

# Biswajit killers get their comeuppance

Speed up legal process, implement the verdict

VICTIM Biswajit Das and his bereaved relations have finally seen justice with eight of the murderers getting death penalty, and 13 others to suffer life sentence. The Dhaka trial court that handed the judgement deserves plaudits for adjudicating the murder case to its desired conclusion in a year of its incidence. But given the monstrosity of the crime, the punishment handed does still look like as it were a slap on the wrist until it is carried out.

It may be recalled that during an opposition-enforced blockade in early December last year, the victim, a pedestrian and a tailor by vocation, was hunted down, mercilessly beaten and savagely butchered by a gang of BCL cadres from Jagannath University on the watch of members of on-duty police. Even though the video-footages from media reports left little doubt about the perpetrators' identities, yet apprehension of the culprits was made tricky by confusing statements of the ruling party leaders.

Now that law could finally taking its course, the challenge before the justice system will be to complete the legal process and implement the judgement in its letter and spirit and not allow it to slip through any loopholes of law or cracks in the system.

The process of law, however, won't end with the implementation of the sentence for those among the convicts already behind bars. The greater challenge lying before the law-enforcers will be to catch those still on the run and see to it that they may not escape justice.

## Secretariat wobbling

The uncertain interlude

IN Bangladesh, even under normal circumstances the pace of functioning of its civil service has been rather slow. And, now with the announcement of the election schedule on November 25 last and run-up to the election in to a messy gear the work at the secretariat is moving at a snail's pace.

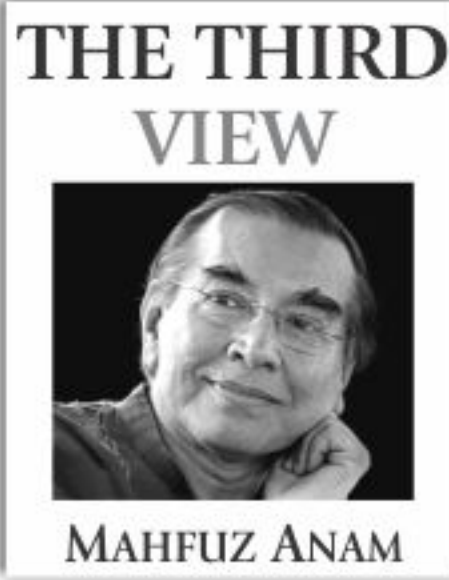
True, that during the tenure of an interim government there are certain limitations and restrictions in terms of decision making. Also true, that the psyche of the civil servants operating within the secretariat is tensed-up due to the current political situation. Even so these cannot be any rationale for the ongoing lethargic conduct of our civil servants.

Functioning of namely five ministries including food, home and land has been found to be the slowest of all times, according to media reports. A number of ministers and deputy ministers have been found repeatedly absent from their offices. Progress of majority of the development schemes has come to a halt with government employees enmeshed in trade of "postings". Heaps of files related to incomplete tasks have piled up within the offices of the secretariat. Most of the employees have been found gossiping among themselves rather than being at their desk.

These are ominous signs of a dysfunctional secretariat. Scenario as such is likely to impede the bureaucratic workflow drastically in the coming days too. We draw attention of the authorities at the upper echelons of the secretariat and all the ministries to take instant measures turning the secretariat in to a dynamic hub of governance.

# PM's gift: A voterless election

Fresh polls idea is positive but poll time government must be headed by someone acceptable to all



WE may recall this fabled message from a doctor to the patient's family, "Operation is very successful; however the patient died soon after."

The Awami League and Sheikh Hasina may think that 'operation election' has been (or is going to be) very successful. However will the parliament that it will deliver survive? Will the government that such a parliament will create have public support? Doesn't the PM run the risk of being stigmatised forever in history as the "Leader" of an un-elected House?

After several hundred years of democracy in the world, centuries old anti-colonial struggle for democracy in South Asia, twenty-four year struggle against Pakistan for our democratic rights, decade old struggle against military dictatorships and after 22 years of practicing democracy -- in however flawed a manner -- today we are forced to ask again what is democracy, what constitutes a democratic government and what are the rights of the people in a democracy?

And the reason for it is simple. Sheikh Hasina, her government and her party, have brought the situation to such a pass that we are forced to ask "are we living in democracy or in an elected 'dictatorship'?"

For, if we are living in democracy then aren't we supposed to have had a government which is our "servant" and not "master"? Are we not supposed to chose those who we want as our parliament members? Are we not entitled to express our WILL through a ballot? Are we not supposed to "elect" a government, through a vote?

If there is one single distinguishing feature between democracy and any all other forms of government, it is the right of every single voter in the country to vote freely. However, in the present elections voters have not been allowed to vote at all, leave alone freely.

As of today 154 candidates have become MPs without receiving a single vote. Which means out of 9.19 crore voters, approximately 5 crore have been totally deprived of their voting rights. For the remaining 146 seats the so-called election will be a total sham because those who will contest the AL candidates have never been known to get more than a few thousand votes leave alone win any election. So here also the voters will have been deprived of their "right" to vote as the election will provide no choice. Therefore the truth is the 10th Parliament is being established without the participation of the people, who are supposed to be the source of all power.

If people are not allowed to vote then there is no elected representative, and if there is no elected representative, there is no elected government. And if there is no elected government then what is the difference between the government that will be formed after January 5th and that of autocrat Gen. Ershad, that we replaced in 1991 after years of mass agitation?

Let us recall what is happening. The PM first formed what she called an "All party" election time government. Then she sat with those who joined the government and distributed seats among them, in some cases withdrawing able candidates from her own party, clearly proving that capacity of candidates was not an issue. She even said that if BNP had joined the poll-time government then she would have distributed seats with them.

What does it mean? That a few parties can sit together and distribute parliamentary seats among them, and then have them declared elected "uncontested" and then form a government with those who have been "selected" without getting a single vote? Is that the type of "representative" government we will now have to accept? Never, because it takes away our greatest source of pride and power -- that we are the masters and we elect the government to serve us, the people. As voters we can never ever accept this also because it opens up the future possibility

of contrived seat distribution and "uncontested" elections, leading to government formation totally bypassing the voters.

We want to tell the prime minister and the AL that it is no longer a matter between the ruling party and the opposition. It is between the voters and the un-elected parliament that is being forced upon us. Election belongs to the people and we feel that it has been taken away from us. And again, we as voters cannot and will not accept this.

We urge the prime minister to please understand that she is heading towards a new parliament that will have a majority of its MPs "uncontested" and who will not have received a single vote in their constituencies. The 146 "elected" will come through one-sided polls. Therefore both these groups of MPs will have no standing in the national public eye and no prestige in their respective localities save what they will be able to buy with money and enforce with 'mastans'. This can in no way be good for democracy which she proclaims to enshrine in all her actions.

There is a different path the PM can follow. The first hint of that we heard yesterday when she announced her willingness to abandon the present election and call for a fresh one very soon if the opposition calls off hartals and other destructive activities. This shift is welcome and is the first sign that she is admitting that the way she has bulldozed forward with the present elections hasn't worked. But it is "too little too late". The fundamental issue of "trust deficit" remains at the core. BNP has no reason to trust any future election, howsoever many times it is held, under the present government. So any future election must incorporate the idea of a poll time government headed by a person that the both sides trust. This remains the key and this is where the PM has to show her true leadership.

If we look at the other side, Sheikh Hasina's government's performance has been quite impressive and widespread throughout her tenure. In the case of economic growth the present PM's record remains far above that of her arch rival, Khaleda Zia. Compared to 2008, under the present government the GDP growth has risen to 6.03 percent, per capita income rose to \$1,044 from \$630, export grew to \$27 billion from \$15.5. Over the last five years food stock was close to 10 lakh tons and remittances averaged \$1 billion per month. Forex reserve reached \$18 billion from \$10 billion in 2010.

The PM personally and her government have earned huge public goodwill, especially from the pro-liberation forces and the younger generation, for being so steadfast in organising and holding the war crimes trials. The recent admiration for the PM has risen several notches for the courage with which she has withstood international pressure to abandon the trial or at least desist from carrying out the sentence.

The recent unconscionable actions of the BNP-Jamaat combine, especially the killing of innocent people through bus burning, setting people on fire, killing children, uprooting railway lines and mindless destruction of the economy have also turned off many people from the opposition.

All this can be turned into a formidable supportive force behind the AL and its leader. This can help the present ruling party in putting up a good fight in the next election.

But for that to happen Sheikh Hasina must restore her trust in the voters and give them a free and fair election. Our voters have elected her twice, and may do so again. But for that to happen voters must be trusted and not bulldozed into a contrived election.

People who advised her to abolish CTG to ensure her victory in elections have led her to the path of self-destruction. Abolishing the CTG has been her single biggest and costliest mistake, and one that will be hardest for her to accept. But swallowing that bitter pill is far better than being guilty of destroying democracy or "winning" a voterless election.

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## A time for choosing without a choice



TIME and tide wait for none. Neither do elections. Now that the government is going it alone without waiting for the opposition, the preparation for unilateral polls gives the feeling of rising fever without shivering. The Election Commission is working. The candidates are chosen. Filing and withdrawal of nomination papers are done. More than half the candidates have even won uncontested.

Everything looks good except for the irony of a wedding procession where the bridal party is missing.

When so many candidates win uncontested, it's a matter of choosing without a choice, which puts two pillars of the state at stake. First one obviously is democracy when people are denied their right to vote. Second is the concept of republic, a representative form of government wherein the people choose fellow citizens to represent them. If one wonders how one-sided elections should suit democratic aspirations, one should also wonder whether the People's Republic is getting reduced to an oxymoron.

If the current chutzpah goes to its logical conclusion, it'll be interesting to see what kind of a government sits in power come this January. What kind of a parliament is it going to make? How attached are people going to feel towards a parliament when most of its constituent members aren't picked by them. In all likelihood, the remaining members will be elected by an insignificant number of voters. Fear of violence and despair over political gloom will seriously impair voter turnout.

So what kind of a government we're going to get? Democracy refers to the style of government where people rule their own country instead of a monarchy, dictatorship or an oligarchy. The republic refers to a style of government where the country belongs not to a monarch, king, emperor or sultan but to its people. Thus, it's not just who runs the country but also who owns it that distinguishes a democracy from a republic. For example, the United Kingdom is a democracy but it's not a republic. Everything is technically owned by the Queen and everything is done in Her Majesty's name.

That's why every democracy is a republic, not every republic is a democracy. Nazi Germany, the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of

Korea, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics are examples of countries, which aren't democracies in the true sense of the word but they can be called republics since they don't have monarchs and elections are held at regular intervals. North Korea is doubly misleading in its title. A democratic people's republic ruled by hereditary rulers is disappointingly neither.

Where do we stand in the scheme of things? If the results of the perfunctory elections stick, what'll more than half the unelected-elected lawmakers make of their victory? What'll be the emerging style of government? Can it be called a democracy, or can it be even called a republic?

What'll happen to the aspirations of people who didn't have a chance to go to the polls and elect the candidates of their choice? How will the unilaterally elected lawmakers cope with their effortless wins after they got themselves auto-elected? Why should they owe obeisance to their constituencies when victory has been artificially inseminated?

A democracy runs on the principle contrary to term deposits. An elected government on maturity can't be rolled over with a standing instruction. Some people argue that there's no legal barrier to uncontested elections. They also argue if we can accept it when one candidate wins uncontested, why can't we accept if the number is more. They don't realise that legality isn't always the sure test of propriety. It's for the same reason overeating is harmful without being unlawful.

In our quest for freedom and democracy, the one-sided election has brought a new low to our self-esteem. Like two wrongs don't make a right, railroad elections can't be justified because the opposition has been ramrod arrogant. The government has been cutting off the nose to spite the face. Every uncontested winner declared is scraping a layer of its reputation like peeling reduces an onion.

In a curious way soon we're going to get a level playing field. The ruling party after the sham elections will hardly have any moral edge left over the opposition. It has always boasted of being a political party that has led the Liberation War and come to power by legitimate means.

Keeping an ear to the ground, it'll hear how it has been impairing its integrity. Can the spirit of the Liberation War give it enough moral ground? It's likely that overdrawing on this national ethos will wear it down. In the past, others tried it with religion only to fall flat on their faces. Forced to choose without a choice, here is a twist to democracy. It has been driving the demos crazy.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Accept responsibility like Mandela

South Africa's anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela has passed away. Our government announced three days' national mourning to pay homage to the great man. But is that all to show respect to the icon of peace and forgiveness?

We should pay heed to his words and follow his footsteps of sacrifice and reconciliation. But alas, what we see is the opposite. In the December 7, 2013 issue of *The Daily Star*, 'Wise words from Mandela' were reprinted. I wish our politicians read it. He concluded his speech saying "Finally I want to say that I have been elected the president of South Africa. Anything that happens in South Africa now reflects on me, regardless of our history. I am responsible for everything that happens in my country."

I hope Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will read this. Being the prime minister of Bangladesh, she is also responsible for everything that happens here. The whole country is looking up to her. By allowing the next general election to be held under a neutral government, she can stop all the violence in a moment. Does she not have an iota of feeling for the country or its people?

Nur Jahan  
Chittagong

## PM should talk with all sections to end crisis

It is high time the country's senior politicians found a way out of the current political crisis. The ongoing political deadlock is damaging not only the economy, business, industry, agriculture, education system, livelihoods of people of the country but the country's reputation as well. I request the prime minister to invite the representatives of the political parties, the civil society, the business community, academics and journalists to find a peaceful solution acceptable to all to end the political stalemate. Otherwise, we will suffer a lot in the long run.

Qaykobad Kawsar  
Student of MSS  
University of Dhaka

## Politics gone bad

How strange is our country! Our politics is getting so bad! It's beyond imagination. Our democracy can be spelled as 'democracy' and politics as 'poly-tricks.'

In the name of a fair election, nominees in 154 seats were selected uncontested, with no opponents facing them. Can they really be people's representatives?

Also, by doing this the government has deprived people of their voting rights. And surprisingly, "No" vote option has been withdrawn.

Engr. Shaheedul Islam

On e-mail

## SAU admission tests in disarray

The ongoing political impasse has its serious negative impact on our education system. Students' future has been thrown into uncertainty. The date of admission test for 2013 at Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University (SAU) had to be cancelled twice. No new date could be fixed because of the present uncertain situation. It's the government's duty to take effective measures to resolve the crisis. And the opposition parties should keep national interest and issues of people's welfare above political interests.

Let us all work together to build a really happy and prosperous Bangladesh.  
Professor M Zahidul Haque  
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University  
Dhaka

## Comments on news report, "Dhaka protests Pak resolution," published on December 18, 2013

### Reader

Why similar protest can not be made when US Congress hearing is made on "internal affairs" of Bangladesh political situation? Why then *The Daily Star* does not ask foreign ministry to make similar protest summoning US ambassador to foreign ministry?

### OpeeMonir

Similar is the case with India too. We do not see *TDS* doing the same when India acts even more hopelessly. I think *TDS* is quite biased on this matter.

### Shahin Huq

Yes. But what about Indian intervention in our internal affairs? It is not simply intervention, India has been exploiting our country and killing our people continuously. What about the Indian killing squad in Bangladesh? How long will we turn our blind eyes to Indian colonial interests in Bangladesh?

### Charanjeet Maan

It is the bad habit of Pakistan to stick its nose into other countries' affairs. They garland people who murder their governors; they call the terrorists martyrs. Molla suits them all right, being a terrorist, rapist and human rights violator.

### OpeeMonir

Pakistan is definitely not our friend, but India is acting like an enemy all along.

What people think

Friday: December 13, 2013

Do you think the ruling and opposition parties would continue their dialogue in a spirit of goodwill and compromise to decrease tensions?

● Yes (23%)

● No (77%)

Saturday: December 14, 2013

Do you agree with US Secretary of State John Kerry that the execution of Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah might derail the next parliamentary election in Bangladesh?

● Yes (63%)

● No (37%)

Sunday: December 15, 2013

Don't you think that the government should ensure security for all involved in the prosecution of war crimes trial?

● Yes (65%)

● No (35%)

Monday: December 16, 2013

Do you think leaders of ruling Awami League and main opposition BNP will be able to reach consensus to end the ongoing political crisis over the 10th parliamentary polls?

● Yes (13%)

● No (87%)

Tuesday: December 17, 2013

Do you think people will accept an election in which the ruling Awami League is going to win uncontested in 127 constituencies?

● Yes (12%)

● No (88%)

Wednesday: December 18, 2013

Do you agree with BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir that the Election Commission has staged a drama of farcical polls through declaring 154 persons elected-unopposed?

● Yes (81%)

● No (19%)

Thursday: December 19, 2013

Do you agree with Human Rights Watch (HRW) that the govt. should set up an independent commission to carry out investigations into the ongoing violence?

● Yes (86%)

● No (14%)