

What prospect for a political movement?

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SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
THE Awami League government may be criticised for a number of reasons: Rejecting dialogue with the BNP, deviating from an earlier promise of a mid-term poll, taking huge delegations out on tours overseas and keeping some bad apples in the Cabinet, as the expression goes. One of them, Latif Siddique, has been shown the door in compelling circumstances of his own creation.
What about a mini-cabinet reshuffle to drop a couple of ministers? They need no fresh introduction to be recognised for their carbon footprints, if you like?
Here the PM may be caught up in the John Kenneth Galbraith dictum: "Politics consists in choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable."
At any rate, even Hasina's worst detractors would agree that she has emerged on this other side of the turbulent phase last year -- unscathed, reenergised and keeping all the initiative in her hands. Not only that, she has grown in confidence and stature. A whole array of important countries have come forward to deal with her, sign contracts with her government.
What exists matters and who can pull it off is a person to deal with. Sure, prickly reminders about non-participative January 5 poll as the one manifest in stopping further funding of an electoral project may come the government's way. In the main, however, the country's huge potential for growth, its sitting at the bridgehead of prospective geopolitical linkages and the dividends they promise are increasingly dawning on the

international community. We are valued for what we can be more than what we are.
The iffy thing about politics will have to be resolved by mustering timely statesmanship somewhere down the line. And, at a time like this, political stability, not with any simmering underbelly but which is demonstratively upfront holds the key to leapfrogging into the middle-income bracket.
There is no second opinion in the country that a degenerate political movement of the type that preceded the January 5 election is totally unwelcome.
Along with terrorisation on the street, we hate to recall the nightmarish roller-coaster ride through one abortive mediation effort for talks upon another, as the national image touched a new low in the eye of the world. Remember, Taranco overtures under UN auspices finalising a 50-50 formula of representation of the ruling AL and then opposition BNP in a pre-poll government with important portfolios promised to BNP. But it all fell through purportedly due to a phone call from London insisting the PM should be no part of it. That was the end of a diligently worked-out accord within a striking distance.
The people don't want repeat of such infantile dramatics in the name of dialogue or talks.
BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, once known for issuing deadlines to the government to meet her political demands, has changed the tack saying: "You cannot put a date on waging a movement." True, you cannot; for, to launch a movement you need a right combination of objective conditions which again are limited by a shelf life.
This is a new-found realism, a sign of maturity on Khaleda Zia's part to reconcile herself to her situational reality. This also speaks of her resilience from what used to be a dourly uncompromising self-image.
Within her party the stalwarts are an aging lot. Although they have some fire left in them they are hemmed in by a plethora of cases. A prospect of

time in jail looming, they face the challenge of being up to the task. They may not be ready for the hard tackles in a changed ballgame.
Yes, BNP had come out of hard times as during Ershad period but then the leaders were younger and more spirited three decades ago to gel as a coherent fighting unit. An undercurrent of tussle between politicians and ex-bureaucrats in the party is not helping either. Besides, Tareque Zia's churlish utterances and pulling strings from across the seven seas are presenting a faint replica of Hawa Bhaban to worrying senior party leaders.
The Chhatra Dal, once a body of Young Turks in the BNP, has grayed, too, non-students filling top slots.
Mutual distance between Jamaat and BNP has been yawning for some time; with the latter realising that the hyper-aggressive Jamaati style has earned it public displeasure and the former growing confident through some electoral victories standing on its own leg.
The Saradha terror financing and Burdman blast suspected to be linked to Jamaat and some other extremist groups in cross-border hand-holding presents a hitherto little known dimension to extremist networking. Mamata's name has been drawn vis-à-vis a BJP agenda for electoral inroads into West Bengal. Some keen observers tend to believe that Teesta accord with Bangladesh may not be far away.
At any rate, now that BNP seems willing to sue for peace, this is the time for the ruling party to keep it engaged constructively. And if they have not learnt by the price they paid for their past obduracy, they will be only eroding their vote bank to the advantage of the other side.
There is a message from what the British statesman Aneurin Bevan said: "We know what happens to people who stay in the middle of the road. They get run over" (*The Observer* 1953).

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7 Habits by Stephen Cow-vey

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

IN order to ensure only adult cows are slaughtered during Eid, cows are adulterated with steroids. And so, right after the Eid prayers, the proud owner of the biggest cow (wonder what the large size is to compensate for...) gets ready with his platoon of butchers.
The cow (bull?) doesn't give up without a massive fight. And this quadruped is no Danny Devito, but rather, a full-fledged Hulk Hogan. It eventually gives in and falls to the ground. And it so happens that the champion, with its last defiant maneuver in retaliation, decides to fall smack in front of my gate. What the platoon doesn't realise is that once the gigantic cow is on the ground, it stays put till it is dismembered, unless they all want to end up with hernia.
For the next three hours, cars are blocked from entering or leaving our house.
After three painful hours, the driveway takes the form of a regular butcher shop. May we now resume normal traffic?
Not so fast. The owner, suspecting pilferage, starts yelling at the exhausted butchers. Dude, if they steal, they steal. No big deal. Isn't the meat mainly for the poor anyway? And what will you do if you find someone guilty, chop off a *sina*? Aren't we already stuffed with beef, Eid Mubarak SMSs and (paid) congratulatory announcements in newspapers on attaining the CIP (2012) status?
But no. He orders the whole cow to be reconstructed. You heard me right -- jigsaw puzzle time. Thank Heavens there are no slaughtered goats nearby. Otherwise, in the rush of reverse engineering, we may have seen an interesting hybrid...

Qurban Eid. It is also the time to gauge our civic sense. It's not how many Polish are needed to install a light bulb, but what is the minimum number of us needed to mess up an otherwise clean public place.
I don't hold my breath...
But we are smart. The sacrificial cow is milked till the end. Introducing the cowfie contest. Not sure if a cowfie taken with a steroid injected cow counts. But at least Oxford English Dictionary gets a few new candidates to join its ranks. A selfie with ice cream before it gets eaten up is *koolfie*, a selfie with Elvis Presley sideburns before the draft is *julfie*. Who knows, the popular TV show may get a new sponsor and is renamed *Cowfie with Karan*. And ISIS -- don't start getting ideas...
Wonder how the cowfie taker felt on the second day of Eid knowing that the main attraction in the selfie is, well, no more...Missing it? Good, that is the spirit of sacrifice. Just don't look at it while enjoying your beef *bhuna*. As for me, if I had horns and I was on death row and people were scrambling to take selfies with me, you'd see a scene from Spain's *Encierro* (Running of the Bulls) or a Texan Rodeo.
But I am a black and white engineer. What do I know about bleeding (no pun intended) edge marketing involving cowfies or billboards with glum models posing in knee deep water or a radio ad of a husky female voice moaning to crescendo with the tune of *Sexual Healing* in the background only to denote an impending sneeze (wonder what awkward moment a female finds herself in while riding solo in a car with the radio playing this ad and the driver driving...). Maybe it is *Hara-kiri Marketing* -- eventually crash landing with a *qulfie* (selfie at its own *qul khani*).
I don't think I have moo-ch to say...

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Islam, Islamist, and Islam phobia

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

THE quirkiness with which world events change every day makes any forecast on future political outcome more difficult than predicting storm in fair weather. Only months ago, when Ukraine and Russia were centre of world attention and caused belly aches in Europe, everyone expected the crisis to explode and embrace at least part of Western Europe and its ally, the US, in a new battle. Sanctions from the west did not seem to bend the event to Ukraine's favour as the force behind the crisis appeared unmoved. But this is our world; events do not remain frozen in one stage. They shift, and shift quickly. The world stage was stolen by the new crisis in the Middle East where new actors seized attention, resurrecting the world phobia of religious militancy and radicalism.
Islam has been in focus for some time in the past. It has been a frequent topic of discussion in the media in the west, particularly US, after the most horrific events of September 2001. The discussion has not been always very favourable, but in the aftermath of the sad happenings of 2001 the discussion has helped to spread more awareness about the religion and its followers. And over the past years, the followers of Islam also have come to appreciate more the need to educate others about the true nature of their religion, and its message of compassion, humanism and tolerance.
In a way, the September 2001 incident became a watershed event also for the Muslims in the US to turn attention to themselves and make themselves better understood by their neighbours and people of other faiths. The diversity of faith and ethnicity along with the general atmosphere of mutual respect and acceptance of diversity in the country helped the Muslims in their effort. They found that they live in a country that is much safer, tolerant, progressive, and accommodating than the places they migrated from. They also found that equality and respect for humanity that their religion Islam preaches is actually more in practice here than the places they have left behind.



But Muslims in the US or other parts in the world do not live in islands. Events in Ukraine or Russia may not affect them in their identity as Muslims, but when other Muslims make claims in their name declaring war on others and adopt abhorrent practices in the name of religion, all Muslims are affected. They are affected because the great majority of them do not subscribe to these views, neither do they want battles to be called in the name of Islam. To the dismay of the great majority, their religion seems to have been hijacked by a group of fanatics who really want to establish a domain of their own to intimidate and terrorise innocent people. But a bigger concern for the Muslims is the label of Islamist that these radicals arrogated to themselves and the media acquiesced to.
An Islamist, properly speaking, is a person who wants to lead his life in the way his religion prescribes. Viewed in this context, it should not be different from a person who wants to lead his life in the way his religion has prescribed, be it Judaism, Buddhism, or Christianity. Unfortunately, the current definition of the term is politically charged because many Muslims extend the term to a set of ideologies holding that "Islam should guide social and political as well as personal life."

There would have been little dispute if the ideology that Islam dictates was rooted to one interpretation of the Quran and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The reality is that it is not so.
The Islamists can have varying interpretations on various Quranic verses, sayings of the Prophet (pbuh), and his practices. They differ on whether the Quran allows judicious inferences, or exercise of intellect in interpreting the Quran. In one word, there is no consensus in the Muslim community as to how it shall govern itself. And hence many Muslims differ from the Islamist views that emphasise the implementation of Sharia (Islamic law); of pan-Islamic political unity; and of the selective removal of non-Muslim, particularly Western, military, economic, political, social, or cultural influences in the Muslim world. The Islamic militants take this ideology to another level and want to fight all who in their eyes stand in the way of establishing this ideology. Their world view is a unilateral interpretation of the religion and imposition of the laws and practices that they think most appropriate. Hence their fight, and hence the war that the militants are waging seizing the opportunity that the civil war in Syria and a moribund Iraq has given them.
The most important reason why the so-

called Islamic State that the militants claimed to have set up and have been able to hold is the inability or unwillingness of the neighbouring countries, including Turkey and Iran, to engage in this battle. In fact, bickering among Muslim nations on how to handle political Islam and the forces that promote the religious militants is the root cause of the spread of this armed movement. Absence of democratic practices and institutions in most Muslim countries and their abject failure to engage popular will in government have not helped much in stopping the growth of radical groups and their extreme philosophies in the Muslim world. The Islamic State is only a conglomeration of the radical groups and their radical acolytes spread across that region, with sympathisers from other parts of the world.
It is difficult to predict when and how this militancy will be stopped. The airstrikes that have begun have a limited capability. Even ground attacks can have limited effect. The militants will move from place to place, seek new territories, and find other means to spread their mission. And we all know that these will be no peace missions.
The only effective way to stop this malignancy and prevent its growth is for the world Muslims to recognise that the state that extremists want to found is a threat to their religion, and urge that their governments meet this threat more earnestly and seriously. This includes allowing more democratic participation in governance, and ensuring civil liberties and freedom of speech for all their citizens. The threat of militancy and extremism in religion can only be stopped by allowing the population to have an open dialogue on what type of government they want, how a people want to lead their life, and what role religion should play in their lives. Rhetoric alone on Islam as a peaceful religion will not work; Islam will be better understood by its practice as a peaceful and tolerant religion. Unless Muslim countries and all Muslims of the world realise this, Islam phobia among non-Muslims will likely spread.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

QUOTABLE Quote
Good advice is always certain to be ignored, but that's no reason not to give it.
Agatha Christie

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph
ACROSS
1 Finish last
5 Cook's needs
9 Masseur's targets
11 Kind of committee
13 Stable section
14 "Camelot" composer
15 Hall of Famer Williams
16 Bridge player's raise
18 Plug
20 Count start
21 Dulcet
22 Marshes
23 Hoary
24 Afg. neighbor
25 Casual eatery
27 Recital highlights
29 Curry on TV
30 Gas buy
32 Response elicitors
34 Golf position
35 Fierce fighter
36 Best of the best
38 Doofus
39 Morley of "60 Minutes"
40 Put away
41 Gardens Areas
DOWN
1 Endures
2 Big singing groups
3 Deborah Harkness novel
4 Long swimmer
5 Less bright
6 Freshener target
7 Deborah Harkness novel
8 Scattering seeds
10 Not on the level
12 Hands over
17 Tabby's tender
19 Soccer legend
22 Pitching no-no
24 You can bet on them
25 Play groups
26 High jinks
27 Mineo of movies
28 Appropriate
30 "Presumed Innocent" author
31 Wolfish looks
33 Office note
37 Research site

Yesterday's answer
DELL BORIS
ELIAS ARENA
BINGE WELDS
UTE CELSIUS
GENIUS ACE
AREA NED
GENE TOTS
VAL DULL
INA RADIUS
CASSIUS RTE
ACTED ELATE
RHINE SITED
SECTS VERY

CRYPTOQUOTE
PL GLTPWWRWB JBANXM XT
EXLEGWGPAGLH P AGHBZ GY AX PWWXC
XLBYBWT AX RB MBUXOZBM.
- QXLZPM PMBLPOBZ
Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE: MOST HUMAN BEINGS HAVE AN ALMOST INFINITE CAPACITY FOR TAKING THINGS FOR GRANTED.
- ALDOUS HUXLEY

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker
GREG: I NEVER PLAYED SPORTS AS A KID
UNLESS YOU COUNT GANG WARS, STREET FIGHTS AND RUMBLES
HENRY by Don Trachte

Comic strip panels showing characters in various situations.