destruction, and has threatened more in the coming days. The human cost of the violence is rising rapidly. The government, on the other hand, has used excessive force to quell the opposition and resorted to the persecution of opposition leaders. Violence and uncertainty will contribute to economic disparity and may be a cause of radicalisation in the future.

While the volatile political environment has frequently drawn the attention of the world's media to Bangladesh, we should not lose sight of the fact the country has also produced a development success story; both in terms of economic growth and social indicators. Increased mobility of both people and businesses, and growth in the tourism industry, have contributed to the rise of place marketing. Cities, states, regions, and countries are now actively promoted with the help of modern communication tools, advertising and the media.

Bangladesh has gained a reputation as a market for cheap labour as well as a paragon of natural beauty. We Bangladeshi are also known for our hospitality. Here, a buyer can enjoy both facilities. But the recent political turmoil and vandalism have tarnished this image.

If we fail to keep our promises then buyers will lose their trust and Brand Bangladesh will suffer. The present political crisis in Bangladesh can be turned into an opportunity to build a stable, democratic and prosperous country. Economic and social achievements of recent decades show that the citizens are capable of taking steps in the right direction. It is time for our political leaders to take the right decisions -- hold an inclusive election, agree on post-election tolerant behaviour, rein-in extremism, and commit to regional peace.

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### KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

# What a gift on Victory Day!

**W**E are witnessing something unprecedented and unheard of in the electoral history of Bangladesh. In absence of any challenger from opposition parties, some 151 candidates from Awami League-led ruling alliance are going to be elected without having to test their popularity at the polling booths.

A look at the past Jatiya Sangsad (JS) polls will show how the ruling combine candidates have this time set a virtually unbeatable record by winning unopposed from so many constituencies in the 10th Jatiya Sangsad (JS) election. Faced with this staggering total of 151 uncontested winners in the 10th JS poll, similar record holders (some 49) of the infamous February election of 1996 held under the then-ruling BNP would rather hide their face in shame. And not to speak of Ershad's 1988 election with 18 candidates going unopposed.

To think that these would-be lawmakers are going to

represent more than fifty per cent of the voting public, who did not get a chance to exercise their voting right. What should we call this strange electoral phenomenon? If this is not farce in the name of election, then what is? Being true to the electoral rules, even if we have to accept this ridiculous development of so many candidates getting elected unopposed, what cannot still be reconciled with is the fact that the voters of the constituencies concerned have been taken for a ride. Have not all these voters of the constituencies concerned been disenfranchised in the name of an election?

And this travesty of an election has been made possible thanks to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's obsession with the recently amended version (15th Amendment) of the constitution that scrapped the previous provision of the caretaker system of government (CTG) to conduct national election. And the irony is that, from the very beginning, she was aware that the opposition would not agree to participate in any election without the provision of the CTG in place. Neither was there a serious effort on her part to reach out to the opposition and sort out their differences on the nature of the election-time government.

So, it could not have been surprising for her to foresee what is going to happen in an election boycotted by the main opposition.

But then why did she allow this to happen? And what has she gained by this sham of an election, other than making a fool not only of herself, but of the whole nation?

Such ridiculous turn of events in the run-up to the 10th Jatiya Sangsad election notwithstanding, the PM does not seem to have been perturbed even a little, rather she is still harping on the same old narrative about her constitutional obligations, on the one hand, while complaining about what she thinks the opposition BNP's perversity of not responding to her call to join the 'all-party polls-time government' she has formed instead, on the other.

And all this has happened in the morrow of the last date for withdrawing candidacy some three weeks before the date of actual election slated to be held on January 5, 2014. With this pre-polls result in hand, what will be left of significance, if any, of the election for remaining constituencies? Given the prevailing situation of all-out anarchy and violence across the country related to blockades and hartals enforced by the opposition BNP-led 18-party alliance, there is little prospect of any substantial turnout of voters on January 5.

The PM may be happy to think that she will soon be presenting the nation with the 10th parliament! If at all, will it be an elected one in the truest sense of the term?

If anything, it will be an apology for a parliament, a creature to suit her own whims! Under any circumstances, it won't at least serve democracy.

If truth be told, from the outset the PM's handling of issues from its dealing with the opposition to her own alliance partner Ershad-led Jatiya Party has been a big mess. The way Ershad's Jatiya Party left her only exposed an uneasy calm existing in the AL-led alliance. But then why was it necessary to resort to arm-twisting of Ershad by confining him in hospital to force allegiance from him? All this has gone only to taint whatever image she could lay claim to!

And the worst part of the entire episode is the deplorable role played by the Election Commission. On the pretext of constitutional limitations, the chief election commissioner has failed the nation. Whereas he could have set a glorious example of independence by creating an encouraging environment for the opposition to join the polls, he has only played second fiddle to the government by weakening EC through taking various wrong steps to the announcement of the election schedule itself. He cannot also shrug off his responsibility in the whole mess-up created over the election.

We are dwelling on such a shameful travesty of our parliamentary election and democracy when we are celebrating the 42nd anniversary of Bangladesh's victory against Pakistani occupation forces. How can we reconcile this with the sublime moment of history?

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## AL-BNP dialogue: A tour d'horizon!

### SUNDAY POUCH



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

**A**WAMI League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) have met three times in the course of the last two weeks to try to see if they could arrive at a consensus on the election time government. At the moment, an interim government is in place consisting of representatives from smaller parties. The BNP wants a non-political government to take charge of things. What the two parties are talking inside the UN compound is still pure conjecture. The press is not privy to the issues under discussion and

whether real progress, if any, has been made. The statements made at the end of each of the sessions speak of hope, possibilities and progress. But public perception remains that what has been done so far is *bakwas* (idle talk). Adherents of both the parties sincerely believe that nothing substantive is yet to emerge. In the end it will be the two leaders, Prime Minister Hasina and leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia who will have the last say. They are unlikely to budge from their publicly stated positions.

So are we to suffer more weeks of political turbulence, violence and uncertainty?

Maybe so. But the senior leaders could have done better. They could have suggested ways out of the present political imbroglio. What they should have done is to devote more time to solutions rather than to state their positions. BNP has said that it wants all its workers and leaders arrested on political grounds to be released. The elections scheduled on January 5 postponed to keep the talks going, as well as to allow it to organise political activities at its central and unit offices throughout the country. It also wants a level playing field for all parties to participate. AL on the other hand wants BNP to stop the destructive programmes like *hartsal* and blockade, give up its demand for a caretaker government and accept the constitutional guidelines on the formation of a poll time government. AL also wants BNP to sever all ties with the Jamaat-e-Islami.

There are several barriers in any negotiations. They include, first, the presence of diehard bargainers. These people will blindly toe the line of their leaders. They will remain inflexible. They will take up irreconcilable positions because the top leaders of the two parties lack trust in each other. This puts the whole outcome of the talks under a question mark. Finally, there are spoilers who are present in large numbers behind the scene. It is such people who have in many critical negotiations scuttled progress. The power of successful negotiations has been infrequently tested here. Hence the predicament of the negotiators.

However, several tactics can be used to overcome most of these barriers to a successful outcome of the talks. These include deciding on strategy. This consists of the top level goals -- whether it is relationship and/or the final outcome.

It is not clear whether AL or BNP is battling for the large possible piece of the pie. In that case the opposite side becomes an adversary rather than a potential partner in resolving the outstanding issues. A good agreement arrived at is not one with maximum gain but with optimum gain. However, this does not suggest that any one of the parties should give up its own advantage.

BNP has lot of people's support for a caretaker government. The party knows it too well. Against this is the sketchy support to AL's action for an interim government to conduct the elections. So if BNP does not act as a spoiler it should suggest concrete measures by which elections could be free, fair and inclusive. It will then get what it always wanted. What if it is not called a caretaker government? BNP can request the UN and the international community to be a co-guarantor with the government to ensure fair elections. AL should have no objections. It, in no way, compromises on its negotiating position. However, great responsibility devolves on AL to see that an election that is fair and peaceful takes place. BNP can place some preconditions before it allows AL to conduct elec-



tions under the interim government.

Dialogue is always a learning process for both the parties. It is also a process of unlearning. But the extraordinary thing about negotiations is that in the end it is a re-learning process. Have BNP or AL ever considered this? They would not know how much flexibility they can demonstrate if they embrace the negotiations in this light.

Emotions have always played an important part in any negotiations. BNP, through its support of the concept of a caretaker government, definitely has a moral upper hand. It should show less contentious attitude and demonstrate less aggressive behaviour. It should take to more cooperative strategies. It should be able to take the lead in achieving instrumental goals. It should initiate flexible thinking and creative problem solving. BNP needs to show respect for other's perspectives and the willingness to take risks.

We are still not sure of any such positive developments. However, the people are still hoping against hope. So are the two top leaders. But since they have never in their long political careers engaged in such dialogue the tactics for a successful outcome are not known to them. They have always got their way through political agitations and movements. Such sort of negotiations is unknown territory.

Can the United Nations still help?

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## LETTERS

### TO THE EDITOR

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#### 'War crimes, Kerry & history'

This is written in response to the news analysis, "War crimes, Kerry & history," published on December 12, 2013 and authored by Syed Badrul Ahsan. I completely agree with his analysis. Mr. Ahsan could have mentioned that Mr. Kerry and his foreign policy advisors should have read a book recently published by Dr. Gary J. Bass of Princeton University, U.S.A. The title of the book is "The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide." Using previously unheard White House tapes, and recently declassified documents, and along with many interviews with the White House staffers and Indian military personnel, Dr. Bass correctly accounted the genocide inflicted on the helpless people of Bangladesh in 1971 as witnessed and recorded by Mr. Archer Blood in his countless telegrams.

I knew Mr. Archer Blood. We discussed the genocide in Bangladesh while he was alive and living in Fort Collins, Colorado. We both witnessed it; he tried to stop it, but was silenced by the higher ups in the US Administration at that time. Mr. Kerry, I am sure is aware of the genocide perpetrated by the Pakistani soldiers and the Jamaat-e-Islami followers, and yet he tries to stop a nation that tries to bring to justice the perpetrators of the heinous crimes inflicted on millions. No one stopped the US when it brought Nazi war criminals to justice at the Trial of Nuremberg nor do I see anyone in the US administration making any fuss when Israelis try to bring to justice, and rightly so, the people who committed genocide against the Jewish people in Europe. Rules and policies should apply equally to all nations.

**M Nazmul Karim, PhD**  
Professor and Head  
Texas A&M University

#### 'Love your enemies'

Three days of national mourning were declared in Bangladesh for Mandela. Good and appropriate. In the Injin (Matthew 5:44), Jesus taught "love your enemies." Nelson Mandela applied this at the national level and South Africa was transformed. What if the political leaders of Bangladesh did not merely mourn for Mandela but also made a sincere attempt to honour him by following his example? Could not Bangladesh also be transformed if its political leaders were to practice "love your enemies?"

**Scott Elliott**  
Texas, USA  
Currently living and working in Bangladesh

#### Are we becoming another Pakistan?

It is sad and frustrating that opposition's insane activities is taking the country towards the path of Pakistan. We have seen many a political agitation but none was like this. In the name of peaceful blockade, they are just killing innocent people, derailing trains and burning vehicles. They are pushing the country towards uncertainty. Isn't the same thing happening in Pakistan?

**Kabir Hossain Taposh**  
Banani, Dhaka

#### Comments on news report, "Butcher of Mirpur hanged," published on December 13, 2013

**MH Khan**  
Shabash Bangladesh! Long live the spirit of justice.

#### Rashid

I would have been happy to see the real Razakars hanged who committed heinous crimes during 1971.

#### Salahuddin Khan

Politically motivated judgment and execution of political opponents has become the state policy of Hasina government.

#### Numan Abdulla

It has definitely nothing to do with Islam. Rather the brutal killings were against the guidance of Islam.

#### Zman7

"Islam loving Bengali Muslims" will ultimately come to a conclusion that God wanted him in that way to make the family members of those martyrs of 1971 happy.

#### Abul Hashem

Finally Quader Mollah had to pay for his actions.

#### Rk

Justice prevailed finally.

#### Delwar Hussain

How do you confirm that justice had prevailed finally and no injustice was done to the so-called Butcher of Mirpur?

#### Poy

And yet people think that he was unjustifiably killed.

#### MistiKotha

When will the rest of the butchers hiding in AL be hanged?

#### Naeem

A judicial killing. Shameful indeed!

#### Fabiha

He deserved to be hanged and he should have been grateful that he wasn't killed the way he and his gang killed so many innocent people.

#### Rashid

Looks like you are convinced with the story. Real Kosha Kader -- the Bihar butcher who committed these crimes -- was killed right after Liberation. Quader Mollah is a scapegoat! Some