

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Dilemma over oil pricing Consumers the losers here

ACCORDING to a report published yesterday in a leading Bangla daily, price per litre of diesel and furnace oil stood at Tk.44 and Tk.28 respectively as per last week's price of oil per barrel in the international market. Yet, prices remain stagnant in the country for these two types of oil at Tk.66 and Tk.60 respectively. Apparently, authorities have decided to watch the market for the next six months before adjusting the prices. In the meantime, consumers both at industrial and private levels will continue to pay these inflated prices. Despite indications that the depressed state of petrol will not be rising anytime soon, we would like to ask as to the rationale behind BPC's support for inaction.

Had prices been brought down, it would have ushered in a reduction in cost of production – agricultural and industrial, lowering of electricity prices and mass transportation costs. The age old fear that lowering of price would precipitate cross-border smuggling of oil is a matter of law enforcement. A failure to check this is hardly any excuse for not readjusting oil prices downward. A reduction in transportation costs would bring down the prices of tickets commuters pay to get from Point A to Point B or beyond. Lower diesel price per litre would save farmers money to fire up their generators and that would be reflected in wholesale and retail pricing of produce reaching end consumers. Perhaps authorities need to revisit their position on the price of oils for the common good.

Masterminds of violence eluding capture

Will law enforcers be focused?

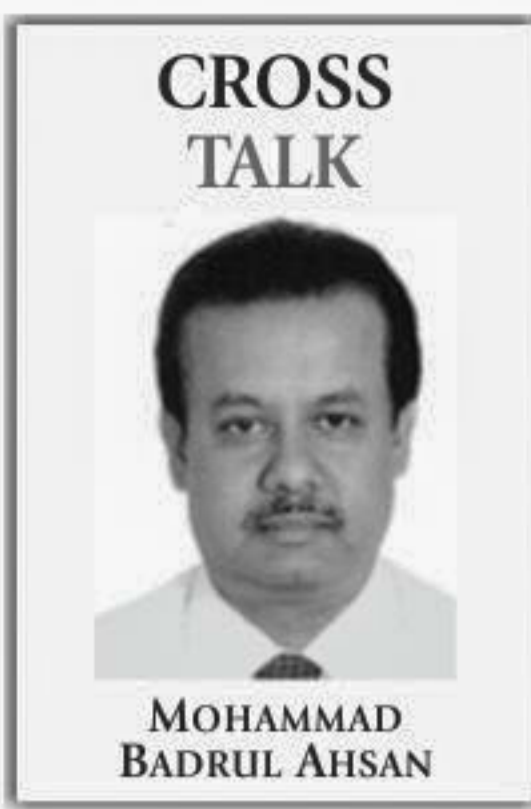
AT least 500 cocktail and petrol bombs have been inflicted on the public and property over the last 24 days, and 588 people have been arrested by the police for their alleged involvement in arson attacks and violence on law enforcement agencies. Based on their investigations, the DB police have identified 170 masterminds of cocktail and bomb attacks in the capital. According to the police, 70 of these "terrorists" belong to Chhatra Shibir, while the rest are members of Jatiya Chhatra Dal and their professional goons.

What is surprising, however, is that despite professing knowledge of the involvement of these 170 alleged terrorists, the police have so far failed to ascertain their whereabouts and arrest them. Given that stringent measures have been taken and law enforcement agencies empowered to curb violence around the capital, it is unacceptable that the police have only managed to arrest some of those throwing the bombs, not the ones making them and orchestrating the attacks.

If the people identified by the DB police as the main perpetrators of violence still remain in hiding, who are the people that are being arrested on a daily basis by the law enforcement agencies? Are we to also assume that the bounties offered by both the police and the Rab have yet to prove their efficacy in enabling capture of criminals?

We urge law enforcement agencies to conduct their investigations and arrests with due professionalism. If they have proper evidence, they must bring those involved, irrespective of their political affiliation, into the purview of justice.

Death of politics and politics of death



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

In Aeneid, a Latin epic poem written by Virgil, Aeneas readily complied after his enemies requested for a twelve-day truce so that they would have the chance to bury and honour their lost soldiers. A similar occasion had arisen in this country last week, when BNP chairperson's son died in Malaysia and she needed some space to mourn her loss. Since she never requested for relief from her side, the ruling party politicians had nothing to comply. Instead they used that very week like an open season and pounded her like jackhammers.

They piled up more burdens on her already crushing burden of grief. They lambasted her party for failing to extend courtesy after the prime minister arrived at her front door to express condolences. They also pressed charges against her for ordering bomb attack on a bus that burned 29 people. The information minister threatened to implicate her in more charges of subversive activities that killed 32 people. He even mentioned that one of the prisons in the country is being readied for her detention. The last straw to break the back of the camel, the ACC moved to revive a seven-year-old graft case against her.

Many ruling party leaders thought their rudeness to the BNP leader was only justified. One of them even warned last Monday that she wouldn't be able escape divine justice for driving a political movement that's getting innocent people killed every day. Others including the prime minister hinted that the opposition leader had got her comeuppance when her son died, because she allowed the sons of other mothers die under her watch.

Boxing legend Muhammad Ali once described himself as someone so mean that he made medicine sick. That pugilist's pun resonated in the events of the entire week, which has been succinctly summed up by a former dictator of this country. In what must be the only sensible thing he said in years, Hussein Muhammad Ershad accused the politicians of being sick and recommended medical attention for them. He was sensible for a second time around in that same breath when he used the subject pronoun "we" to describe the community of politicians. Lucky for us, he

Our politicians not only failed to show consideration for their people, but they also failed to show consideration for each other.

didn't consider himself an exception to the rule.

Those who know Ershad also know that his revelations have shorter shelf life than fresh vegetables: They don't last even for a day. But this one time the man has hit the nail on the head and said something of lasting value with a straight face. Our sick politicians are indeed so sick that they are giving their noble profession a very bad name.

The whole of last week was yet another rude awakening to that bitter truth as the politics of death exposed us to the death of politics. This nation, undone by its fractious politics, gave British poet John Donne a run for his money. "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind," writes the poet. His words proved inane as we confronted the tragedy of one death in the face of many.

Perhaps that was the most disturbing thing about the whole situation. Our politicians not only failed to show consideration for their people, but they also failed to show consideration for each other. And that was the last frontier of political degeneration beyond which exists the sprawling wasteland of a dog-eat-dog world.

G.K. Chesterton writes in his book *Orthodoxy*: "Tradition is the democracy of the dead. It means giving a vote to the most obscure of all classes: our ancestors." He then goes on to say that all democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth and tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death.

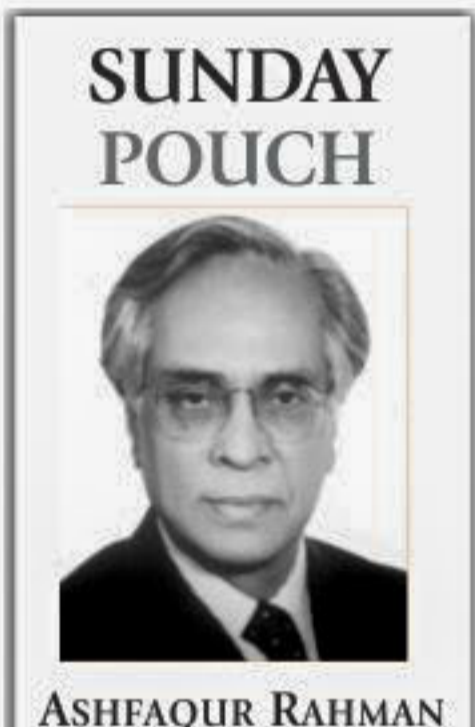
While we are struggling with democracy in this country, last week our politicians also failed to uphold tradition. The ruling party politicians had first announced that they would attend the funeral prayer of the BNP leader's son. Then they changed their minds at the last minute because political hatred went so far that it transcended even the bounds of death. It wreaked its havoc not just in this world but continued on to the other side of the grave.

If the BNP leader failed in her public duty to show consideration for the deaths of others, that failure multiplied manifold as each and every one of the ruling party leaders failed in his or her private duty to show consideration for the death of her son. It's not about mixing apples and oranges, but one can tell if a pot of rice is cooked by squeezing a grain between one's fingers.

That brings us to the sickness issue, which is pandemic amongst our politicians. If they are no longer touched by our deaths, how the heck will they touch up our lives?

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Titans meet, world notices



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

WHEN US President Obama came on a three day visit to India, an unusual spectacle was seen at Delhi airport. There was Modi, the prime minister of India waiting anxiously at the foot of Air Force One to welcome Obama and his wife Michelle. Modi himself was wearing a bright orange and beige wrap-around to warmly greet them. He had broken protocol to come to the airport to meet his special 'buddy' who had come to honour India on its 66th Republic Day. It was a fitting tribute to the changing relationship between the two titans of democracy coming from far flung corners of the world. It was also to remind all that in the few months that Modi has been prime minister, this was the fourth time they had met; and of these meetings two of them were in India. It was an unusual gesture by the US, who had barred Modi from even getting a US visa only in the recent past.

So what have been the dynamics that led to this turnaround? History tells us that India had maintained a strict policy during the days of the Cold War of staying at a safe distance from the US and pursued what was called 'non-alignment'. It refrained from buying defense equipment from the US. Russia was India's principal supplier of arms and ammunition. But with the recent tectonic shift in US-India relations, India has been buying more and more from the US.

In Delhi, Obama had a busy schedule. Besides meeting Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and being feted by a banquet, the American president had intensive talks with the Indian prime minister to settle outstanding bilateral issues. One of them was the irritating matter of supply of civilian nuclear technology to India that was signed in 2008 but had been held up by the US due to its concerns regarding liability in the event of a nuclear accident. But this had led the US to stay out of a huge market as energy starved India had planned to increase nuclear power generation by 13 times. Obama became the first US president to attend the spectacular military and cultural display on India's Republic Day.

Several images of Obama's visit to India this time had stuck to many discerning observers around the world. The BBC listed them. First was the 'hug' that Modi gave to Obama. But what was significant was that Obama displayed the chemistry and Modi his warm friendship for each other. It was a brewing 'bromance' between the leaders of the two largest democracies. It became evident immediately that Modi has 'managed to put his controversial past' behind him. The other image that registered was the 'woman power' displayed. In the past decades the image of women power in India was in decline. This was so when women in India were increasingly maligned due to incidents of rape in the country. But in the Republic Day parade a

350 person women's squad drawn from the Indian army, navy and the air force led the huge men's contingents in the march past. Then again, a woman Indian Air Force Officer, Wing Commander Pooja Thakur, was requisitioned to lead the Guard of Honor for President Obama at Rastrapati Bhavan. The image of Pooja smartly leading men was in sync with the image of Indian women in millions joining the job market as well as, among other things, supporting the recent Indian mission to the Planet Mars.

The third interesting image of the visit was 'the picture of President Obama sipping tea in the lawns of Hyderabad House' where the important talks were held, while Mr. Modi a former tea seller looks on. President Obama had reportedly said to Mr. Modi that his life story could only happen in America. But Mr. Modi narrated the story of a tea seller rising to be a prime minister could also happen in a democracy like in India. The tea became the symbol of the possibilities of what can take place only in true democracies.

It is clear now that growing convergence of interests of India and the US in the world had brought the two countries closer. It is evident that, as the US reduces its military presence in Afghanistan and transfers security control to the Afghan government, the new governments in Delhi and in Washington needed to find ways to strengthen their partnership in Afghanistan. Thus, both the countries share a number of objectives in South Asia. These include a unified and integrated Afghanistan. Both the countries also want that Afghanistan prevent terrorist groups from using its territory to train and strike against them and anywhere in the world. They also want an Afghanistan that serves as a central trade, energy and transit hub connecting south and central Asia. Both the countries further want that Pakistan stop being used by various militant groups for operating from its territory.



At the core of revitalised India-US relationship is of course strengthening economic ties. Both the countries aspire to avail of each others' markets to increase their bilateral trade and investment. But India needs a US that is strong enough to protect its own global and regional interests too. In this aspect both the countries depend on each other to contain a rising China. It is curious also that the US is ready to strengthen the Indian navy and the air force to address this issue.

So if the Indian-US relationship in the past was viewed in abstract terms, the reality today is that the two countries need each other more than before. Their bilateral partnership acquires greater salience. The fact is that US-India relation seems to be no more aspirational but an immediate mutual need. That is why perhaps the US has agreed to support India's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council too.

We are, therefore, likely to see much more proximity of the two titans in the future also.

The writer is a former Ambassador and a commentator on current affairs. E-mail: ashfaqur303@gmail.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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"A good gesture by PM"

This refers to the editorial "A good gesture by PM" published in TDS on January 26, 2015. I respectfully disagree with the editorial. First of all, the core reason for the current tension is the non-participatory election in 2014. Without addressing the core issue, the tension cannot be diffused by a mere condolence visit. Secondly, the PM and her entourage were well aware of the condition and state of mind of Khaleda Zia due to the loss of her son whom she had not seen for a long time. The PM knew that there would be no one to receive her. So, in my view this trip was nothing but a publicity stunt. Moreover, readers should be able to recall the lack of courtesy accorded by the PM when Khaleda Zia visited her when the PM's husband Mr. Wajed Mia died. I do not recall seeing a Daily Star editorial on that occasion.

Iftexhar Anam
On e-mail

Mothers bear the same pain

I deeply mourn the unexpected death of Arafat Rahman Koko and feel the condition in which his mother is. At the same time, I also feel the agony of those mothers who have lost their children in recent arson attacks or whose children are writhing in pain in the hospitals. I realise the anxiety of thousands of mothers of the 14 lakh SSC examinees who are facing uncertainty over the forthcoming exam. Who will ensure their security while going to exam and returning home? The PM and the BNP chief are both mothers. Shouldn't they understand the feelings of the other anxious mothers of the country?

Mohin Uddin Mizan
On e-mail

Who runs BNP?

A Bengali daily carried a comment that there was a call from somewhere and Khaleda Zia's spokesperson had rushed out and locked the gate of the BNP Gulshan office so that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina could not enter the premises to express her condolences to Khaleda Zia on the death of Arafat Rahman Koko. All this had happened while the senior leaders of BNP, who are mostly in their mid seventies, were sitting in Khaleda Zia's office. Later on, different statements were made and regrets expressed giving reasons why the Prime Minister was denied entrance.

Is it true that all this has happened because of a call from somewhere? If so, then who is running the show in BNP? Has BNP gone into the hands of younger generation and are they taking over from the senior members of the party? We all know that Tarique Rahman, senior vice president of BNP now living on asylum in London, made calls to enforce blockade and strikes in Bangladesh which is now in its fourth week.

I wonder whether BNP is going the same way as the MQM in Pakistan which carries out its activities under the direction of its party head Altaf Hossain, sitting in London for more than last two decades.

Ziauddin Ahmed
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Blockade raises cost of business," published on January 27, 2015

Sayed Rahman

Blockade raises not only cost of business but also the living expense of general people. Both the parties are talking about people, but people are not happy with the present situation.

"Police asked to intensify raid, watch" (Jan. 27, 2015)

Barkat

Instead of doing so much hard work why can't the government just sit and talk with BNP? Why can't there be a free and fair inclusive mid-term election for the sake of the nation? AL is so confident of its good work. Definitely if the people want, AL will be re-elected.

"BNP to invite PM to Koko's qulkhwani" (Jan. 27, 2015)

Touchstone

It is tragic that Koko's death has become the issue of vicious political game. Inviting the PM to the qulkhwani is a good gesture no doubt but whether it would be expedient on Hasina's part to attend is the question.

Mortuza Huq

Khaleda Zia's state of mind is quite understandable. Yet it is expected from her that she would personally call the PM to thank her for her visit to the BNP's Gulshan office and invite the PM to attend Koko's qulkhwani.

"Will sanity prevail?" (Jan. 27, 2015)

Kabdullah

AL is in the driving seat and they have adopted the politics of annihilation and hence it is very unlikely that sanity will prevail.