

In Search of COMMON SENSE

ANU MUHAMMAD

The spirit of liberation war does not mean rhetoric; it means people's power, equality, democracy, sovereign authority over the country's resources and decision making process and democratic practices within party and society

A LONG with killing and torture, uncertainty and insecurity, hatred, intolerance, cruelty, vulgarity, sexism all are coming up on the surface in this time of desperate 'tribal fight' for power. The current phase of it began with the declaration of a big gathering in Dhaka by BNP and alliance to press its demand for fresh election under a caretaker government. The government was not willing to give any space to raise and popularise this demand, so they put a ban on the meeting and enforced many restrictions on BNP alliance's activities. Failing to carry out its rally, BNP started a countrywide indefinite seizure programme. Thus began violence on people in general.

Since then, media has updated us every day, every hour about new killings and injuries in this deadly fight. Nobody is spared: women-men, children-elderly. From January 6 to February 2, we find 46 people have been killed, 24 from petrol bomb and fire, 10 from clashes, 8 by 'crossfire', i.e., killed by police or Rab. 102 have been admitted in burn units, 886 vehicles were attacked. The number of arrests has reached 14,000. Mobility of people has been restricted; people of different trades, especially the informal and transport sectors are living vulnerable lives, struggling for their survival. Meanwhile, the 'As usual' untimely

death continues, including from factory fires, contaminated water drinking, unfit bus accidents and border killing without much attention.

There is no indication that any of these parties have the confidence to rely on people. If the government believed in people's support, it would not have to ban meetings and demonstrations, nor be afraid to discuss the possibility of credible election. On the other hand, if BNP could rely on people's active support it would not need to go for violent actions; it could mobilise people on the streets no matter what restrictions are imposed. So, fearing political defeat, the ruling party increased its dependence on armed law enforcing forces, gave them extra power, as the prime minister said, 'you do whatever you need to do. I will take the responsibility.' And in the absence of people's active support, BNP and allies outsourced their politics to professional bomb throwers. In both ways, victims are the people and the country whose name is used in both camps.

Who is winning in this vulgar mindless fight? Despite increasing repressive measures, mobilising additional police, Rab, BGB and ansar members and having regular support meetings from associate organisations, the government could not restore peace and stability or provide security to the citizens of the country. On the contrary, innocent citizens have been exposed to increasing harassment, indiscriminate arrests and

restrictions by the law enforcing agencies. On the opposite side, after a long month of petrol bomb and violent acts against citizens, BNP-Jamaat could not attract people's support and could not draw the attention of other 'friends'. Nobody is winning; both sides have actually failed. Nevertheless, there seems to be no symptom of realisation of this on either side.

Therefore, despite failures, BNP and allies are not only continuing their indefinite violent programme, but trying to strengthen it. Do they have any signal from anywhere to continue with these deadly attacks? It seems that they are determined to keep the programme on with the hope to attract some special 'rescuers' from home and abroad. On the other side, it appears that AL and associates are happy to take this opportunity to crash BNP, to make them marginal and ineffective in Bangladesh politics. AL is not bothered about Jamaat, because in vote politics, Jamaat can be contained if BNP is crashed. The activities of both sides appear to confirm that provocation and violent acts will not end soon. The question of people's lives and security does not have any space there.

The intellectuals close to the ruling party are willing to see it as a battle between good and evil, spirit of liberation and anti-liberation, development and anti-development, national interest and plunder, secularism and communalism. Sorry, things are not

that simple or 'black and white'. If alliance with Jamaat is a test, BNP has a clear-cut record of associating with the party led by war criminals, but AL has its record too. In 1996 it used this card to organise protracted seizure, hartal and election boycott against BNP government. In that phase, Jamaat and Jatiya party were their main allies. People had their first experience of week-long oborodhs in 1996. BNP then was highly vocal against 'razaakar' since Jamaat was with AL!

After coming to power in 2008 election, AL could remove some blemish of earlier scandals by initiating the war crimes tribunal. Nevertheless, for obvious reasons, suspicion about AL's compromise with Jamaat remains in the society. Huge mobilisation in Gonojagaron Moncho in early 2013 was a direct outcome of that suspicion. Other than bringing some Bangalee war criminals before justice, AL cannot claim to bear any element of the spirit of liberation war in its politics, programmes, and financial records.

The spirit of liberation war does not mean rhetoric; it means people's power, equality, democracy, sovereign authority over the country's resources and decision making process and democratic practices within party and society. AL does not hold a different record than BNP in these areas. In plunder, grabbing land of religious and ethnic minority, corruption, violence, extra judicial killing etc, statistics will place

both in high competition. Therefore, people of this country actually are trapped in a vicious cycle, where they only have the options to choose between the grabbers/looters, under different banners. Both the parties follow the same neo-liberal economic ideology, both aim to enjoy absolute power, both use their student and other organisations to create armed hooligans, both have the records to destroy institutions and create feudal or tribal rule.

People will cry: where is the way out at the moment? Common sense is enough to get the answer; any citizen will be able to give the solution. Number 1: withdraw hartal, oborodh, stop violence and mindless attack on citizens. Number 2: restore civil rights; withdraw restrictions on meetings and demonstrations of the opposition. Stop abrupt arrest and harassment of the people, withdraw restrictions on media, stop extrajudicial killing in the name of 'crossfire'. Number 3: strengthen election commission; allow it to work independently for a better and credible election.

But everybody understands that common sense does not work when greed and audacity grabs power politics, when and where people's lives and interest is the last priority.

The writer is Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University and member secretary of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports.

The plight of low-skilled migrants in Malaysia

NAHELA NOWSHIN

LOW skilled Bangladeshi workers both at home and abroad face persisting challenges to their livelihood in the form of unemployment, extortion, exploitation, unsafe working conditions and a lack of job security. On January 29th, an overloaded ferry carrying illegal migrants to Malaysia sank off the coast of Bangladesh. After the boat capsized around 2.5 km offshore, emergency workers rescued 32 Bangladeshis in the Bay of Bengal but many others remain unaccounted for.

Poverty, underemployment and a surge in our youth population catalyse international migration from Bangladesh due to financial reasons. International labour migration from Bangladesh began to expand in the '90s beyond GCC countries to include countries such as Lebanon, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, etc.

Malaysia is the most important destination of these newer destinations having received around 700,000 Bangladeshi immigrants from 1976 to 2009 according to the Migration Policy Institute. Malaysia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bangladesh in 2012 lifting a four year ban on import of Bangladeshi workers who have been filling up industries of low level, menial jobs that Malaysian locals continue to shun. The complex circumstances responsible for the plight of our low skilled migrants in Malaysia (and elsewhere) must be brought to light and given their deserved attention.

Desperate, unheard and exploited
According to the Financial Express, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Malaysia in December of 2014 resulted in "partial abolition of visa requirements" and an amendment to the MoU of 2012. Workers complained that the PM's trip hardly tackled tangible issues affecting their day-to-day lives. For example, issues concerning workers' abuse, Dickensian conditions of forced labour, and the inevitability of them turning into illegal aliens once MRP expiry dates have passed were not discussed. Although the new MoU will allow for another 12,000 workers to be employed in Sarawak, Malaysia, the fate of 1.4 million still waiting to go to Malaysia despite their registration having been completed two years ago remains undecided.

The Malaysian government relies heavily on foreign labour to fill low-wage jobs in mainly the plantation and construction industries. The News Today recently reported that the failure to expand overseas labour market beyond these sectors led to the rise of "unsafe and illegal labour migration" signalling a failure by the government to send workers through legal channels despite there being a G2G agreement between the two countries. The Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU) of Dhaka University also observed that workers migrating to Malaysia decreased by a dismal figure of 5,191 only in 2014 as a result of the G2G agreement. Workers blame the Bangladesh High Commission for the sluggish recruitment processes under the G2G system.

Despite Bangladesh having signed an anti-human trafficking MoU with Malaysia, instances of human trafficking continue to make headlines. The UN estimates that 50 to 150 Bangladeshis travel to Malaysia every week via dangerous, illegal sea routes. An increase in illegal migration via the Bay of Bengal can be attributed to limitations potential migrants face such as the scarcity of sectors available to low skilled workers and a cap on the number of people that can legally enter the country. The Financial Express reports that over 0.12 million job-seekers were smuggled out of the country in 2014 alone. According to the report, human traffickers charge only Tk 50,000 to 60,000 whereas going through legal means can cost one up to Tk 0.4 million.

The large number of undocumented workers in Malaysia and elsewhere may be explained by the role played by intermediary scouting "agents" who connect potential migrants to employers abroad. These agents negotiate on behalf of migrants with recruitment agencies which in turn negotiate with employers or other intermediaries abroad. This long chain of components involved in the recruitment process results in high transaction costs for the worker. According to a 2009 survey conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Bangladesh, these middlemen generate almost 60% of the costs borne by migrants who wish to go abroad. Because of these rising costs, employers overseas prefer recruiting undocumented workers over documented ones in order to avoid large expenses.

IRREGULAR MARITIME MOVEMENTS FROM BAY OF BENGAL (2014)



Institutional inefficiencies
Remittances from Bangladeshi migrant workers reportedly brought in over \$14 billion in 2014 surpassing those of the RMG sector. According to a report published by the Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA),

Bangladesh is one of the top remittance receiving countries in the world. The stability of remittance inflow - the most important variable contributing to our foreign exchange reserve - is therefore crucial for the well-being of our economy, and our migrant workers

must be protected.
According to Wall Street Journal, about 1.3 million of an estimated 2 million undocumented workers registered with the 6P Amnesty Programme created for the legalisation of illegal immigrants. The program, which has already ended, resulted in 500,000 workers receiving legal documentation while nearly 330,000 were deported. Tenaganita, a foreign worker NGO, blames the lack of transparency in the program's biometric system for making it hard to determine the fate of workers who neither obtained permits nor were repatriated. The NGO also cites the lack of monitoring of the program for giving rise to fraudulent 6P agents. Branding the program a "fiasco," the executive director of Tenaganita said that such malpractices lead to the exploitation of workers and employers alike.

In 2008, the IOM initiated an agreement between the representatives of recruitment agencies from nine Asian countries (including Bangladesh) to promote "ethical and professional recruitment practices." Although the formation of the Alliance of Asian Associations of Overseas Employment Service Providers from this meeting committed to said practices, it did not specify what exactly "ethical recruitment" entails.

The MoU alone is unlikely to curb illegal immigration unless underlying causes are addressed. Some of these issues are insufficient maritime security enabling illegal entry through sea borders, the absence of clear foreign labour policies and the lack of capacity building entities that help potential migrants with language barriers, vocational training, and an understanding of foreign labour laws and workers' rights. Similarly, the G2G agreement is unlikely to succeed unless effective implementation and monitoring of activities by both private and governmental bodies are ensured to tackle problems such as human trafficking, shortage of sectors available to migrants, unethical recruitment, etc. Strategic coordination between bodies such as Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) and Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL) is also imperative in order to protect our workers' interests.

The writer is a graduate of University of California, Los Angeles.

QUOTABLE Quote

Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build a bridge even where there is no river.

Nikita Khrushchev

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Tell target
- Numerical comparison
- Cerebrum setting
- Extreme pain
- Study intensely
- Halloween mo.
- Will Smith biopic
- Rent out
- Held power
- Sports drink suffix
- Top card
- Commotion
- Become excited
- Bearings
- One of the Brontës
- Fall behind
- Floral ring
- Children's card game
- Mornings, for short
- Go downhill
- By way of
- Fall on tough times
- Unescorted
- Trig functions
- Cars' scars

DOWN

- Abrasive powder
- Detest
- Tag number
- Singer Page
- Tipsy
- Make better
- Overly eager
- Previously
- Not in time
- Finalized, as a cartoon sketch
- Raw bar selection
- General Robert -
- Stare in disbelief
- Weary sound
- Grail seeker
- Eight furlongs
- Jennifer of "Friends"
- Painter Henri
- Leia's brother
- Grill waste
- Sheeplike
- Subway patron
- Impudent
- Blasting stuff
- Kipling book

CRYPTOQUOTE

SPCJC OF MYSPOMI OM SPC ZYJVG FY OJJCFOFSOAVX HYMSEIOYKF EF VEKIPSCJ EMG IYYG PKTYJ.

— HPEJVC F GOHDCMF

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE EXCELLENCE OF A GIFT LIES IN ITS APPROPRIATENESS RATHER THAN IN ITS VALUE.

— CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER

Yesterday's answer

SUMOS CABTS
ATONE AGATE
RIVET POSER
ACE TOE ERA
HAROLD RAMIS
VEE BALE
CRIED TONER
HERR JAM
IGOTY OUBABE
DAN INN LON
ELATE TAIN
SEGAL EMBER
SEND DAIRY

A XYDLBAAXR IS LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

READY FOR INSPECTION, SARGE!
I SEE... UNIFORM PRESSED... BUTTONS POLISHED... FLOOR SWEEPED...
BED MADE... YOU PASS, BEETLE
THE COOKIE ON THE PILLOW WAS A NICE TOUCH
I TRY

HENRY BY DON TRANCHE

ART SCHOOL
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.