

# ACC's probe welcome

## Politicians should account for their wealth

THE ACC's launching of a probe into the declared wealth and assets of one minister and two state ministers from former cabinet and four lawmakers from both the present and immediate past parliaments is a much awaited step in the right direction. The gaps between the wealth statements they submitted to the EC before the 9th and 10th JS polls respectively are too wide to be explained rationally. The ACC's task is now to effectively conduct the investigation to hold them to account and, at the same time, let the general public know how these politicians could amass such enormous wealth within such a short span of time.

While commending this particular ACC move, we would also like the anti-graft body to look into the wealth status of a host of others regardless of their political identities. Their wealth apparently does not match their known sources of income.

Widening the scope of investigation is essential to ensuring that public representatives are individuals of integrity and probity. The ACC in collaboration with the EC and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) should do it homing in on such people whose declared incomes hardly tally with the amounts of wealth they own.

Powerful as the big possessors of ill-gotten money often are, they don't easily give in to the law. The government, if necessary, together with the parliament should create provisions to strengthen the hands of law so that these powerful but corrupt quarters could be exposed and held to


# EU's assistance to grow

## Some areas need to be addressed

EUROPEAN Union's (EU) envoy William Hannah has stated that the GSP facility enjoyed by Bangladesh is set to continue. Indeed, going by Mr. Hannah's press statement, EU hopes to have further trade links with the country in the coming years. All this of course is good news for us, especially with EU coming on board with the Accord signed to improve the working conditions and safety-related compliance issues of garments industry in the aftermath of the twin-disasters at Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions Ltd. The government for its part has its work cut out to meet certain deadlines in order to preserve the confidence of the EU facility.

What we gather from the minister's remarks is that peaceful environment and continuation of dialogue between the contending political blocs are something that the EU would keep its eyes on. Indeed, the continuation of dialogue that would settle differences over the negotiating table are of paramount interest to all concerned, both domestically and internationally. A repeat of the blockade of the capital city which not only hurt trade, commerce and everyday lives of ordinary citizens is something we can all do without. For trade and commerce to recover and flourish, a congenial atmosphere needs to exist. Compliance issues need to be taken into account and addressed seriously by the government. We are very good at making commitments and not delivering on them, but this must change if we wish to continue to enjoy special privileges.

What people think



Friday: January 17, 2014

Do you think that the government would respond to the call of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to reach a consensus through resuming dialogue to resolve the ongoing political impasses?

● Yes

28%

● No

72%

Saturday: January 18, 2014

Do you think that the government has failed to keep its promise to bring about reforms and enact laws to make the public administration merit-based and service-oriented?

● Yes

80%

● No

20%

Sunday: January 19, 2014

Do you think the government would respond to the call of the United States for fresh polls in Bangladesh by June?

● Yes

32%

● No

68%

Monday: January 20, 2014

Do you think the government is doing enough to protect the minorities?

● Yes

10%

● No

90%

Tuesday: January 21, 2014

Do you agree with the European Parliament that parties which turn to terrorist acts should be banned?

● Yes

74%

● No

26%

Wednesday: January 22, 2014

Do you think government would respond to the call of BNP chief Khaleda Zia to create a congenial atmosphere for an acceptable election through dialogue?

● Yes

17%

● No

83%

Thursday: January 23, 2014

Do you agree with the BNP chief Khaleda Zia that the present government is illegal and isolated?

● Yes


71%

● No

29%

# Challenges before Khaleda Zia

## Old issues, old tactics and old allies are no longer assets but burdens



THE THIRD VIEW  
MAHFUZ ANAM

TWO heartening things about Khaleda Zia's first post election speech were that it shunned *hartals* and *oborodhs* for the time being and called for peaceful dialogue to move towards a more acceptable poll. As for the rest, they were full of the usual threats, half truths, contrived versions of events and self-serving narratives. It also contained some dangerous innuendos implicating our security forces. (See our "analysis" published on Tuesday, January 21st, and BNP's rejoinder and our reply published today).

As an opposition leader Khaleda Zia's "finest hour" was during the anti-Ershad struggle of the '80s. Driven by a widow's obsession to avenge her husband's assassination she was unwavering to the cause of the destruction of Gen. Ershad.

It was her single minded, relentless and uncompromising stance that earned her the respect of millions who saw in the young widow's determination the emergence of a new leader who could be depended upon and relied on to lead the party that her husband founded.

She was a totally unknown person in the political circles as she was generally confined to the domestic chores by her strong-willed and domineering husband. Hence her emergence as a leader was indeed a surprise for all, especially as she took on a military dictator.

It was for her role during that period that earned her the title "*Aposh heen Netri*" (The uncompromising leader). It was to her "uncompromising" stand against autocrat Ershad that many attribute her surprising victory in 1991 election, confounding political observers and, of course, the Awami league that took its victory as certain.

If the anti-Ershad movement of the '80s was Khaleda Zia's 'finest hour,' her recent role in anti-Sheikh Hasina agitation was her "darkest." What was her greatest quality of the past -- uncompromising personality -- became her biggest handicap as she was unable to think creatively to an ever evolving political scene that needed smart assessment, quick adjustment and clever response. Handling PM's telephone call and failing to respond to the offer of any ministry in the poll-time all party government are two glaring cases where she failed to respond cleverly and her "uncompromising" reputation did her in.

To start with, Khaleda Zia did not accept her defeat in the 2008 polls to be a reflection of the public verdict but took it as a result of the machination of the so-called 'One-Eleven government' which was army-backed. Thus she did not feel the need to examine whether there was anything wrong in the way she and her son ran the country during 2001-2006.

In fact there was no introspection, no soul searching and hence no new thinking resulting from the 2008 election defeat. Since there was no attempt to analyse the mistakes, there was, naturally, also no attempt to understand what the AL did right like its appeal to the youth, commitment to try the war criminals of 1971, etc.

BNP greatly underestimated the appeal of the war crimes trial on the people of Bangladesh, especially the youth. It is this writer's view that Khaleda Zia never tried to understand the deep wound that our people felt about the killers of 1971 never being held accountable for their crimes. She showed unforgivable disrespect -- to the memory of our Liberation War and its martyrs -- when she appointed Matiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Md. Mojahid (both accused of war crimes and are facing trial), cabinet ministers in her 2001 cabinet. It is one thing to support or take support from Jamaat but quite another to make them occupy cabinet post of the country that they fought tooth and nail, killed, raped and participated in genocide to prevent from being born. That action, howsoever a product of political exigency, distanced the BNP and its chief from the hearts and minds of millions, especially those of us who are still alive and have been freedom fighters, and from our children who are proud of what

their parents did.

The second mistake, and for which Khaleda Zia and her son, Tarique Rahman, must be held particularly responsible, is not to have a Plan B. From the outset the demand for election under a caretaker government was their single demand, and not participating in the elections without it was their single option. There was never any thought given to evolving situations and to what they will do if AL goes ahead with the election in spite of everything. They seemed to have ignored our electoral history that no election was ever postponed due to the boycott of any other party save the one in 2007 when the army intervened.

As we now know that BNP's local level leaders were ready, willing and eager to join the election fray and to take on the AL. Many felt confident to win despite the odds. But they got no hearing from the high command. The cost of poll boycott and its multifarious consequences appears not to have been calculated. In retrospect, it turns out to be a grave mistake, whose consequences are yet not clear and whose likely impact could make this Khaleda Zia's greatest challenge since her entering politics.

So what's in store for the BNP and its leader?

Much depends, as it always does with both parties, on what the leader chooses to do. Challenges before the BNP chief are both formidable and urgent. She must transform or perish.

To start with, BNP must objectively assess where it has gone wrong, how those wrongs came about, implications of those mistakes, and how to overcome them. Nothing short of a "re-invention" of themselves is called for.

This re-invention must include an in-depth analysis of its political platform. Will a regurgitation of 'Islam in danger' and 'sovereignty in danger' be enough to re-energise the party? For it to reinvigorate itself BNP must take into account the country's demography that indicates that more than 60% of our population is under the age of 25. What is the central concern of these voters? What message will BNP have for them? Why should they put their faith in the party?


The most serious soul searching of BNP must involve its relations with Jamaat. It not just a question of political alliance, or even that of BNP's position on war crimes trial, but far more importantly the intellectual base of BNP's goals as a large political party that twice formed the government and may do so in the future.

What kind of future Bangladesh is BNP offering us? Where and what is the difference between BNP's future vision of Bangladesh and that of its ally, Jamaat? As BNP gets more and more dependent on Jamaat, how much of the latter's political philosophy will get incorporated in the vision of the former? How much of our laws will be based on principles of democracy, freedom, justice, equality, etc, and how much on religious edicts? What has been the experience of modern societies running on the basis of religion? Once religion based politics is accepted then where do we draw the line? What are BNP's future plans for tackling extremism and terrorism? As we show in our reply to BNP's rejoinder ( see separate story), the past record is not very encouraging.

As BNP tries to re-group, re-energise, re-invigorate and re-emerge it will have to come to the electorate with new messages of hope and a new vision for the future, especially it will have to provide suitable responses to the questions we ask above. We do not want to see a party as large and as voter based as the BNP being swallowed up by an obscurantist party prone to violence as exhibited during the recent agitations. BNP will make a grave error if it underestimates the shock, horror and anger people felt when innocent bystanders were being set on fire, petrol bombs were thrown into running buses and kids were burnt alive in the name of political agitation.

In this crucial period of re-invention the old issues, old tactics and old allies are more likely to be burdens rather than assets. Is Khaleda Zia ready, willing and most importantly, capable of giving leadership in this all important transition?

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CROSS TALK  
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

body like a burden, stashing it away in guarded privacy as if to escape some kind of a wrath. She never acted again. Never gave interviews. Never appeared in public except for the brief visit to Uttam Kumar's funeral in 1980. She occasionally left the house in utmost privacy to see her spiritual teacher at the Ramakrishna Ashram in Belur.

Now we know Suchitra Sen also used to go for abrupt outings in disguise. She visited her tailor and talked to him. She used to go for a stroll at night and occasional shopping binge. She once circled half of Kolkata looking for a weight machine.

That tells us she had nothing against the external world and some of its people. But she had grown averse to mass adulation. Like a deer in the headlights, she wasn't comfortable being the centre of attention anymore. She wasn't even comfortable being the focus of her own attention. All her pictures in her house were removed.

She must have been aware that her intensifying mystery was strengthening her allure. May be she knew it all along and played it to her satisfaction. May be she couldn't care less because she had already made her choice. All that time it was, like Newton's Third Law, having an equal and opposite reaction. She tried to erase herself from the public mind getting etched deeper in their imagination.

Meanwhile, those who loved and admired her have been left in a limbo. She gave them enough emotional rope to hang themselves and left them helplessly longing for yet another glimpse of her face that worked to bloom her signature smile or roll her doe eyes. For her charm, beauty, grace and elegance, Rama Dasgupta had transformed into the wife of a wealthy industrialist. She transformed again into a screen goddess before giving up everything to become a recluse.

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HEN Suchitra Sen died last Friday, she took her seclusion to the next level. Mysterious and aloof, she culminated her disappearance in her departure. The actress completed her withdrawal from this world the moment her mortal remains went up in flames. It had the spectacle of a space shuttle liftoff. Her soul soared to heavens while the body burned to ashes.

For 35 years she carried that

Every time in her every manifestation, her magic got reinforced. It's that magic which twists in the aching hearts of millions. In the midst of sighs and tears, they must now learn to accept that they won't see their icon again in her earthly incarnation.

Suchitra Sen's memories will continue to intrigue us, because she has been deeply embedded in the DNA of her fans. Those who grew up on the staple of Suchitra-Uttam romance seldom realised its delusional effect until much later in life. By then the celluloid reality of a black-and-white world, where men and women made supreme sacrifices for their love, had gotten drilled into our heads. Half of that drilling was done by the glamorous Suchitra Sen. The great Uttam Kumar did the rest.

Suchitra Sen's death has diminished her fans. They have lost the first lady of Bengali cinema. And that loss has marked the end of a shining era. Uttam Kumar's death had already taken a significant bite out of that innocent time when men and women loved to live and lived to love. Many of us were still able to cling to that time with the mere knowledge that Suchitra Sen was still hanging out there. She took with her the last vestige of that bygone world.

She'll continue to live amongst us in myriad reruns of her movies, the lasting testimony of a time when the silver screen was truly ruled by the epiphany of a goddess. She was above the usual muck of show business, her purity untouched by its pettiness, scandals and vulgarities. When she amusingly told a journalist that she couldn't have kissed him so easily, it was only an affirmation that she wasn't ready to negotiate her dignity. It was perhaps that dignity which made her a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

Suchitra Sen had already left us 35 years ago and last week was her second leaving. In a way, her death has redeemed us. We can spend more time looking for her in our hearts instead of hopelessly waiting for a glimpse of the recluse in self-confinement.

The irony is that she'll have to leave this world many more times before her earthly journey comes to its end. She was withdrawn from the world that was drawn to her, and her memory burns in millions of hearts. She'll live in the moisture of wistful eyes, torments of yearning hearts and anguish of nostalgic minds. Until the last soul that loves her also meets its end.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Holding voter-less polls constitutional?

It is strange and ridiculous that 153 out of 300 members of the parliament were elected without votes and the rest 147 members were declared elected with only 10% vote cast (EC claims it to be 40%). And these so called ministers including the PM are shamelessly continuing their work saying that doing this is a constitutional necessity. Does our constitution say that the ruling party should hold general election without people's participation and take office without slightest hesitation? It is strange, because there is no opposition in the house except for a few members who are loyal to the government. Noted personalities including civil society members are saying that it is legal but not legitimate.

Some shameless ministers keep saying that they will hold office for 5 years. Is it so? Has Bangladesh failed totally?

**Md. Shahjahan Mia**  
*Development Professional*

## Only AL can ensure peace

No matter what agenda the present government is trying to implement, it is imperative that peace returns in the country first. This is indispensable for development. If Jamaat is not being banned, then the government should just sit with them with a positive mindset and settle the issues once and for all. Hostility of any kind would breed only hostility. For obvious reasons, only Awami League can ensure peace in the country.

**Iqbal Ali Khan**  
*Director*  
*Naseem Group, Dhaka*

## It's a nightmare we are in!

I am feeling very curious about the mental state of the members of the newly formed government. People do not mean anything to them; so ignoring their demand, the AL government went along with the election saying it is constitutional requirement and that the 11th parliamentary election will be held soon. But now they are saying that they will finish the 5-year term.

Bangladesh seems to be an unknown place to me. Every day news of horrible and unjust acts reach us, dead bodies are being recovered regularly and destructive activities are taking place any time and anywhere. We never thought the situation in our beloved country would become so nightmarish.

**Nur Jahan**  
*Chittagong*

## What is a parliament?

In a speech to the electors of Bristol, on 3rd November 1774, the eloquent British statesman Edmund Burke defines what a parliament ought to be: "Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a 'deliberative' assembly of 'one' nation, with 'one' interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed, but when you have chosen him, he is not member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament."

Our politicians who froth at their mouth over democracy should better take note of above quotation from Edmund Burke on parliament.

**Ishtiaq Rahman**  
*On e-mail*

## Comments on news analysis, "Dangerous insinuation, distortion of facts," published on January 21, 2014

## Sorwar

The writer got it all wrong; the point is the forces of the people can not get so brutal against its own people. So people suspect from the events at Motijheel that there must be outsiders who are leading these operations. I think a large part of the people believe this. You can just hold a poll to know the opinion of the people...

## Md. Ismail Hussain

People suspect something else too. How could the Jamaat-Shibir so brutally burn and bomb its own people? How could the Hefazatis burn holy books, destroy rail communication, fell trees, etc? A poll might tell you otherwise.

## SM

Any proof of these unknown faces?

## Mortuza Huq

Khaleda Zia represents the sentiments of the democracy loving citizens of Bangladesh. She has nothing to lose. She should call on Sheikh Hasina asking her to sit for a dialogue in front of the media in order to resolve the current crisis of the country.

## Saint

It is one-sided writing.