

HR violations

Took alarming political proportions

THE alarming rise in human rights (HR) violations that the year 2013 saw was to a large extent traceable to violence of political nature. The worst aspect of it all was that not only activists of ruling and opposition parties, but women, children and even minority communities also fell victims to political violence. According to an estimate, the death figure from such violence was 507. The other statistics are appalling. Instances of political violence alone stood at 848. Secret killings numbered 53, while extra-judicial killing took 72 lives. Three journalists died and 280 got hurt. In attacks on minority community 278 houses were damaged, while 475 temples, other places of worship and idols were ransacked.

The sad irony is that it was the nation's first ever attempt to try the perpetrators of gross HR violations in 1971 that triggered the spate of political violence last year and its attendant incidents of fresh HR violation. Especially, the International Crimes Tribunal's verdict on Jamaat leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee in February, was followed by unprecedented violence by activists of Jamaat and its student wing Shibir. Worse still, Jamaat took advantage of the ongoing BNP-led alliance's agitation programme to restore caretaker system of government and used this platform to meet their own agenda. Its toxic fallout was that violence took the most pernicious turn with scores including men, women, children becoming victims of arson attacks, bomb blasts and police firing.

During the last two months 19 people died from burning, while 100 others are being treated for burn injuries. Two children also became victim of this violence.

Development programmes hard hit

Mid-term review revealing

PROLONGED political agitation is beginning to tell on the rate of annual development plan's (ADP) implementation in the current fiscal. Going by what has been published in the press, an estimated 20 per cent of the ADP outlay of Tk.658.72 billion has been expended over the period July – December. All this is hardly encouraging news. Development works that include crucial infrastructure projects like the expansion of Dhaka-Chittagong four lane highway is all but stalled. The failure to move man and material along road and rail links have not helped in moving things along the right direction. And it is not simply construction that has suffered.

In the case of many development programmes, some contractors have consciously decided to go slow with their respective works in the hope that things will settle down after the general election on January 5. However, we are not all so sure that the conclusion of the January elections will result in an easing of political tensions. With the main opposition party-led alliance going for non-stop blockades, we wonder as to how the government feels that ADP implementation will pick up after January 5. There has been no sign of reconciliation between the two grand alliances. Nor has there been any indication of any talks to resolve the current political crisis. With the two major political parties, Awami League and BNP firmly entrenched in their respective positions, the likely irresolution is going to cast a

New Year: No reason to celebrate

ABDUL MATIN

PEOPLE celebrated the New Year all over the world. As usual, the fireworks started in Auckland in New Zealand. It was followed by a spectacular display around Sydney's Harbour Bridge in Australia. China arranged light shows on the Great Wall near Beijing and at the Bund waterfront in Shanghai. Moscow celebrated with fireworks over Kremlin. Dubai created a world record with fireworks extravaganza stretching 50 km along the seafloor.

At midnight, the capital cities in Western Europe celebrated the New Year with traditional festivities and spectacular displays at Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Eiffel Tower in Paris and the banks of the River Thames in London, among other places. People came from all over the world to take part in the traditional celebrations at the Times Square in New York City in the United States. While people watch fireworks in many parts of the world, the Japanese visit shrines and temples to pray on the New Year Eve.

In Bangladesh, the people did not have the mood or reason to celebrate the New Year. Marred by political violence, arson and killings, they have bitter experiences of the year 2013. The New Year's messages by the prime minister and the leader of the opposition showed no ray of hope for a political settlement the people of Bangladesh have been eagerly waiting for. The only New Year's gift they got is a non-stop blockade.

The people are fed up by the prolonged blockades, violence and the uncompromising attitudes of the political leaders. They are dismayed to see the economy breaking down, the education system blowing apart, the industries in doldrums and the supply chain in shatters. What is worse, the leaders who are responsible for the present situation seem to be indifferent to what is happening.

Though it sounds hollow, we say "Happy New Year" hoping against hope that better days are ahead of us. The only wish the people of Bangladesh now nourish is peace. We have no reason to celebrate on the New Year Eve. It is time to contemplate and pray for peace.

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

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

detractors of Sheikh Hasina, an election that has all but become invalid if not unconstitutional, an election that has been given the thumbs down by not only the majority of the people at home but also our very important development partners. And there is perhaps only one country that has supported the government's plan to go ahead with the election regardless of whether it is boycotted by the main opposition or not. That is because most of us have failed to look at the brighter side of January 5. The election is being done to strengthen democracy and uphold the Constitution; Constitution is like the scriptures that cannot brook any tinkering.

The first bright side of January 5 is the economic aspect. Those who say that a huge sum, nearly Tk.600 crore, would go waste in producing a thalidomide parliament whose future has already been hinted at by the PM, fail to see the fact that by having more than 50% contestant elected unopposed has saved half of the amount earmarked for the election. No, the entire amount is not being wasted; half of it has been saved. Irrefutable logic!

There is a bright side also to the large number of seats being decided even before a single vote has been cast. Look at the huge saving that will be made by the candidates in terms of election campaign. Unlike in the past, they can dispense with their large bevy of supporters for running election office or for that matter, door to door visits or with election agents at the poll centres.

Also, expenditure for getting elected is directly related to the multiplication of wealth during tenure as MP. And I need not dilate on how that will benefit the people and the country. Further, if one were to combine the amount of wealth generated by ministers and MPs, and I am not for a moment suggesting that all of those are ill-gotten, and take into account the increase of wealth in percentage terms, then politics will very soon come under the category of business, which will dispense with the need to disassociate from one's business enterprises after one has been elected to the parliament.

And what is more, another 'culture' will find more currency along with agriculture-- pisciculture that is. Given

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

moments in solitude.

One of the great pleasures of 2013 is recent: the just-concluded first Test between India and South Africa, which I watched from the comparative loneliness of a holiday resort in Kerala. This was an absorbing Test of skill and character by two teams determined to win, and if they could not, then deny victory to the opponent. The last day was a magnum opus thriller, brilliant spurts of lightning across large patches of steady play: to watch India slip was agony, but to turn off the television was impossible.

Defeat is easy to accept. We do it every day of our normal lives. But defeat so close to victory is another story. The biggest reason for defeat is not the strength of a victor but the complacency of a loser. If you take anything for granted, the prize will slip away before your troubled eyes. I don't know if art imitates life anymore; one suspects not. But sport certainly does. Nothing is certain until that final bell rings and the umpire -- or indeed the Chief Election Commissioner -- announces close of play.

The best books I read this year were both from America. *The Blood Telegram: India's Secret War in East Pakistan* by Gary Bass, is less on the secret war conducted by Delhi and far more on Washington's secret policy of indifference towards the Pakistan army's genocide in what was then East Pakistan during the fateful year of 1971, which ended in a war that created a new nation, Bangladesh. The second great read was *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* by Stephen Kinzer, which graphs the lives of the two brothers, one a secretary of state and the other a CIA chief. They controlled American foreign policy during the Eisenhower administration between 1952 and 1960.

If you think there are too many secrets on the cover, rest assured this is no exaggeration judging by what is revealed between the covers. If you want to revel in

Look at the brighter side of January 5

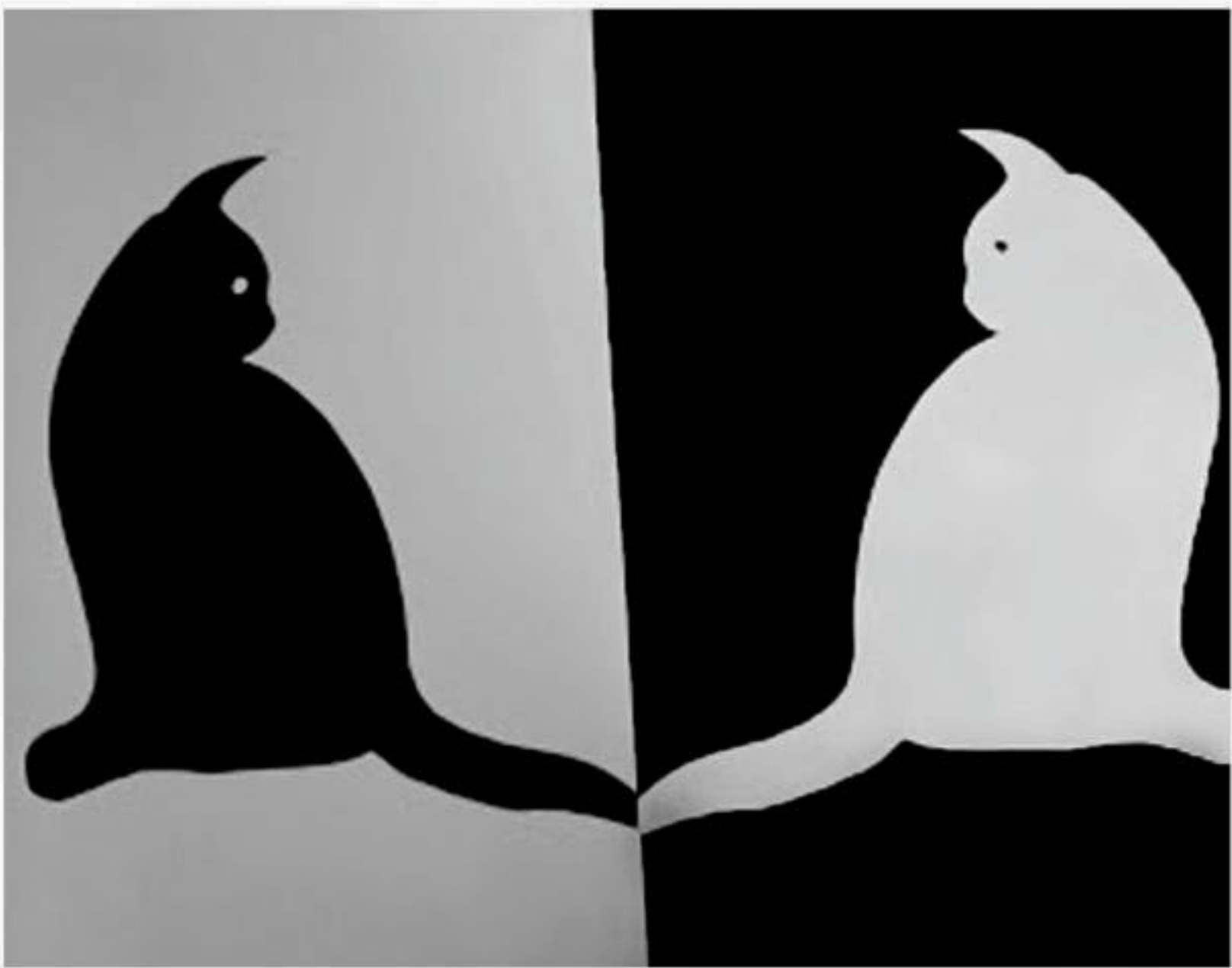
WE are so one eyed that we are ever willing to see the dark side of a matter only and deliberately overlook the bright side. We are in a hurry to misinterpret an honest intention, even if that has to do with people's welfare and welfare of the nation and the state.

Look at January 5. I cannot understand why the AL and its allies have been berated for going ahead with, according to the

how this trade has multiplied the wealth of some of our current parliament members as revealed by their wealth statements, I presume more and more young persons will vie to become MPs and take up pisciculture to multiply income and add to the economy, more so when income from pisciculture is not taxable.

Also, look at the law and order side of the ensuing elections. In fact, there is no need to deploy the law enforcing agencies in such large numbers at all. And the army can be spared from the job of maintaining law and order. Since all the remaining aspirants belong to more or less the same election grouping, the chances of election violence are extremely remote, and nothing that cannot be resolved between themselves amicably is likely to happen.

The cynics look only at the fact that January 5 has disenfranchised more than 50 million voters. The brighter



Five crore voters or so will not have to lift themselves up from the cozy comfort of their bed on a cold January morning to stand in the queue to vote. Look at the mental agony they will be spared from -- having to vote for compromise candidates.

side of it is that many schools that are used as voting centres have to close down well before the poll date, thus disrupting classes. Now that will not be the case. These schools and teachers will be free to run their daily classes. And fewer poll centres means the need for fewer members of law enforcing agencies, and thus more resources can be concentrated on the other polling centres for ensuring law and order.

And even more, these five crore voters or so will not have to lift themselves up from the cozy comfort of their bed on a cold January morning to stand in the queue to vote. Look at the mental agony they will be spared from -- having to vote for compromise candidates.

I am by now convinced that everything is not bad with the idea of January 5. Aren't you?

The writer is Editor, Op-Ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

Good riddance, 2013. Long live 2014!

THE sense of an ending -- a phrase borrowed from the title of Julian Barnes' moving book -- inevitably breeds nostalgia for a year that has just passed. Fortunately, nostalgia does not regress into the welter of headlines that claimed daily attention, a toxic porridge of conceits, hypocrisy and lynch mob hysteria that often sought relevance in the name of virtue. There were more illuminating

America-bashing, go ahead. There is enough to fuel a lifetime of fulminations. But I also marvelled at the unwritten sub-text, which neither author chose to stress: how focused and unrelenting America, with its many leaderships, is when it comes to national interest.

National interest is a moveable feast. This decade's convictions can be the next decade's disaster. There is probably some wrong in every right, even if the proposition does not work the other way around. But national policy is made by present vision, not hindsight. In the 1950s America believed it was fighting a cold war against world domination by Communists, and if morality became hostage to this conflict, so be it. That American and European generation of Eisenhower, Stalin and Churchill had just survived a war that could have shattered the West and the East completely [if, for instance, Germany had also been able to construct nuclear weapons by 1945]. It did not need any lessons in cynicism, or worried too much about casualties.

In 1971, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger were focused on another great game that they knew would change the dynamics of international relations [as indeed it did] and impact world affairs for generations. Bangladesh was hardly on their radar; they were concentrating on how to sacrifice Chiang Kaishek's Taiwan and correct an obvious anomaly by recognising Maoist China as the legitimate China. Russia and China had already begun to drift apart, pulled in separate directions by national compulsions; the American intervention ended all hopes of Communist solidarity. The much-vaunted concept of a Communist International reassembled into Communists Nationals. A good theorist could trace a direct line from 1971 to 1991, when the Soviet Union fell apart and Russian Communism disintegrated.

One wonders when India's foreign policy will be injected with a little more steel of self-interest, instead of being a charity shop of good intentions. It is good that Indian diplomats have stood up for one of their own in America. But this is only evidence of what they can do, individually and collectively, if they are given the freedom to stand up for their country with equal backbone.

The remembrance of things past, to use another book title, can be a mixed joy. On balance, I am relieved that 2013 is over, never to return. Long live 2014!

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Politicians talk, but hardly listen

In recent months the political situation took a violent turn as the opposition organised several hartals and blockades which led to death and destruction. The government, on the other hand, has used excessive force to quell the opposition and resorted to persecution of opposition leaders. Statistics shows that 492 people died last year due to political clash and more people will die in the coming days as the two political parties have still not come to a solution. There is no cooperation and trust among the politicians and no unity among the political parties on issues of national interest. Consensus among political parties is a must to develop any country and to fight against corruption. Empowering people is the most important feature of democracy but in our country general people are always oppressed by the politicians or by their activities. What type of democracy is this? Our politicians are always talking about what they want, never listening to what people want.

Shahin Ahmed
Dept. of marketing
University of Dhaka

The orphan called Bangladesh

Your recent commentary "Please do not hold Jan 5 elections" brings back to mind a story that I am sure you have also read in your childhood. It runs like the following:

Once upon a time, two women were fighting tooth and nail over the motherhood of an infant child in the court of King Solomon. The king went through all the arguments, evidence, and witnesses, but still could not determine with any certainty as to who the real mother was that deserved the custody of the child. Wise as he was, the king ordered that the child be cut in two halves, so each woman could have one-half. "Oh no, oh no, let her have my child, I give up", cried one woman while the other said nothing. You know what Solomon's final judgment was.

Alas, we do not seem to have a real mother in Bangladesh! She would have cried out by now if we did.
Mahmoodul Islam

Comments on news, "Defer Jan 5 polls," published on December 29, 2013

Abbasuddin

What's the use of deferring poll by keeping the same 'jokers' on the stage?

Abul Kalam Azad

The eminent citizens have called rightfully to defer the farcical election of Awami League. This election will not bring any peace to the country. How long will the country see the killing of its citizens by the Awami hoodlums? How long will the 160 million people suffer?

Molla A. Latif

If these gentlemen did mean that the election should be deferred to bring BNP back on track, then they should have visited its netri before sitting here. Do they even know what they are talking about? It is not that because they are prominent figures they can do and undo everything just by delivering their opinions sitting around a table without any home work.

Jafar Iqbal

Sheikh Hasina has gone mad in her greed for power. But what happened to other senior leaders of AL, many of whom are wiser than her? They should have resigned by this time.

Kish

This election can be declared unacceptable only when the voter turnout proves to be significantly lower than the minimum acceptable level, which we are yet to see.

Ash C.

Right now India is the root cause of all the evils Awami League is doing. Remove India from Bangladesh political scene and see the result. Hasina will be bound to compromise with her main backer removed from the scene.

Nasreen Chowdhury

Lack of civility and no civility in our political discourse is our trademark as Bangladeshis.

Ashraf Ahmed

Deferring the Jan 5 election without first solving the problem will just create another 'deadline', with another extended period of instability. This government and the "Prime Minister" need to step down now. She and her cronies have lost all legitimacy through their efforts to engineer the political system, deny the people their right to franchise, and cling to power by repressing all democratic expression.

Abul Hashem

Do you think they care for what you say? AL and BNP chiefs have no sense of humanity and accountability towards the nation. They will do everything to satisfy their ego at the cost of public blood and lives. So I would like to request you (civil society and other respected people) not to try to teach politics and humanity to our political leaders as all your advices will fall in deaf ears.