

Arrests and punishment of alleged perpetrators

Ensure due process of law

WHILE we strongly believe that appropriate measures should be taken to stop the onslaught of political violence that has killed at least 28 people, we are concerned that the latest drive against terrorism might be giving law enforcement agencies unrestricted power to act at their own discretion, enabling them to indiscriminately arrest, assault and even shoot people.

At least four opposition activists have been killed in a span of only four days in 'cross-fires' by law enforcers, highlighting a dangerous trend of condoning extra-judicial killings in the name of ensuring security. The social welfare minister's suggestion that a directive may be issued to law enforcers to "shoot at sight" can only aggravate our fear that revenge, and not justice, may ultimately be served by this counter-terrorism drive.

Meanwhile, law enforcement agencies have now announced a bounty of Tk1 lakh for tip-off on attackers, which essentially encourages the settling of old scores. There is also a fear that this old and discredited method may lead to wrongful arrests of those suspected to be affiliated with opposition parties.

In a statement released on January 20, rights watchdog Amnesty International urged the government to "carry out thorough and impartial investigations into all instances of arson attacks and killings and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials." We endorse that demand. Indiscriminate violence by the opposition, and that too, against civilians cannot be tolerated under any circumstances, but we have to ensure that due process of law is followed in arresting, investigating and punishing alleged perpetrators. Law enforcers cannot take the law into their own hands in a democratic, civilised country.

Saudi labour market reopening soon

Transparent recruitment process needed

A MID allegations of anomalies in the recruitment process, Saudi Arabia (KSA), one of the largest expatriate labour markets for Bangladeshis closed its doors seven years ago. Thanks to the diplomatic flurry between the two countries, KSA has agreed to give out labour visas to Bangladeshis once again. Prior to the ban in 2008, an estimated 100,000 Bangladeshis used to obtain jobs in the Kingdom on an annual basis. The lift of the ban across the board enables expatriate workers to apply for jobs in all sectors of KSA's economy. We are informed that a formal announcement will soon be forthcoming from the Saudi labour ministry.

Now that Bangladesh has got a new lease on this lucrative Middle East labour market, it is time to institutionalise the recruitment process. Transparency in the online registration system is of utmost importance as no one, particularly our prospective workers destined to that market want to fall victim to unethical recruitment agencies. It is also time to do our homework to satisfy a key KSA requirement that would-be workers receive an informative orientation programme prior to their departure from Bangladesh to KSA so that they are familiar with what is required over there. There is urgent need for imparting necessary training here in Bangladesh in order that our workers excel in their respective jobs and professions in overseas labour destinations. The order may seem long, but we cannot forget that Bangladesh is not the only country in Asia competing for a slice of the international labour markets.

Obama upbeat on the State of the Union

ABDUL MATIN

BLOUED by the economic recovery, rising employment rate and falling deficits, President Barack Obama was upbeat in his 6th State of the Union address. He declared that "the shadow of crisis has passed" and claimed credit for turning a page after the worst recession since the Depression. He unveiled a major domestic programme to improve the condition of the middle class. He intends to make community colleges free for most students, enhance tax credits for education and child care and impose new taxes on high income earners and large financial institutions. "Will we accept an economy where only a few of us do spectacularly well? Or will we commit ourselves to an economy that generates rising incomes and chances for everyone who makes the effort?" He asked. He proposes to provide sick and maternity leave and affordable child care to the working families. He pledged that Congress should pass a law to give women the same wages as men for doing the same job.

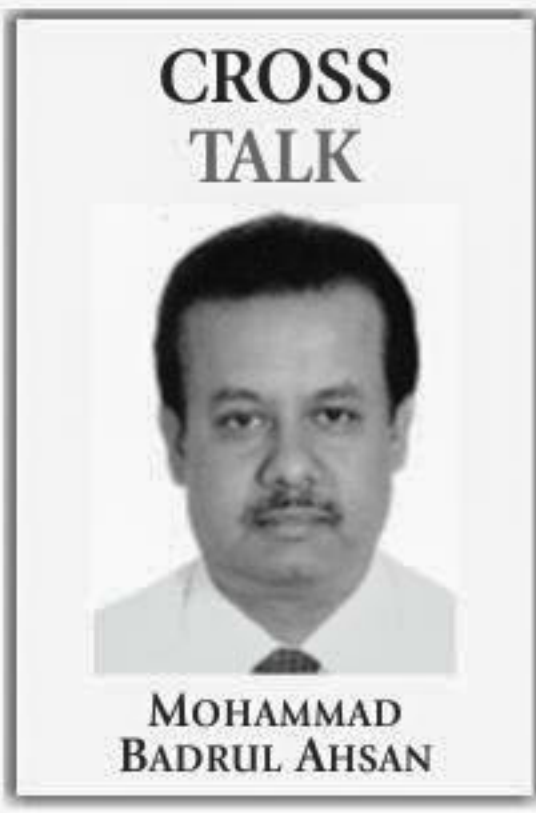
He intends to continue with his foreign policy that combines "military power with strong diplomacy," and requested Congress to lift the trade embargo on Cuba and pass legislation to fight against the Islamic State. He warned that any attempt to discard his health care law or his executive actions on immigration would face vetoes. Referring to cyber war he said: "No foreign nation, no hacker should be able to shut down our networks, steal our trade secrets or invade the privacy of American families, especially our kids. If we don't act, we'll leave our nation and our economy vulnerable."

Obama explained: "I have no more campaigns to run." Still he wants to "do what I believe is best for America." The State of the Union speech is traditionally full of rhetoric -- accompanied by frequent clapping and ovations. Obama, in his words and body language, tried to convey one message: he meant business. Why?

There must be several good reasons besides being driven by his patriotism which is beyond any question. First, he wants to show "Yes, we can," his campaign slogan during the first presidential election. He knows that if he fails, there may not be another coloured US president in the near future and he will get all the blame. Second, though he didn't mention it, he could not take the outcome of the recent mid-term election too easily. Definitely, he intends to regain some of the losses during the presidential election in 2016. Lastly, what else would please him more than welcoming another Democrat (Hillary Clinton?) at the White House when he leaves? Why not? When the economy thrives, do the Americans care for anything else?

The writer is a senior nuclear engineer.

No solution until people are in power



ALEXANDER the Great cut the Gordian Knot after hearing an oracle promise that whoever could undo it would be the next ruler of Asia. That legend is haunting us in this country, albeit working backwards. In their contest for power to rule this country, our politicians are locked in an endless deadlock. They're caught in their tangled politics like spiders stuck in their own webs.

Today, the one question every citizen likes to ask is how this country can ever get out of this quagmire. And some of them are already asking that question in their private conversations, television talk shows, and newspaper columns. Those who are afraid to speak wrestle with that question in their quiet frustration. Everybody is worried who would be the next casualty in the firing line of hell-bent politicians.



Albert Einstein said that no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. That problem is the real problem holding back politicians. Poison cures poison. A thorn removes a thorn. Politics predates upon a similar proposition that politicians will act as their own checks and balances; the government will balance the opposition and the opposition will check the government.

There is no sign of surcease in hostility between the two political sides because neither side has changed its level of consciousness. A battle is always fought in thoughts before it goes to the battlefield. Once it's there, thinking gets to a fight to finish.

The futility of our politics is that politicians have confused rivalry with enmity. Rivalry is competition amongst equals when someone tries to prove that he is as good as or even better than someone else. Enmity is when someone is opposed to someone else and tries to harm or eliminate his opponent.

In this country, that level of antagonism has hardened on both sides. Like concentric circles sharing the same midpoint, each political party is surrounded by wider

circles of intellectuals, professionals and other party affiliates harbouring the extreme prejudice of their leaders. So, while this country continues to descend into chaos, violence on the street escalates in tandem with verbal invectives.

The reason why the deadlock can't be unlocked is that politicians aren't approaching politics with an open mind. Their partisan minds behave like courtesans, dancing and singing for the carnal satisfaction of their political ambitions. They all speak in unison using the same tone of voice and the same choice of words. It's no surprise that everybody starting from party cadres to leaders to thinkers is speaking in the same obnoxious language.

Every time someone talks, he or she reeks with prejudice. Socrates favoured truth as the highest value, proposing that it could be discovered through reason and logic. Today's truth is captive of obsessed minds, reason and logic displaced by selfishness and arrogance hissing in the depths of elusive convictions. Our politics is lost in a tour puzzle where walls and paths constantly change during the game.

That brings us to the ultimate conclusion: The Gordian Knot in this country cannot be untied without an Alexandrian solution. Neither side in this quarrel is ready to step back. Neither side is ready to cut the other side some slack. It looks highly improbable that those who have compounded this problem will ever be motivated to find the solution.

Those of us who are getting their voices hoarse from screaming for a solution should know they have been focusing on the fallacy that the ill can heal themselves. A dialogue, even if it ever happens, between the two sides won't bring a lasting solution for the same reason remission doesn't always mean cured. It will bring temporary relief without doing away with the fear of another relapse.

Neither can a third force give us hope because a plant doesn't start bearing fruit right away. We have occasionally tried and failed in that experiment. Military coups have transplanted alternative forces only to prove that orange doesn't grow on apple trees. Those who have to rule the people must be organic. The rulers must come from the people in order to belong to them.

The beauty of democracy isn't only that it churns out governments in an orderly fashion at regular intervals. Its main function is to tell the rulers when the people have spoken. In the last 43 years power has been grabbed by both elected and unelected governments, elections often creating the illusion that power wasn't taken at gunpoint. That illusion is now only overly stretched.

The right-minded people with like-minded determination should unite to dismantle that illusion. It may not happen tomorrow in one dialogue or another election or yet another military coup. A chronic condition of high prevalence requires long-term intervention. Power and people can be connected only after politicians are separated from their illusion.

The writer is Editor, First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star. E-mail: badrul151@yahoo.com

Eight key actions for economic development

TAKEHIKO NAKAO

ASIA is making remarkable progress in development and poverty reduction. But, why have some countries developed more rapidly than others? It's a question that engaged my thoughts during visits to many of the Asian Development Bank's developing member countries.

In the 1950s the Philippines was second only to Japan in per capita gross domestic product (GDP), but it slipped to among the lowest in per capita GDP terms of the major Asean countries, although it has been growing more rapidly in recent years. The People's Republic of China lifted its per capita GDP from just over \$300 in 1990 to nearly \$7,000 today.

My first-hand experience of developing Asia tells me that good government policies comprising eight key actions provide the answer to this question. The right policies in these eight areas can lift low-income countries at least to upper-middle income status.

The first key to success is high quality infrastructure. Without adequate power, roads, and ports, investment from both domestic and foreign sources is difficult and industry cannot develop. Infrastructure also gives people access to basic services like healthcare and education. Every time I go to China I'm struck by the new urban and rural infrastructure. China's public investment to GDP ratio is 22%, while much of developing Asia's doesn't even reach 5%. Better mobilisation of domestic resources, especially through tax revenues, is essential. Countries can also attract private funds by increasing the use of public-private partnerships.

Second, investments in human capital—education and health—are vital. While many countries across Asia now have high primary school enrolment rates, the quality of teaching at secondary and tertiary levels often disappoints. Countries also need to improve their technical and vocational education and training to match the needs of industry with the skills of the next generation. In Indonesia, for example, ADB supports 300 vocational schools to help improve labour market opportunities for high school graduates.

The third condition is good macroeconomic policies. Double-digit inflation, excessive government spending and high interest rates deter savings and investment. Since the 1997/98 Asian financial crisis, many countries in the region have reinforced their fiscal, monetary, and financial sector policies. Fiscal deficits are now smaller and inflation more manageable, while banks are better capitalised and regulated. We should not lose our hard-won gains in macroeconomic stability.

Openness to investment and trade is the fourth ingredient. Countries that hide behind closed doors will not advance. In the past, many countries suffered from socialist or inward-looking economic policies such as import substitution, price controls, and the nationalisation of major industries. Those days are gone, and there is now consensus in Asia about the importance of market-oriented policies.

exploit their comparative advantages, gaining access to global markets, foreign capital and advanced technologies. Red-tape and complicated regulations—though created with good intentions for certain policy purposes—impede investment. There are encouraging signs in streamlining regulations. India's new government has pledged that it will offer foreign investors "the red carpet" rather than red tape. Countries such as Viet Nam are also making serious efforts in reforming state-owned enterprises and nurturing their financial sector to better allocate resources through market mechanisms.

Fifth is governance. Corruption is fundamentally unfair. It also diverts the energies of the people from productive endeavours, thereby damaging growth. It's pleasing to see a number of Asian countries step up the fight against corruption. Transparency and accountability are indispensable not only for government but for state-owned enterprises as well. Governance is also about the administrative capacity of governments to deliver on their commitments. To do this, enhancing the capacity of the civil service is imperative.

Equality of access to incomes and other opportunities is the sixth condition. A wide gap between the rich and poor prevents shared efforts for development. It also erodes the quality of a country's workforce, as the poor are deprived of incentives and opportunities to acquire the necessary education and skills. To make growth more inclusive and sustainable, countries need to create quality jobs and plug gaps in access to education, health, and financial services. Sustainable growth also requires policies to tackle climate change and manage disaster risks.

The seventh point is the importance of a clear vision for the future. The successes of Singapore and South Korea are testament to this. Governments have a responsibility to plan for their country's future based on careful analysis of its comparative advantages and the evolving global economic landscape. This doesn't mean that the economy should be state-driven, but it does mean the government should prioritise its spending and public works and provide appropriate guidance to the private sector. The strategy should be shared with the people and be flexible to respond to changing environments, but also consistent beyond changes in government.

Finally, growth is underpinned by security and political stability. Conflict disrupts development, and ending it can yield tremendous benefits. Myanmar's emergence from isolation has allowed it to attract private investment and assistance from multilateral and bilateral donors. In the Philippines, a comprehensive peace agreement with Islamic groups in Mindanao could unleash the rich potential of the region. Peace and geopolitical stability should continue to support robust growth in Asia.

I've been impressed by the strong commitment of developing Asia's leaders to market-oriented reform and other elements of the eight actions. Still, fully implementing them will require sustained, firm leadership and continued public support.

The writer is President of the Asian Development Bank.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

We want severe punishment for the arsonists



PHOTO: STAR

Every day miscreants are burning people by throwing Molotov cocktails in the name of democratic demands. Is it a sane way of pressing home one's demand? No! This is clear-cut murdering of people without any accountability as if they have got license to kill! These gruesome killings are the result of conflict between political parties. Why should we bear the brunt of the power feuds between belligerent political parties? We saw innumerable killings and maiming by arson attacks before the 5th January election of 2014, but not a single perpetrator has been caught and brought to justice. Even at that time, the Hon'ble Prime Minister vowed to take stern action against such arson attacks and killings, but nothing fruitful happened. Every day suffering people are imploring the government and the law enforcers to do something against the perpetrators of these gruesome attacks, but no one is listening at all. And why are the law enforcers there – is it to serve the politicians' interests? So my appeal to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, please set an example by giving the harshest punishment to those who are killing innocent people.

Shazzad Khan
Culshan, Dhaka

Call off blockade please

Blockade, hartal, violence, sabotage, killings, etc. are not the solution to our current problems. In fact, these acts are affecting business and growth, forcing the foreign investors to withdraw investments and retailers to cancel and shift their orders to other countries. Innocent people are being killed.

Bangladesh is the second largest RMG exporter in the world and aiming to become the first. Can we become the number one this way? Can we influence the foreign investors to invest in our country? Can we prevent the retailers from shifting their orders to other countries? I am a well-wisher of Bangladesh; I would appeal to all of those who believe in blockade, violence, hartal, arson, sabotage etc. to withdraw the blockade and resolve the issues amicably and work together towards a common goal.

Zubair
India

Goodbye Bret Lee

Bret Lee has retired from all types of cricket. We salute Bret Lee for his outstanding achievement in cricket. He played a long innings of 20 years. He was a great cricketer and famous fast bowler. We think he can contribute more to world cricket by becoming a bowling coach. Youngsters can learn a lot from his bowling actions. Long live Bret Lee.

Shafkat Rahman
BIAM Laboratory School
Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Targeting law enforcers," published on January 19, 2015

Rahul Ahmed

True, these acts need to be condemned. Police brutality and making political statements should also be condemned. Police are acting as political goons.

Barkat

Let there be a free and fair election and let the people decide.

Kabdullah

These law enforcers are not the employees of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; they are the employees of the ruling party!

"No way out?" (January 18, 2015)

Alo

It seems that we are at a crossroads and have been marching towards a confrontational situation as there have been fundamental and basic ideological differences between the main two parties.

Molla A. Latif

The question is, will the government of Sheikh Hasina yield to the BNP combine's demand for an inclusive election under a CTG?

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

How unfortunate that people have to pay the prices for these leaders' ego and stubbornness. The irony is that these leaders were put to the position of power by the very people who continue to vote for them despite their dismal records.