

Heroes in Business and Politics

Is anyone listening?

Shop owners in crisis

SHOP owners across the capital city decided to take to the streets on February 2 to protest the political impasse and the violence that has come with it. More than a thousand members of the Bangladesh Shop Owners Association (BSOA) decided to mark their protest in what the organisation termed as a critical situation with many shop keepers on the brink of going bust. And it is not only the small shops that straddle the side streets of the city that have been hard hit. Upscale markets and malls have all witnessed a massive drop in sales and it is estimated that these establishments are footing a bill of Tk150 crore per day to keep their shops open in the absence of customers.

The protesters urged for an end to the violent politics that has gripped the nation and the capital city since January 6. The dire situation is adversely affecting business for some 2.5 million shops which, before the present political crisis, generated about Tk 3,000 crore in daily sales. But there is grave concern that a large portion of these businesses may face closure in the very near future. That would mean a loss of livelihood and consequent hardship for an estimated 10 million families who are supported by these businesses. This scenario is a reflection of many other sectors including poultry and dairy to name but a few that have been hard hit by the choking blockade of Dhaka city and the wanton use of petrol bombs. To put all this in perspective, the economy as a whole is losing more than Tk 2,200 crore a day. The haemorrhage must stop.

Trigger-happy BSF

A Bangladeshi farmer killed

WE are shocked and surprised by disquieting reports from Birampur upazila in Dinajpur that members of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) shot and killed a Bangladeshi farmer named Nazrul Islam and wounded another peasant Shahedur Rahman on Monday. They had barely planted saplings in a farmland inside the Bangladesh territory when BSF personnel came in albeit with arms. Nazrul, the victim, merely asked the only plausible question to ask in those circumstances, namely, what brought them there? At this, a BSF man fired, purportedly aiming at his chest. And, he died on the spot.

What needs to be noted in particular is that Hela Heng Mong, Sector Commander, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) after a flag meeting following the occurrence with his BSF counterpart told press men, "Where the killing took place is within Bangladesh territory". While we condemn this, we regard it to be in the best interest of the two countries to probe the matter at length and punish the guilty.

The incident simply boggles the mind, and can be treated as a test case for determining how arbitrary, highhanded and lethal BSF men can get despite commitments by their high functionaries to apply 'zero tolerance to border killings.' A non-lethal approach was a necessary part of such assurances, a policy emphasis which obviously does not permeate the functional or ground level.

When so much friendliness is going on at the highest political and official levels between the two countries, it defies comprehension as to why should there be border killings.



RUBANA HUQ

does not smell of one party or the other. Name ten business leaders who the public perceives as objective. Today, neutrality is most precious and scarce.

Apparently business people follow the Prime Minister's schedule and book their tickets to be on the same aircraft, just to be seen. Apparently businessmen fight to be seated close to the press in an official banquet. What else do the business people do? A few business people are also extremely camera friendly and do not miss out on photo opportunities. A chance encounter with the Prime Minister will never be missed and will always be photographed. Those thirty seconds will be frozen in print and framed for being hung on the office wall for the next five years. Sadly that photograph will change with elections. After all, the photograph with the PM comes with a shelf life. With a change in the government, new photo opportunities are sought and a new frame has to replace the last one. Photographs are also used to woo people in the respective areas. One photograph of importance automatically spells clout in the locality.

This is of course all about people who would want to be close to power but are not. The story is entirely different for those who are. Most of those who are associated with associations and federations are where they are today because of their close proximity to the incumbent in politics. Suppose an election is coming up for a particular federation. Very often, there will be almost a no-contest-win for the President-to-be. Very often, the aspiring candidate will apparently have the nod of those who matter and those who will assure him of his post. The sad saga of the entire process of contesting for elections includes the candidate "seeking blessings" from all those who count, and gathering as much support as possible by just mentioning that he or she has the "support" of the honourable Prime Minister. Whether or not the PM has actually "blessed" the candidate, the word goes around and before you know it, the entire business

community is busy talking about it.

What else do business people do? Every time there's unrest, they complain of damages and ask for "dialogue" between the two warring parties. Seminars are held and conclusions drawn with data of losses, which make headlines in every print media the next day. Last week, about 50 top business and export organisations of the country formed a human chain protesting the 20-party alliance's hartal and blockade program. The leaders presented a figure of Taka 36,000 crore incurred as loss over the 16-day program of the opposition. The daily loss has now been calcu-

lated at Taka 2300 crore. When a journalist asked one of the leaders if they expected to see any results out of the human chain, he replied in the negative and said, "What else can we do but protest in this fashion?" The journalist rested her case for then. But the announcement of the next program, announced by FBCCI got her thinking again.

On the 8th of February, "30 million" business people will apparently be standing while waving the national flags from Teknaf to Tetulia, a distance of 914 kilometers, for a total of "15 minutes"! If

Jokes aside, what have we reduced ourselves to? Can a nation that holds pride in its liberation war - a nation that was created at the sacrifice of millions who went down fighting, a nation that has brought international recognition to its language - afford to be manipulated by a few of us who are beneficiaries of the system? If we are to protest today, if the business community is to make a difference, then most of us will need to come clean and admit that when we boast of political affiliations, we no more have the right to expect a credibility tag. If war has to be declared against

acts that burn our own people, we ourselves have to lend our skin to the risk of a fire first. A fifteen minutes or a one-hour program does not drive our agenda home. If protests have to be registered, let them be not only for the losses that we incur, but also for the seven who were just burnt alive forty-eight hours ago, for the common people who are losing lives and livelihood on a regular basis, whose children are stopped from going to schools and who bear the risk of schools being bombed in the Taliban style as fear reigns in every household. If the business community is to protest, let it be in the most meaningful and uncompromising manner, where a few will risk everything and go down fighting.

In April 1919, after a British Brigadier ordered his troops to open fire on a nationalist meeting and four hundred were killed in what is now known as the Jalianwala Bagh massacre, things turned around. Gandhi joined hands with Khilafat; students did not attend colleges, and lawyers did not go to courts. There were 396 strikes in 1921 involving 600,000 workers. But suddenly when in February 1922, a group of peasants attacked and torched a police station in Cahuri Chaura in the UP, Gandhi turned around and said: "No provocation... can possibly justify the brutal murder of men who had been rendered defenseless and who had virtually thrown themselves on the mercy of the mob." By 1922 Gandhi had turned nationalism around to non-cooperation, which later on evolved to social reform.

Sadly, we don't have heroes who even think of social reform and justice anymore. Sadly, we don't have leaders who even spare a minute and grieve for the lives lost because of their violent programs. Sadly, we don't have heroes who understand that fear is not the way to win our hearts and the regular people of this nation are tired of battles that are won at the cost of the commoner.

The "heroes" we see on-screen and in print are "heroes" who enjoy a few minutes of photoshoot opportunities and have long given up on real change. Very often, as a nation, we have different episodes and different heroes. As Jinnah put it in the annual meeting of the League in 1940 held in Lahore: "...the hero of one is the foe of the other."

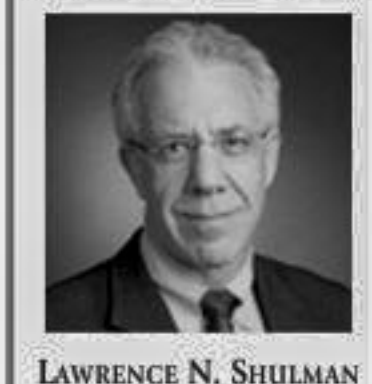
A real hero is yet to be born. Until then programs and rhetoric will continue while real people go up in flames.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Cancer Care for the Developing World

VISIONARY VOICES SERIES



LAWRENCE N. SHULMAN

showed that chemotherapy could cure diseases such as acute lymphoblastic leukemia and Hodgkin's lymphoma, declared "war on cancer." Since then, steady progress has been made using chemotherapy, surgery, and radiation to treat and cure an increasing number of cancer patients. But access to these life-saving advances remains elusive in low- and middle-income countries, where the majority of cancer patients reside today.

In the United States, more than 80% of patients with breast cancer are long-term survivors, and more than 80% of cancer-stricken children survive. In my nearly 40 years as an oncologist at Harvard University, I have cared for thousands of patients who would have had little chance of survival were it not for chemotherapy. Many of the patients who received treatment in the 1970s are alive and well today; their children are now productive adults.

But it was not until I began working in Rwanda in 2011 that I fully grasped the power of the tools at my disposal, by witnessing the impact of their absence. Stepping into the pediatric cancer ward at the central public referral hospital in Kigali was like traveling back in time. Outcomes among Rwandan children with Wilms' tumor, a form of kidney cancer that rarely afflicts adults, mirrored those in the US 80 years ago, before the availability of drugs that today enable more than

90% of diagnosed American children to survive.

According to Rwanda's health minister, Agnes Binagwaho, the cancer ward in Kigali resembled the HIV/AIDS unit when she was a pediatrician at the hospital, a decade earlier. With no antiretroviral therapy, the prescription for HIV/AIDS was food and rest - meaning that infection essentially amounted to a death sentence.

At the time, some were caught, if only briefly, on the wrong side of history. In 2001, a senior US official claimed that it would be impossible to treat HIV/AIDS in Africa, owing to its "complexity" and high cost.

But he - along with the many others who shared his view - was proved wrong. Today, rates of treatment adherence in Africa among HIV-positive patients with access to drugs have long exceeded those in the US. Indeed, Rwanda was one of the first countries to achieve universal access to AIDS treatment.

Despite this experience, the prospect of effective cancer treatment in Africa has been met with similar skepticism. True, cancer therapy is complex. It requires a broad range of diagnostic and therapeutic capacities - pathology, surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, and targeted medicines - together with the knowledge and skill to safely administer these life-saving treatments.

But the Butaro Cancer Center of Excellence and others like it have proved that it is possible to treat cancer patients safely and effectively, even in poor, rural settings. Thanks to the Rwandan Ministry of Health, Partners In Health, and the Boston-based Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, the Butaro Center has treated more than 3,000 cancer

patients, most of whom are referred from outside the region, since its dedication in July 2012 by former President Bill Clinton and Binagwaho. Support from the Jeff Gordon Children's Foundation, the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, LIVESTRONG, and private donors has also been critical to this achievement.

Fortunately, some major institutions are already stepping up to bolster this effort. The World Health Organization, together with the International Union for Cancer Control, is re-examining the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines for Cancer to identify more accurately which cancers are most responsive to treatment, and which place the heaviest burdens on populations.

The most efficient approach to reducing global cancer mortality rates would be to bring existing therapies to cancer patients in developing countries. Add to that international funding for cancer treatment, like that which was mobilized for HIV/AIDS through the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and The Global Fund, and cancer mortality rates in developing countries could decline considerably - and quickly.

More than a decade ago, the international community decided that it would no longer accept certain death for HIV patients. We must make the same commitment today to bring life-saving cancer treatment to patients everywhere.

The writer is Chief of Staff and Director of the Center for Global Cancer Medicine at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Harvard Medical School.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Does security of common people really matter?

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has ordered the law enforcing agencies to take whatever steps necessary to stop the ongoing violence in the country. She said that she would take the responsibility for whatever happens (due to their action) but they would have to ensure the security of the common people.

To us this concern for the people seems hollow because if she really cared, she would have addressed the core issue, agreed to hold the general election under a neutral government which is the demand of a large segment of the people. She just could not ignore it.

All the unrest will end the moment she announces the date of a fresh election under a neutral government and she must do it immediately to save the country and the people.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

People are the ultimate sufferers

Since the inception of Bangladesh, successive governments have hardly succeeded in ensuring the basic rights of the citizens. And nowadays, let alone the other rights, normal death of a person is going to become a rare thing. The ongoing hartal-blockade has already claimed about 50 lives. But you won't find a single party activist affected; the victims are the innocent common persons.

Md. Shafaat Ullah
University of Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR

"KHALEDA WITHOUT POWER FOR 19 HRS" (FEBRUARY 1, 2015)

OpeeMonir

Is Shajahan Khan running the country? It seems that the government is implementing his wishes. At the same time I can't but say that the BNP chairperson should experience the feeling of the general people who had to suffer for days without power during her last tenure. However we protest as it is an act of injustice on the part of the government.

Molla A. Latif

She makes the whole nation suffer; there should be no sympathy for her.

Binodbangali

What about millions of examinees and their parents who have been left in unimaginable uncertainty and anguish because Khaleda Zia has refused to stop blockade during the exam?

"ARE TERROR AND DELUSION NEW NAMES FOR POLITICS" (JANUARY 31, 2015)

Sundar

We all know that power is intoxicating but seeing the politics of Bangladesh, now it seems that powerlessness is more intoxicating.

"MORE THAN 50 FEARED DEAD" (JAN. 30, 2015)

Muzzy703

These traffickers have no respect for human lives. And I am sure they are already planning their next venture.

"GO TOUGH ON ARSONISTS" (JAN. 30, 2015)

Barkat