

When the news of the PM visiting the Chairperson of BNP came to us we were filled with relief. We were relieved and impressed that our PM had risen above her personal and political animosity towards her archrival and reached out to a mother who had lost her son. Many will say it was a political strategy but few can deny that it was this unexpected gesture that revealed compassion and humanity that are prerequisites of any leader.

In a scenario where there is only fear, fire and total darkness, this one piece of news gave us that flicker of hope that somehow things were about to be turned around. But the PM was turned away without even the minimum courtesy shown. The gate of hope was closed.

Now the gates of hell have opened up again – engulfing humans in the vicious flames – for the crime of trying to survive despite the insanity unleashed on them.

One cannot help but wonder what would have happened had the two leaders met. Would there have been a softening of the staunch hatred they shared for each other? Would they have realised where their all encompassing animosity has taken the nation to – the depths of hell? Would Begum Khaleda Zia have called off the 'blockades' that have immolated so many people? Would the PM agree to allow the free assembly of political opponents? Would they both decide to start discussing the possibility of a free and fair election?

We really don't know whether any of such positive steps would have been taken. At the time of writing this (Monday January 26) we seem to be back to square one.

If we are honest with ourselves we have to admit that getting out of this quicksand has become more and more complicated. Everybody is screaming that they must sit together and negotiate which of course is the logical course. But what about all those people whose lives have been snatched away or made unbearable because of cold blooded, organised, vicious, inhuman acts of brutality? Please remember that the last time it happened there was hardly any attempt to catch the murderers which gave BNP and

its allies the license to hire thugs to set people on fire again this year. They cannot continue to deny their involvement in this diabolical strategy to create terror and chaos just to bring their political opponents down. A member of their student wing blew his hands off while making one of those deadly cocktails, injuring his nephew and niece and finally dying himself. Individuals with affiliation to these parties have been caught with deadly petrol bombs, the law enforcing agencies have announced rewards

if anyone can help them catch these arsonists. But even then the burning alive of humans have continued.

Please let us not be ambivalent about this. We must not let our eagerness for an end to the political stalemate overshadow our demand for justice for all these innocent people who have been torched to death or sentenced to lifelong disability and misery in 2013, 2014 and 2015. Those who have ordered such gruesome attacks on the public have

to be identified, put on trial and punished along with those who have carried out the acts. If there are individuals hired by other quarters to make the opposition look bad, they too must be held responsible.

If the government is sincere about protecting its citizens it has to put a stop to these attacks by using all their resources and making sure that their law enforcing agents do not abuse this authority to harass and torture innocent civilians.

If the government is sincere about caring for its citizens it should provide substantial financial assistance to the families of the dead, to the surviving victims so that they can at least live without the insecurity of a loss of livelihood.

In a civilised country political activists do not set people on fire to get their political demands met. That is what terrorists do.

In a civilised country law enforcing agents do not pick up citizens, torture them and force them to pay up or kill human beings in cooked up 'crossfires'. That is what fascist states do.

We have to be civilised before we try to be 'democratic'. ■

## Being Human First

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