

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Khaleda's welcome overture

The govt. should create condition for dialogue

WE are heartened by the BNP chief's decision not to go for oborodh and hartal that spilled blood, burnt people, destroyed property and hurt the economy. It also earned unpopularity for the party. We are relieved at her choice of peaceful means to articulate her demands and wish that these will not be short-lived.

We also note that she has strongly condemned the violence perpetrated against the minority community. While congratulating her on this, we would like to add that had she reacted earlier on, it could have been more effective.

Khaleda Zia has blamed it all on the ruling party. While the misdeeds of certain ruling party elements were duly covered by the media including ourselves, may we assert that it was largely doings of the Jamaat-Shibir elements that did most of the damage?

The BNP chief is right in demanding the release of her party's imprisoned leaders, opening of their offices and allowing them to function. We believe the government should respect their rights to peaceful demonstrations. We recall that the way the ruling party handled the opposition prior to the election smacked of a repressive regime. Such an approach must be scrupulously avoided, now

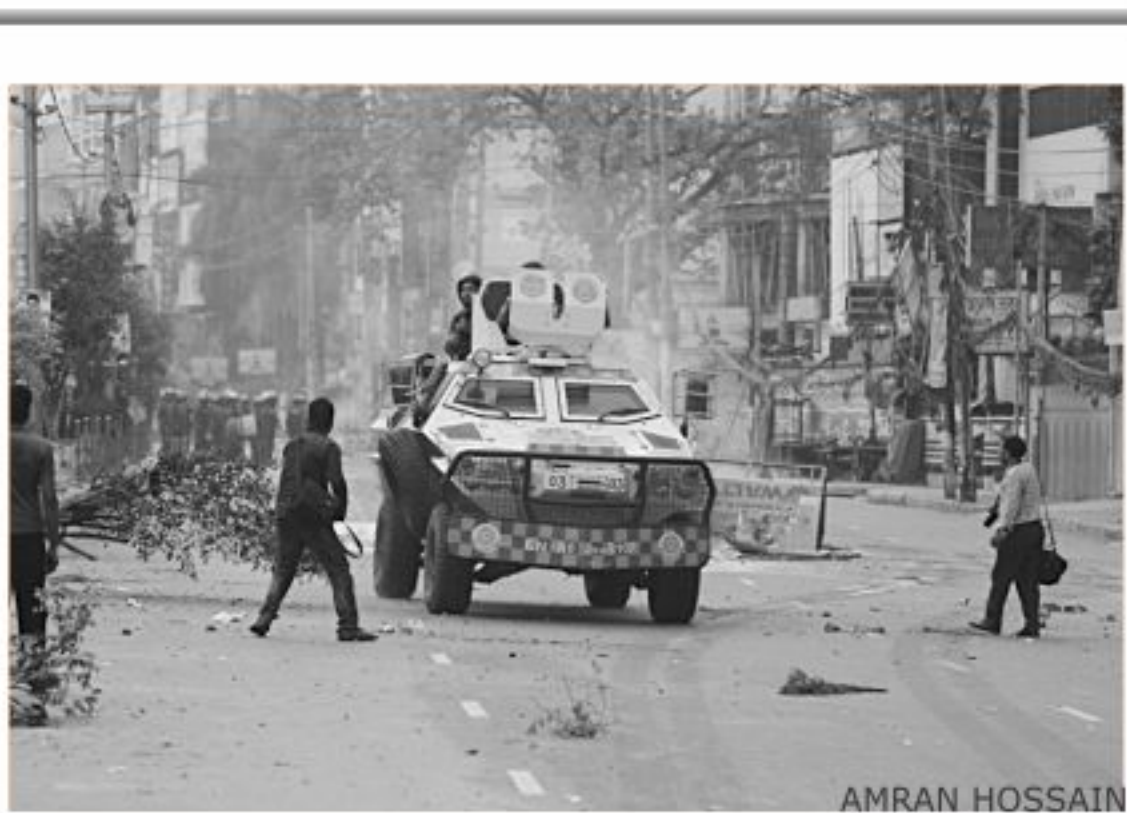
Finally, Khaleda Zia has called for a dialogue and so has Hasina. Now the nation awaits the start of this much-awaited process.

Taxman's purse takes a hit

Where will the money come from?

SUSTAINED political agitation over the last quarter has hit National Board Revenue (NBR)'s collections particularly hard. With tax collection falling short by more than Tk8,500 cr, the ministry of finance is being forced to revise the annual revenue collection for the current fiscal. With economic activities grinding to near-halt due to the volatility in politics that has seen disruption in the supply chain, productive sectors across the board have seen drastic reduction in business generation. Needless to say, with revenue collection down, the government will be hard put to meet its expenditures. Going after taxpayers with a stick is not going to bear desired results.

The recently concluded national election has brought some respite from the strikes and blockades. It will however take time for lost business to pick up. Going by newspaper reports revenue collection fell short by Tk3,500cr. in the month of December. Most of NBR wings could not meet their respective targets. Value added Taxes or VAT collection fell as sales took a dip and with people struggling to make ends meet during these times of economic hardship, income tax returns have also slowed. Ultimately, what all this boils down to is that a long term solution has to be found whereby the major political alliances can learn to live in peace with one another. Without that, the culture of violence will remain and economic activity may gradually grind to a halt.



Civility and hostility in our politics

M.A. SERAJ

BANGLADESH is in a dire political and economical situation because of the political hostility of AL and BNP towards each other. Both the parties are equally hostile in nature, whether in power or in opposition. The more hostile one is the more the advantage one gets over the other in the politics of power play. Because of this, the young generation seems to be lost without proper guidance or motivation to point them in the right direction.

Leaders should have the vision, courage and wisdom to move forward to serve the people. Leaders lead from the front, and if they cannot then they should get out of the way to make room for others.

There are many instances of empires falling apart or being annihilated due to negligence and failures of their rulers or leaders. So, troubled nations are always watched by the international community.

In the event of such a scenario in Bangladesh America will not just wait and see because "Bangladesh matters to America." (Ref. the article written by Dan Mozena, US Ambassador to Bangladesh. TDS. Jan , 2014). This can be presumed by the flurry of activities in the diplomatic circle, constant negotiations, and preparation of a check list for the future course of action following the United Nation's failure to put an end to this political deadlock in Bangladesh.

In any case, America has the upper hand as a deciding factor as its stakes are higher than those of other countries for strategic reasons to keep Bangladesh stable as a regional power in the South East Asia and Pacific Region.

America also wants Bangladesh to be a moderate Muslim country, as fundamentalism won't really work in this age. Fundamentalism didn't succeed in Algeria, Iran is moving towards moderation, and most recently the trial and error case in Egypt are still fresh in our memories to take lessons and give civility a chance.

The writer is a former officer of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Bow to internal reality not to foreign pressure

STRATEGICALLY
SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

her stating that the January 5 elections are only an expedient for meeting constitutional obligations (a position that many would disagree with), implying that election for the 11th Parliament was inevitable.

Given the nature of the election to the 10th Parliament one is not surprised at the way the government has been treating congratulatory messages from foreign countries. It reminded one of the times in Bangladesh of military governments after a coup in quest of international recognition and validity.

That these messages are being made out as vindicating missives for Sheikh Hasina's position on the recently held election and indeed her newly formed government is indicative of the sticky wicket the government finds itself in, irrespective of the lack of any demonstrated public outcry against the election. It is the moral and not so much the legal and constitution issues that are perhaps modulating the mind of the prime minister.

India, Russia, China and a few Southeast Asian countries have congratulated Sheikh Hasina on her assumption of office for the third time. Conversely, the western countries including the US, Canada and the EU have made no secret of their disappointment over the January 5 elections and have reiterated their position on the urgent need to hold a participatory, free, fair and democratic election. Clearly, there is a divide internationally on the present state of political affairs in the country. And this is what begs the very question. Whether it is a healthy situation for Bangladesh where our development partners and friends have taken different positions on an issue that is internal to Bangladesh.

Indeed, election is an internal matter for us but at the same time, given the global nature of our existence, the modalities of elections and the 'democratic' nature of it are always under scrutiny from abroad. And on that count we would want acceptance and support from all countries, because division, even on an internal matters, is detrimental to our interest.

That the January 5 elections have failed to meet the minimum requirements to qualify as an acceptable elec-

N OBODY can take issue with the PM when she says that she will not succumb to foreign pressure on issues that are entirely internal. The PM had vented her feeling after she was sworn in as the new PM (of a government of the 10th Parliament which is yet to be convened). And an internal issue, like a parliamentary election, cannot be externally driven. But by the same token she needs to be respectfully reminded of

tion is not a matter that needs to be proved, it is matter that is accepted as a fact by most of us. This is an evaluation of the common people of Bangladesh and which is shared by most of our friends. This paper and this column had on many occasions called for the voting to be postponed in favour of more participatory elections. And it is this very reality, of compulsions of internal views of the matter and not 'external pressure,' that Sheikh Hasina must internalise and proceed accordingly to address in earnest the next election issue. In fact, for a true leader 'bowing' to public will is the sane thing to do.

The PM should be under no illusion that the recent election was anything but flawed. Because then there will be a tendency for her to ride roughshod on the sentiments of the people, particularly of more than fifty percent of the voters, who, by the machinations employed to keep the main opposition out of the elections, have been disenfranchised. Not only that, the unduly haste with which the MPs-elect and the



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cabinet have been sworn in have confounded the confusion, and, in spite of what the foreign advisor to the PM would want us to believe, we actually have two sets of MPs, a unique situation not happened before.

We feel constrained to also point out that there is a tendency to assume antagonistic attitude by the government on comments or even friendly opinion coming from our foreign friends and development partners. The EU in particular has been a time tested friend of Bangladesh and we cannot forget the fact that they have been an integral part of our development journey. I believe that there is a universal goodwill for Bangladesh, and their comments come from an honest desire to see that our development efforts are not impeded by adverse fallout because of bad politics. And to this end the government should act expeditiously to assuage their apprehensions.

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Don't let the hawks win



SYED MANSUR
HASHIM

programme will not be able to advance, and parts of it will be rolled back, while we start negotiating a comprehensive agreement to address the international community's concerns about Iran's programme." With the European Union, China, Russia, France, Germany and the UK (besides the US) firmly onboard the plan, why are certain quarters within Congress hell bent on announcing a fresh



What is the alternative to a negotiated settlement? If the hawks would have it their way, forget any deal, more sanctions and throw in some napalm and bomb the Persians back to the Stone Age -- just to be safe!

come out with a statement that he believes Iran is "telling the truth when saying they only intend to use nuclear technology for civilian means." That is perhaps the single most surprising statement to emerge from the region. Needless to say, the UAE's defence procurement and policy is largely geared at countering Iran's larger conventional forces. Yet, here we are. An old adversary speaking out and reaching out on behalf of a nation at which it has been at odds for decades, for a possible peaceful solution that can only benefit the region's stability and trade.

The debate is strong on all sides. Can the world trust Iran to keep its end of the bargain? According to the Israelis, we can't. According to Mathew Bunn, Professor at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center and former White House adviser on non-proliferation, we can. Mr. Bunn argues that the deal goes far beyond mere a comprehensive agreement. The restraint and verification regime would make it near-impossible for Iranians to rebuild a stock of 20% enriched uranium without setting off alarm bells in

half a dozen countries. The deal if inked could also have other ramifications for Iran's domestic politics -- by strengthening the hands of reformers over that of hardliners. By defaulting on any of the many preconditions that will inevitably be set in a firm agreement, Iran would certainly be looking at the possibility of serious military action by all major powers (that could very well include support from Russia and China). The counter-argument to Mr. Bunn comes from people like Dr. Ephraim Sneh, who served two terms as Israel's deputy minister of defence and a cabinet member on several Israeli governments. Dr. Sneh believes that the P5+1 deal have achieved only one

thing, and that is the continued existence of the Ayatollah regime. According to him, Iranians are now free to meddle on in the region in the cat-and-mouse game that will see Sunni regimes of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain threatened, and that internal opposition to the Ayatollahs will continue to be repressed and weakened.

What is the alternative to a negotiated settlement? If the hawks would have it their way, forget any deal, more sanctions and throw in some napalm and bomb the Persians back to the Stone Age -- just to be safe! The whole question of sanctions will automatically fall into place and the US will have all the support it needs from Europe, both East and West should Iran fail to live up to terms of the agreement. The world is watching and it would be a tragedy to walk away from a lasting peace now because of preconceived notions about Iranians not being trustworthy.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Voter with passionate mission

We learned from The Daily Star that Mr. Abdus Samad Bir Pratik, 65, who is suffering from old-age complications and is partially paralysed, has travelled from USA to Bangladesh overcoming all the obstacles, only to cast his vote. Although he cannot walk alone, he appeared at the polling centre defying all the odds to cast his vote. His aim was to support the war crimes trials, initiated by the Awami League government. A few other elderly people including Mr. Shakhawat and Mr. Sharafat came to the voting centre only to extend their support for the trial of war criminals. I commend their bravery.

K.M. Nazimuddin
On e-mail

Corrupt MPs, ministers in govt.

Different media reports have revealed that most of the MPs and ministers of AL have made huge fortune during AL's last tenure. The reports have raised questions in people's minds as to how they had amassed such huge wealth only within five years. Did they get Aladdin's lamp? Everybody knows they have amassed such huge wealth by illegal means. This revelation has spoiled AL's image. So AL should take action against the corrupt MPs and ministers. And the ACC should also do its part.

M. A. Kashem
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Hasina 'won't bow down to any pressure'," published on January 13, 2014

Jafar Iqbal

People of Bangladesh know Sheikh Hasina for more than 40 years but she never behaved the way she is behaving now. Hasina has already bowed down to India.

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

This unfortunate attitude will prove to be very costly and it will not be long before her party will be paying the price.

Deepjelejai

She bowed down to greed and corruption only.

Anonymous

Though many of us are under the poverty line, we have proven time and again that we are better than half the countries in the world including India (on certain index).

Zman7

Well said. It is outstandingly commendable.

Barkat

History has seen many dictators who made similar claims. And history also witnessed what happened to them finally. No one is above the power of Almighty. It is only a matter of time.

Deepjelejai

One should have the sense of right and wrong.

Anonymous

What goes up must fall down. It's gravity. It's physics.

Ash C.

The New York Times article "Matriarchs' Duel for Power Threatens to Tilt Bangladesh Off Balance" by Ellen Barry about the farcical election quoted The Daily Star editor Mr. Mahfuz Anam saying "If Hasina can keep the military happy, she will have her way all through." "There is nothing Khaleda Zia can do" If one look closely at how Hasina had politicised every organ of the government, it's no wonder the military was just a silent spectator -- they even carried out 'duty' at the farcical poll while its duty was to safeguard the constitution that was trampled at will by Hasina!

"Why do intellectuals play second fiddle to politicians?" (January 10, 2014)

Sajjad

Do look at the mirror!

Akhtar Shah

The amount of reference to bring home the points made in last two paragraphs make a tad laborious read. However they are extremely pertinent and vexing. The "source of power" of the political rulers have no respect for law and get away with all their activities with complete impunity. In addition the establishments that are to uphold and enforce law are weak and easily bought. The result is "FEAR" amongst the intellectuals who could make a difference. They either join them (as they can't beat them), or they are silent or leave the country!

Nds

I am really thankful to the author for bringing up the million dollar question that stirs the minds of many like me without finding any plausible answer. The author has given a very scholarly and convincing explanation to provide a plausible answer to the question about the parasitic characters of our intellectuals. But I must mention that the author's passionate call to our intellectuals to unite because they have nothing to lose but their brains drained by their inhibition, is certainly not going to get any response. Because that is the only thing they possess and provide their sustenance. They can hardly afford to lose that.

An Observer

Thank you, Mr. Ahsan, for writing such an interesting article for us.