

# Blockades extract a heavy cost

*Hold talks until a solution is reached*

WITH the imposition of the 72-hour blockade, the opposition has thrown public life into yet another dreadful spell of chaos, death and destruction. We are aghast and outraged at the damage the blockade has been doing to the economy, business, education, and communication infrastructures of the country.

Let's face it. These blockade-hartal programmes, as part of the opposition's demands, have not, so far left any visible impact on the government, to which they are aimed at. It's, therefore, time, the opposition realised the futility of continuing with such virulent time-worn political programme. The government should also be able to see that it is no less responsible for the havoc thus wrought on life and economy, if only for its unwillingness born of stubbornness not to listen to any of the opposition's demands on the conduct of the election. They both must be wiser by now and should look for the sole alternative left which is the path of dialogue to end the insufferable impasse. And for that to happen, either side should be ready to make concessions.

For both the sides to meet each other halfway, they may follow up on the moot points emerging at the discussions initiated at the level of general secretaries of the two parties, thanks to heralding of the process by the UN envoy, Oscar Fernandez Taranco.

To create the right atmosphere for the talks, the government should release the detained opposition leaders, while the opposition must withdraw the blockades and hartals. The bottom line is neither side should disengage from the dialogue until it is brought to fruition.

# Under-aged domestic workers

*It's a child rights issue*

BANGLADESH has an estimated 20 lakh children domestic workers. Some of the employers of these children may be part of the policy making body for the labour ministry, which has left out children domestic work from the 38 very risky jobs for children.

Their job description ranges from doing small shopping for the household to baby sitting and helping in the kitchen. They are often left alone at home, some of them locked from outside for security -- not security for the child worker but to protect the possessions of the employer.

There are risks in these situations, from fire hazards to kitchen related accidents. But no one is willing to recognise these risks because of the convenience they receive from child workers. Children are cheaper to hire than adult workers, they are easily disciplined and hold almost no voice for themselves. And our educated middle class is willing to look away from these small and big everyday violations of theirs by often giving the excuse that these children are getting a better life than they would otherwise in their village homes.

In the international standard child labour is of course a big 'no,' and we have a long way to go before complying with that standard. And the fact that our policy does not consider children domestic work as a risky job shows how far behind we are from the civilised standards of human rights.

# Agrochemical products and health hazards

ABDUL MATIN

ACCORDING to BBC news (December 13, 2013), the "UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has been blamed for the spread of a kidney disease which affected nearly half a million people in Sri Lanka. Scientists believe the illness is caused by pesticides and fertilizers. The FAO is accused by campaigners of encouraging the use of agrochemicals on behalf of multinational companies." An FAO official, however, denied the charges.

A recent study by Sri Lankan and foreign scientists concluded that "excessive use of pesticides and fertilisers using toxic metals - cadmium and arsenic - was the main cause." Cadmium, if ingested with food, accumulates in kidneys where it damages filtering mechanisms. It is reported that the Sri Lankan government has already banned three major imported agrochemical products.

According to the National Institute of Kidney Diseases, there are nearly 20 million people suffering from various kidney and urological problems in Bangladesh and every year 15-20 thousand patients develop acute renal failure. In Bangladesh, pesticides and fertilizers are being used indiscriminately. We should investigate the causes of high prevalence of kidney diseases in Bangladesh and immediately stop the use of the pesticides and fertilizers which have been banned in Sri Lanka.

Arsenic in ground water is already a major health concern in our country. We have the highest percentage of arsenic contaminated shallow tube wells and estimated 30 million people use water from those wells for domestic purposes. Arsenic has already entered our food chain through use of arsenic contaminated water for cultivation of rice in some regions. Nearly 40,000 people with skin diseases caused by arsenic ingestion have been identified in Bangladesh.

Our markets are flooded with calcium carbide and formalin treated food items. Calcium carbide is used as a ripening agent and formalin as a preservative. Formalin is toxic, allergenic and carcinogenic. If ingested, 30 mL of formalin containing 37% of formaldehyde can cause death to an adult human. If inhaled at concentrations above 0.1 ppm, formaldehyde can cause eye and nasal irritations, headache, difficulty in breathing and asthma. Industrial grade calcium carbide contains arsenic and phosphorous which are harmful to human health. Calcium carbide can cause both cancer and neurological disorders.

The data on kidney diseases in Bangladesh indicates that it is already a major killer disease. Unless we stop the use or misuse of harmful agrochemical products, calcium carbide and formalin, the crisis is likely to intensify further involving other forms of diseases and soon turn into a catastrophe.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

## GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

organization which now shows all the signs of turning into a terrorist outfit? The monopoly for ferocity, or so it appears, ought to be the Jamaat's alone. Its activists ought to have all the right in the world to wield machetes and hack away at people because these Awami people have the gall to ask that the Jamaat be dealt with severely over the murder and mayhem it has been engaged in for long.

These Jamaati men invoking history have done something else as well. The manner in which the joint forces have gone after Jamaat terrorists in Satkhira, they proclaim, beats even the record of the Pakistan occupation army in 1971. Ah, that's indeed a discovery! And it is surely very revealing. Perhaps unwittingly, the Jamaatis have let slip the truth that their friends the soldiers of Pakistan were indeed an occupation army whose record of brutality remains etched in millions of minds, including those that belong to the men of the Jamaat. You tend to wonder. If the Pakistani establishment, which of late has been vocal in condemning Bangladesh over the execution of the war criminal Abdul Quader Mollah, should now chance on the Jamaat's reference to the Pakistan army as an instance of historical brutality, how might it react?

While you mull over a possible response, on your part, to that query, do not forget that the Jamaat has friends in high places and in powerful countries. You have veteran journalists and smooth-tongued academics here at home whose obscene defence of the Jamaat, in the name of democracy, turns out to be revolting. One of these defenders of the Jamaat, a journalist, wonders if the Mollah who was hanged last week was actually the Mollah who committed all those crimes in occupied Bangladesh in 1971. The response to his bizarre inquiry comes from a caller right on that television talk show. She wonders when the day will come when such men, strutting around in the garb of false intellectuality, will be tried in Bangladesh for their dishonesty. She speaks for all of us.

And the powerful countries? There are the Americans, there are the Europeans, there are the Pakistanis, people who have come forth with that old question of human rights in the matter of a handling of the Jamaat. Mollah's execution, one of these powerful men had the audacity to suggest last week, could jeopardize the upcoming general elections in Bangladesh. It was a wrong message he was conveying to Bangladesh's prime minister. He should have been asking

# The Jamaat and the Pakistan army

CERTAIN Jamaat-e-Islami politicians have been speaking of history, in a rather intriguing way. The Awami League, they have warned, will be judged in the dock of history someday. And why will that happen? Well, the government has sent in its joint forces to neutralize the Jamaat-Shibir men who have been terrorizing people in Satkhira, hasn't it? That is an unpardonable sin. After all, why must the government or the ruling party have the temerity to go after the Jamaat, an

*There are times when democracy needs to be saved through pitiless action against those who perpetrate violence in the name of democracy.*

her what the government was doing about cracking down on an outfit which freely murders people who do not agree with its convoluted interpretation of politics, whose armed cadres have been terrifying Bangladesh's Hindus into leaving their hearths and homes in yet another demonstration of communal hate.

Diplomats from the European Union based in Dhaka did not think it proper to pay their respects to Bangladesh's freedom martyrs at the Savar national memorial on Victory Day. You certainly can't compel people to visit a place they don't want to, but there is something called diplomatic norms. If foreign diplomats are upset with the government of the host country for any reason, there are a good number of ways in which such displeasure can be expressed. In the present instance, the EU diplomats have not only snubbed the Bangladesh government but also attempted to humiliate the sovereign state of Bangladesh. Besides, by staying away from the national memorial, what message were they conveying and to whom? If their act leads to a subverting of our embattled democratic process, how will they explain the ramifications of their action? If their act emboldens the Jamaat into committing newer criminality, encourages the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in hardening its bellicosity, compels the ruling Awami League into adopting an even more harsh position on the question of elections, what might their response be?

Perhaps it is not quite relevant here, but here's an aside to explain the predicament the world's poorer nations are often prey to. Not long ago, a CNN anchor asked Zimbabwe's Robert

Mugabe if he didn't think, seeing that he had crossed eighty, the time had come for him to retire from politics. You may not like Mugabe for a whole treasury of reasons, but you salute him for the response he gave to that CNN

question: was he being asked that question because he was a black man? And if retirement and age were important, why didn't the anchor put that question to the reigning British monarch?

Come back to Bangladesh. There are two imperatives before us. The first is firm, ruthless action against those who have been engaged in violence and murder over the past many months. In Satkhira, in Nilphamari, indeed everywhere these men of terror have struck, the government must strike back harder. There are times when democracy needs to be saved through pitiless action against those who perpetrate violence in the name of democracy. And the second, of course, relates to the need for fair and credible elections in the country. When you have more than half of parliament elected without voting, it is not an election. The Awami League, having championed the cause of democracy in the Pakistan era and then led the War of Liberation, must not replicate the record set by General Ershad's Jatiyo Party in 1988 and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in February 1996.

Finally, as Bengalis, we have a daunting challenge before us. And that is to reclaim a country as we fashioned it in 1971 from the hands of the predators who have systematically sought to push it down the precipice.

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

# Renminbi rising?

ensure the renminbi's international success.

Given this, the Chinese government would have to implement decisive measures to encourage international traders and creditors to price their transactions in renminbi. Specifically, China would have to use its market power to promote pricing in renminbi for relevant manufactured exports and raw-material imports, and encourage renminbi denomination of foreign financial assets that China purchases (which the country's status as a net creditor should facilitate).

But there are serious pitfalls to avoid in this process. As the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 demonstrated, capital-account liberalization could lead to financial meltdowns -- a danger that opponents of internationalizing the renminbi often cite. But these risks do not outweigh the potential benefits of financial openness, and they can be minimized with effective monitoring and regulation, including requirements for large capital buffers and low leverage ratios, together with strong crisis-response mechanisms, like a resolution trust corporation.



In fact, effective financial-monitoring and prudential-regulation systems do not have to precede opening the capital account. On the contrary, developing and enacting financial regulation must be a gradual process, shaped by both existing knowledge and firsthand experience. After all, no financial market is either completely open or completely closed forever; the degree of openness at a given moment depends on policy choices.

The recent establishment of the Shanghai Free Trade Zone will allow for the emergence of an offshore international financial center that offers real-world training to China's regulators. This will give them the tools they need to recognize the signs of a developing crisis, defuse the threat, and efficiently handle the recapitalization and reorganization of failed financial institutions.

China's pursuit of an IVC and a 1-IFC city would serve not only its own interests. Allowing the renminbi to help meet global demand for international reserves and risk diversification would also strengthen global financial stability.

There is little time to waste in internationalizing the renminbi. Given the limited number of currencies that can serve as IVCs, the failure of the renminbi to achieve IVC status before, say, the Indian rupee, the Russian ruble, or the Brazilian real could mean that the renminbi is denied IVC status -- and that Shanghai fails to achieve 1-IFC status -- for generations, if not forever.

Wing Thyee Woo is Professor of Economics at the University of California, Davis, and at Fudan University, Shanghai, and Central University of Finance and Economics, Beijing. He is also Executive Director of the Penang Institute in Georgetown, Malaysia.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

## We need leadership that can meet present challenge

We Bangladeshis have fought for our language as well as our liberation. The traitors of the country must be punished for the atrocities they committed. It is our right to try them. Didn't the people they killed have the right to live? Didn't the 3 million innocent Bangalees have the right to live? Where were Human Rights then?

And does the U.S. sponsor BNP-Jamaat alliance? What happened to their so-called Anti-Islamist ideology? If BNP comes to power, extremism will follow, thanks to Jamaat. If AL comes to power, the country will see a civil war. We need new leaders. The world has changed and our political leaders must cope with the change. It's time to wake up.

Atish A. Huq  
On e-mail

## Another victory in the month of victory

We have achieved another victory in this month of victory with the execution of Qader Mollah. Nation has waited for 42 years. We never forgot for a moment the screams of Pallab, poetess Mehrunnesa, Abu taleb, a mother Ameena, Hazrat Ali and 344 other people who had been the victims of this butcher's cruelty. Perhaps 30 lac martyrs' souls could be consoled with his execution. But this is not the end, because we are still waiting to see the execution of other war criminals.

Aminul Islam Raz  
A student  
Bangladesh Agricultural University

## Have we lost our rebellious spirit?

A few days ago, 19 people got fatally burnt on a moving vehicle in the capital and some of them died. I don't understand what the government is doing. If it can't stop these miscreants, I think it's people's turn to take to street and wipe them out.

In 1971 our ancestors freed the country by fighting a bloody war. But now our rebellious spirit is dead. We can only roar on Facebook. But in reality we only think about ourselves. How can we become so selfish? How can we let this situation go on?

Jakaria Bulbul  
Dhaka University

## Comments on "Politics of killing must stop," published on December 15, 2013

Nrb

Hasina, Khaleda, or whoever else has a role in the political violence that claimed hundreds of lives should be put on trial. They must be held accountable for all the crimes and deaths. Crime is crime, whether it happened during the Liberation War or after.

Rezaul Karim

Good writing, but in your conclusion you said two things:

1. "The BNP must accept responsibility..."
2. "The govt. has responsibility...."

Why is that? The government has the responsibility to ensure safety and security of its citizens. They have failed and lost the moral authority to stay in power. Everyone knows they are the ones who have created this problem.

Aasfisarwar

We all agree that politics of killing must stop, but unfortunately it's just accelerating. The law enforcing agencies and the democratically elected autocratic government are making things difficult for us. One party rule, uncontested election and seat selection are signs of systematic destruction and we hope all sensible people will stand against it.

MH Khan

When any government fails to run the country responsibly it should resign. When any government fails to ensure safety of people and their properties, it should resign. That is the norm in civilised countries.

Kalu\_Mia

Violence has not only been created by Jamaat-Shibir activists. Police, RAB, BGB and Awami thugs have done the same also. It has been reported that police is firing on people from a point blank range. Police fired on the legs of Jamaat-Shibir activists in custody. Both the parties are equally involved in terrorism, none less than the other. Whatever you say Mr. Editor, bringing back a level playing field will require more than a year in Bangladesh.

Robi

The government in office is always responsible for keeping its citizens safe not others.

Ash C.

Let's not overlook whose ruthless and despotic actions to remain in power have resulted in such loss of human lives.