

## This not political programme

### Abjure violence

WE have been making the point and will continue to do so till the cows come home that blockades and hartals are rank bad ideas, more so when innocent lives are lost and private and public properties destroyed in the name of such programmes. It is a pity that the same old script, that we saw being played in 2013 is being reenacted with the two parties rooted to their implacable positions.

In the last seven days ending Saturday 10 Jan, 11 people have been killed and 162 vehicles damaged or destroyed. Houses of ministers and political party offices have been targeted in many parts of the country. And going by the announcement of the BNP there appears no likelihood of a let up in the blockade programmes.

While not for a moment suggesting the abridgment of the right of political parties to organise peaceful political activities including meetings and rallies, we take issue with the type of programme that results in deaths and destruction. Such activities cannot meet the definition of politics or political programme.

It cannot be lost on the political parties who seek public support for their agenda that there is no chance at all of getting it by resorting to terror tactics and inculcating fear in the minds of the people. It is true that the BNP has been pushed to the wall by the government's refusal to allow it political space, but no amount of provocation, either from the government or opposing political party, can justify the violence that we are witnessing.

## Why this embarrassing gimmick?

### BNP lets itself down and the country, too

FOR a few days the press buzzed with a two-pronged information dissemination centering around BNP chief's interment in her Gulshan party office. First, it was given out by party chairperson's press secretary that India's ruling BJP President Amit Shah had, in a telephonic conversation with Khaleda Zia, asked about her welfare. Second, a news item purportedly published by The International Business Times (IBTimesUK), as claimed by BNP circles, referred to US House Foreign Affairs Committee's criticism of government's handling of the opposition.

Both the BNP claims, designed to whip up controversy and drum up external support for Khaleda, now stand thoroughly exposed and demolished. The BJP chief has confirmed that no phone call was made to Khaleda Zia. On the contrary, it seems attempts from the BNP to connect with the BJP leader went unanswered.

Particularly mischievous was the fraudulent statement The IBTimes received from a senior aide to Khaleda Zia's son. In fact, the US Foreign Affairs Committee has condemned in no uncertain terms the use of a fake statement from the US Congress to advance BNP's political goals.

Resorting to deceit and falsehood by a major political party like the BNP is disgraceful for the party and an added slur on the country's image. This, however, shows the desperate state of the BNP and the bankruptcy of the party's leadership at the top. In its current beleaguered state the best the BNP can do to bounce back is to withdraw the blockade that is getting bloodier by the day and not to divert public attention away from it.

### A READER'S RESPONSE

## The tests of freedom

AFTER living through and witnessing the mayhem that the AL government has unleashed on the people of Bangladesh since November 2013, which included a fake election and the tragi-comedy of "defending" democracy on the first anniversary of that event on January 5, 2015, I think Mr. Anam's Commentary in the TDS (Jan 7, 2015) falls short on many levels. It is at best too little too late to wake up to the reality of the nature of PM Hasina's current AL government. Mr. Anam and many others of his ilk in our society persistently ignore history and, ostrich-like, duck their wise heads in the sand refusing to acknowledge the true nature of the present AL government.

In August 1944, after the overthrow of the Italian dictator, Mussolini, Sir Winston Churchill, PM of wartime UK, undisputed leader of parliamentary democracy and freedom and a sworn enemy of fascism was asked how he would judge whether the new Italian government was a true democracy. His reply is quoted below:

"The question arises, 'what is freedom?' There are one or two quite simple practical tests by which it can be known in the modern world in peace conditions -- namely: Is there the right to free expression of opinion and of opposition and criticism of the government of the day? Have the people the right to turn out a Government of which they disapprove, and are constitutional means provided by which they can make their will apparent? Are there courts of justice free from violence by the Executive and from threats of mob violence and free from all associations with particular Political parties? Will these courts administer open and well-established laws which are associated in the human mind with the broad principles of decency and justice? Will there be fair play for poor as well as for rich, for private persons as well as Government officials? Will the rights of the individual, subject to his duties to the state, be maintained and asserted and exalted? Is the ordinary peasant or workman, who is earning a living by daily toil as striving to bring up a family free from the fear that some grim police organization under the control of a single party, like the Gestapo, started by the Nazis and fascist parties, will tap him on the shoulder and pack him off without fair or open trial to bondage or ill treatment? These simple practical tests are some of the title-deeds on which a new Italy could be founded." (1944, August 28, Dawn, 170. Quotation from *Churchill By Himself* -- first edition.)

If we are honest and true to our collective conscience in protecting and preserving these most fundamental characteristics of Parliamentary democracy in any country, and specifically in Bangladesh today, then a new election has to be held immediately, which would be free, fair, inclusive and credible. There is only one way forward, and that is for Sheikh Hasina and the AL, who have brought about this unfortunate state of affairs in Bangladesh, to schedule and hold fresh parliamentary elections or face ostracism by the democracies and the free people of the world.

Iftikharul Karim

# Fall of invincible Rajapakse

MAHMOOD HASAN

INVINCIBLE Mahinda Rajapakse (69) has conceded defeat. His attempt to get an unprecedented third term as president was dashed on January 8, when his challenger Maithripala Sirisena garnered 51.3% votes from Sri Lanka's 15 million voters.

Rajapakse's second six-year term was supposed to end in November 2016. But suddenly last November, the president announced fresh elections. His decision to seek a fresh mandate was linked to several motivations -- astrological considerations; the divided and fragmented opposition; Supreme Court's ruling that he could seek a third term; likely adverse UN Human Rights Council's report in March 2015, which could make him unpopular during the remaining period of his tenure.

Elected for the first term in 2004, Rajapakse had two major credits to his presidency. He waged war against the Tamil Tigers and defeated Velupillai Prabhakaran's LTTE in May 2009. That ended the 26-year old insurgency. The victory led to his reelection in 2010. The second credit was that the economy had grown at the rate of 7% per year since then.

The issues that worked against Rajapakse were high handedness of his executive presidency, authoritarianism, staggering corruption and appointment of family members in powerful positions of the administration. Rajapakse failed to pursue a reconciliation policy to bring the defeated Tamils into mainstream politics. International accusations of war crimes against the Tamils during the LTTE war haunted him, with UN Human Rights Council going after him repeatedly.

Rajapakse amended the constitution (18th Amendment) to remove the two-term limit on presidents. He impeached Chief Justice Shirani Bandarmayake and appointed pliant Attorney General Mohan Peiris as the new chief justice. His three brothers occupy high positions -- Gotabaya Rajapakse is the defense secretary, Chamal is Speaker of the Parliament and Basil Rajapakse is minister for economic development. He had too much power concentrated in his hands.

The voting pattern was marked by some significant changes this time, which upset the election result. In 2010 the Tamils, who constitute 13% of the population, and Muslims who make 7%, abstained from voting, because they did not have any trust in chauvinist Rajapakse. This time around, leaders of both communities promised to support Sirisena. A significant portion of the Sinhalese vote, which traditionally supported Rajapakse, split and went to Sirisena. Disenchanted first time youth voters also voted for Sirisena.

Sinhala Buddhist Maithripala Sirisena (63) comes from a peasant background. Jailed in 1971 during the communist insurrection, Sirisena rejoined mainstream politics

through the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Though he lacks charisma he is soft-spoken and seen as a sober and serious person who can undo the bad precedents set by his predecessor.

Sirisena has promised major political reforms. The MOU signed by him with NDF component parties pledges to abolish the executive presidency, repeal the 18th Amendment and appoint Ranil Wickremasinghe as prime minister of a full all-party government. It was the amendment and the Supreme Court's ruling that encouraged Rajapakse to go for the election. He also pledged to hold fresh parliamentary elections within 100 days of assuming power.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon applauded the "peaceful and credible elections" and affirmed UN support for "development, reconciliation, political dialogue, and accountability in Sri Lanka." Washington, which had strongly criticised Rajapakse for alleged crimes related to the LTTE war, also endorsed the results and said it would work with the new president. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also felicitated the new president.

Now that Maithripala Sirisena has taken over let us see what challenges he is likely to face. His first task will be to keep the disparate group of 40 parties in the NDF united. The motley NDF includes ethnic, religious, Marxist and centre-right parties, and Sirisena may end up being ineffective in his efforts to accommodate their varied demands. Bringing the ethnic minority

communities -- Tamils and Muslims -- alongside the mainstream Sinhala will require inclusive policies. Maintaining the economic growth rate unhindered will require strict and efficient management of fiscal and monetary policies. The NDF component parties have not yet agreed on a common

economic policy. Curbing pervasive corruption will be a daunting task for the new president.

Under Rajapakse, Sri Lanka had tilted more towards China ignoring neighbouring India. Because of criticisms, Rajapakse shunned the West and tried to thwart all attempts to investigate his government's war crimes. Sirisena will have a serious task to rebalance his foreign relations -- mending ties with India while not upsetting the Chinese, who are involved in massive funding of mega development projects. Speaking to Hindustan Times Sirisena remarked: "India is our first, main concern. But we are not against Chinese investment either. We will maintain good relations with China too."

The election passed off rather peacefully, with a few stray incidents. Sri Lankan Department of Election led by Mahinda Deshapriya deserves full credit for organising a clean election. One has to praise Rajapakse for allowing the holding of free and fair election despite all the negative predictions that he was invincible and would employ every means to hold on to power. He will command wide respect from all for handing over power peacefully, respecting the wish of the people.

Can we in Bangladesh learn from the Sri Lankan experience on how to conduct a free and fair election and how power can be transferred peacefully?

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

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## BLOWBACK IN THE HEART OF EUROPE

# Killing Charlie: Cui bono?

PEPE ESCOBAR

PUTIN did it. Sorry, he didn't. In the end, it was not Russian "aggression" that attacked the heart of Europe. It was a pro-style jihadi commando. Cui bono?

Careful planning and preparation; Kalashnikovs; rocket-propelled grenade launcher; balaclavas; sand-coloured ammunition vest stuffed with spare magazines; army boots; piece of cake escape in a black Citroen. And the icing on the lethal cake; faultless Paris-based logistical support to pull that off. A former top French military commander, Frederic Gallois, has stressed the perfect application of "urban guerrilla technique" (where are those notorious Western counter-terrorism "experts" when one needs them?) They might have spoken perfect French; others said it was broken French. Anyway, what matters is that they uttered the magic words, "We're al-Qaeda." Better yet, they told a man in the street: "Tell the media that this is al-Qaeda in Yemen," which means, in American terror terminology, al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP), which had Charlie Hebdo's editor/cartoonist Stephane Charbonnier ("Charb") on a hit list duly promoted by AQAP's glossy magazine Inspire. Accusation: "Insulting the Prophet Mohammed."

And just to make sure everyone had the perpetrators implanted on their brain, the killers also said, "Allahu Akbar"; "We have killed Charlie Hebdo;" and "We have avenged the Prophet."

Case closed? Well, it took only a few hours for French police to identify the (usual?) suspects; French-Algerian brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi. The third man -- the driver of the black Citroen, 18-year-old Hamyd Mourad -- then turned himself in with an ironclad alibi. So the third man remains a cipher.

They all wore balaclavas. The Kouachi brothers have not been captured. But the police seem to know very well who they are. Because they found an abandoned ID in the black Citroen (oh, the troubles of being a command in a rush ...) How come they didn't know anything before the carnage?

Right on cue, Cherif Kouachi's bio was splattered all over. He was on a global watch list. Along with six others, he was sentenced in May 2008 to 3 years in prison for "terrorism;" in fact unloading a dozen young Frenchmen via madrassas in Egypt and Syria to none other than Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the killed-by-an-American-missile former head of al-Qaeda in Iraq and the spiritual father of Daesh/ISIS/ISIL.

Also right on cue, a full narrative was ready for mass consumption. The key point; French police privileges the hypothesis of "Islamic terrorism." According to their "experts," this could be an attack "ordered from abroad and executed by jihadis coming back from Syria that have escaped us," or it could be "suburban idiots that radicalised themselves and concocted this military attack in the name of al-Qaeda."

Scrap option two, please; this was a pro job. And staying with option one, this points right at -- what else -- blowback. Yes, they could be Daesh/ISIS/ISIL mercenaries trained by Nato (crucially, France included) in Turkey and/or Jordan. But it might get even false-flag nastier. They could also be former or current French special forces.

### Blast Islam, will travel

Predictably, Islamofascism peddlers are already having a field day/week/month/year. For simpletons/trolls/hordes exhibiting an IQ worthy of sub-zoology, when in doubt, demonise Islam. It's so convenient to forget that untold millions from Pakistan's tribal areas to street markets across Iraq continue to feel pain devastating their hearts and lives as they are expendable victims of the jihadi mindset -- or "Kalashnikov culture," as it is known in Pakistan -- profiting the "West," directly or indirectly, for decades now. Think ritual droning of Pakistani, Yemeni,

Syrian, Iraqi or Libyan civilians. Think Sadr City witnessing carnages over 10 times worse than Paris.

What French President Francois Hollande defined as "an act of exceptional barbarism" -- and it is -- does not apply when the "West," France in the front line, from King Sarko to General Hollande himself, weaponises, trains and remote-controls assorted mercenaries/beholders from Libya to Syria. Oh yeah; killing civilians in Tripoli or Aleppo is perfectly all right. But don't do that in Paris.

So this, in the heart of Europe, is what blowback feels like. This is what people feel in the Waziristans when a wedding party is incinerated by a Hellfire missile. In parallel, it's absolutely impossible that the oh-so-sophisticated Western intel network had not seen blowback coming -- and was impotent to prevent it (how come the scapegoats du jour, the Kouachi brothers, were not in the gallows?)

Of course the ultra-elaborate Western counter-terrorism expert network -- so proficient at strip-teasing us all at every airport -- saw it coming; but in shadow warland, portmanteau "al-Qaeda" and its myriad declinations, including "renegade" Daesh/ISIS/ISIL, are used as much as a mercenary army as a convenient domestic threat "against our freedoms."

### Who profits?

US Think Tankland, also predictably, is busy spinning the drama of an "intra-Muslim" split which provides jihadis a lot of geopolitical space to exploit -- all this sucking the Western world into a Muslim civil war. This is absolutely ridiculous. The Empire of Chaos, already during the '70s, was busy cultivating jihadi/Kalashnikov culture to fight anything from the USSR to nationalist movements all across the Global South. Divide and Rule has always been used to fan the flames of "intra-Islam," from the Clinton administration getting cozy with the Taliban to the Cheney regime -- helped by Persian Gulf vassals -- advancing the sectarian Sunni/Shi'ite schism.

Cui bono, then, with killing Charlie? Only those whose agenda is to demonise Islam. Not even a bunch of brain-washed fanatics would pull off the Charlie carnage to show people who accuse them of being barbarians that they are, in fact, barbarians. French intel at least has concluded that this is no underwear bomber stunt. This is a pro job. That happens to take place just a few days after France recognises Palestinian statehood. And just a few days after General Hollande demanded the lifting of sanctions against the Russian "threat."

The Masters of the Universe who pull the real levers of the Empire of Chaos are freaking out with the systemic chaos in the racket they so far had the illusion of controlling. Make no mistake -- the Empire of Chaos will do what it can to exploit the post-Charlie environment -- be it blowback or false flag.

The Obama administration is already mobilising the UN Security Council. The FBI is "helping" with the French investigation. And as an Italian analyst memorably put it, jihadis don't attack a vulture hedge fund; they attack a satirical rag. This is not religion; this is hardcore geopolitics. Reminds me of David Bowie: "This is not rock'n roll. This is suicide."

The Obama administration is already mobilised to offer "protection" -- Mob-style -- to a Western Europe that is just, only just, starting to be diffident of the pre-fabricated Russian "threat." And just as it happens, when the Empire of Chaos mostly needs it, evil "terra" once again rears its ugly head.

And yes, I am Charlie. Not only because they made us laugh; but because they were sacrificial lambs in a much nastier, gruesome, never-ending shadow play.

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# LETTERS

## TO THE EDITOR

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### Charlie Hebdo attack

Recently the whole world witnessed the terrorist attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, in which two young Muslim men were involved (they were brothers too). They killed 12 people in the office of the newspaper on January 7 and later they were killed when police stormed their hideout two days later. Regardless of the fact that what Charlie Hebdo did was offensive to Muslims, it does not warrant any act of violence. Islam is a great religion that does not permit violence or killing.

Husna A. Mirza

Jamaica Hills, NY, USA

### Democracy and development in Bangladesh

BNP and its allies have so far failed to present any economic agenda to the nation, let alone any road map to improve further the economic and social condition of the country. Their only agenda appears to be political and that is only how to come to power. They are vocal about democracy, but how democratic were they in their last tenure? The nation has not forgotten their association with those elements who were (and still are) not only anti-liberation but also openly involved in terrorist activities. Unless and until BNP promises a better governance than Awami League and disowns the religious extremists, people have no reason to heed their call for democracy.

On the other hand, there is no gainsaying the fact that Awami League deserves criticism for many of its omissions. However, AL-led government must be given credit for achieving successes in the economic and social arena, particularly those relating to power generation, trade and commerce including exports, rural health and so on. However, the people at large are not that unhappy. They are busy in their own job and are hardly moved by whatever is talked in the talk-shows or written in the media.

Hafejul Alam

On e-mail

### If BNP in power...

I have read with interest the piece captioned "January 5: Feel the pulse of the people" published in TDS on 6.1.15. I agree with the contents of the article.

What benefit the country and the people will have if BNP is brought to power? And also why? BNP should be brought to power so that more Bangla Bhais, Abdur Rahmans, Mufti Hannan etc. can be created and promoted? So that more grenade attacks of 21st August model can be staged? So that Jamaat-e-Islami can dictate BNP and carry out its agenda? So that all the war criminals can be freed from the jails and restored to full glory with compensations?

The economy of the country is picking up. People are interested in development -- self and collective. They have no interest in BNP politics.

Dr. SN Mamoon

Dhaka

### Comments on commentary, "Internment' of BNP chief, a dangerous precedent," published on January 9, 2015

#### Dev Saha

Both parties should take a timeout and talk. We need peace. There is no harm starting a dialogue.

#### Deep

Does it matter if our GDP rises above 10% and there is no rule of law? We feel for the safety of our kids, there are no jobs for people without political background and, above all, no freedom of speech. We want a congenial political culture which will build up a secure and peaceful society. AL has extreme views which are worsening the political culture and hence making our life more unsafe while BNP has an ugly past of reaping the seeds of antagonistic political culture.

#### Waliul Haque Khondker

Democracy is not what bothers the leaders of the two parties. It is all about grabbing power and clinging to it.

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### "People hostage to hostility" (Jan. 6, 2015)

#### S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

One cannot help but feel sorry for the people of Bangladesh as they are stuck with two selfish leaders who only care about themselves.

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### "Sad day for democracy" (Jan. 6, 2015)

#### Nasrullah Khan

Government could have allowed BNP to hold meeting in front of its office at Nayapalton. Heaven would not have fallen if that was allowed.

#### Salim Ullah

Absolute power and absolute authority never bring any good to any society.