

# Sharp rise in 'shootout'!

## Human rights situation amid political turmoil

IT is worrying that three more were killed in 'gunfight' with law enforcing agencies in two separate incidents in the last two days of the week. We are seeing a sharp rise in such 'gunfights' since the 20-party alliance enforced a nationwide blockade a month ago. During this period, it is reported that 16 have been killed in 'shootout' of whom 6 were identified as opposition activists.

Human rights activists have attributed this abrupt rise in extra-judicial killing, particularly death of opposition activists in 'shootout', to current political turmoil. BNP-led opposition has resorted to brutal violence and killing of innocents for political point scoring. And the ruling alliance instead of going for any political solution has been dealing with the issue as a law and order problem and riding roughshod over the opposition. Mindless comments from ruling party politicians and law enforcing agency bosses to use extra-judicial measures to control the situation seems to have only exacerbated the situation.

In the name of containing law and order situation, the law enforcing agencies can in no way indulge in human rights violations. The government cannot be oblivious to such gross violation of human rights. In the existing culture of impunity it will only make the situation worse. And both the ruling and opposition alliances should stop this politics of decimation and find a peaceful solution where fundamental rights of people will prevail over narrow party interests.

# Modernising ground handling

## Reform is long overdue

COMPLAINTS about the dismal state of ground services in our airports due to severe mismanagement are voiced by many. Poor luggage handling systems, disorganised and sluggish processes at immigration lines, and unhygienic conditions among many other things are symptomatic of a dire necessity to revamp our airports.

We, therefore, welcome the decision by Biman Bangladesh Airlines to form a joint venture with international agents in an effort to modernise its ground handling services. At present, Biman oversees ground handling management of Dhaka's Shahjalal International Airport, Chittagong's Shah Amanat International Airport, and Sylhet's Osmani International Airport, whereas in most countries multiple agents are tasked with managing ground handling services.

Under this initiative, cargo and baggage handling would be fully automated replacing the current manual system. The foreign companies are expected to charge a management fee with Biman retaining full ownership. By giving up its monopoly over ground handling service management, Biman looks to boost profit and efficiency by joining forces with foreign agents in an effort to modernise our ground handling and infrastructure which are among the worst in the region.

The current poor ground handling system has tarnished the airport's global reputation and hampered the growth of tourism and foreign investment prospects. In an increasingly globalised world where Bangladesh is expected to compete successfully, there is no denying that a fully-equipped, state-of-the-art ground management system for our international airports is a must.

We expect Biman to team up with the most dependable international partner and bring about the desired changes within the given timeline.

COMMENTS

"THE FARCE GOES ON!"  
(FEBRUARY 2, 2015)

M. Saiful Islam

The article embodies in a precise way what the country and its citizens are going through right now. Thanks to the writer for presenting things so vividly. Will the two leaders pause for a moment to ruminate and lend an ear to words of sense and sanity?

Sundar

It is undeniable that we have already made democracy a farce.

"WHERE DO WE GO?"  
(FEBRUARY 1, 2015)

LITON

The author of this article has been successfully able to read the minds of the common people.

AA

BNP is not worthy of getting any sympathy. Khaleda Zia ignored PM's invitation and insulted PM when she cordially invited Khaleda for talk before election. Ties with Jamaat have decreased BNP's popularity even more.


"PLAYING WITH FIRE"  
(FEBRUARY 1, 2015)

Hafeejul Alam

It's time to suggest solution instead of just narrating the painful problems from which Bangladesh is suffering now. While we cannot negotiate when it comes to democracy, we also cannot negotiate when it comes to the core values of our Liberation War. Further, as a former student of International Relations, may I remind the professor that unlike India or former Pakistan which ultimately became independent countries by

# Unified field theory of POLITICAL SOLUTION

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

TO borrow the concept from the fashion world, Bangladesh's political crisis is comparable to a reversible trench coat in contrast fabrics. Our politics needs the right solution and that solution needs the right politics. One eludes the other and we're caught in a vicious circle. Politics is missing solution and solution is missing politics.

Please bear this jump from politics to physics. Albert Einstein spent the last thirty-five years of his life on a fruitless quest for a way to combine gravity and electromagnetism into a single elegant theory. He was convinced that there was an intellectual need to unify the forces of nature and made it known in his Nobel lecture in 1923.

Gravity is a force that acts between any two objects. No matter what these objects are made of, they get pulled towards each other just because they have mass. Magnetism is different. It can either pull the two objects together or push them apart, but the whole thing depends on which way the magnets are directed. Most importantly, it depends on what is going on with the electrons in the material, since each electron is like a tiny magnet unto itself.

The magnetism side comes from the flesh and blood, which make the human beings. These are the electrons that behave like tiny magnets, propelling people towards their selfish pursuits. These magnets pull people together or push them apart depending on orientation.

The political force fields in this country are at odds with each other because the magnets aren't in their right directions. Yes, people have their party positions. Yes, they have their ideological convictions. They are also fully fired up to fight and die for anything relevant to them.

But underlying these gravitational factors is the magnetic field when every individual calculates private gains in public dispositions. That explains why politics is merely a front for the seedy

business of greedy people. This explains why some of our politicians are corrupt and have this unconscionable habit of lying through their teeth. They wear patriotism on their sleeve, not so much to show their commitment but to hide the lack of it.

The reason why we can't find a solution is that our focus is on fixing the gravitational field while ignoring the magnetic one. We are spending more time planning the staircase than minding the pillars of the building. Contrary to the constituent principle of the People's Republic, the politicians build their strength on the weakness of people.

A macro solution won't work so long as the micro problems remain unattended. In other words, we can't expect the weave to hold the cloth together if it has loose ends. A solid top cannot give us a sturdy table if it has rickety legs. Our politicians can't work out the solution because they are the ones creating the problems.

That national contradiction has percolated down through the population. Like politicians, people also speak of solutions in the same breath as they also propagate problems. The gravity holds us together as one nation but the magnetism divides us into factions. This republic is like a broken bone contained within unbroken skin.

The prognosis for this illness is a

unified field theory that will reconcile human mass with human condition. For that, every individual will have to reconcile within himself his flesh and bone with instincts and impulses coursing through his veins. If this country has to become a viable state, then people will have to learn how to ingest that urgency into their mindset.

The short-term solution to the long-term problem must start with a stable government. It's a pre-requisite for the same reason healing needs rest. For 43 years politics has been a roiling boil, and stopgap solutions have come too soon with the effect of making curd before the milk has cooled off. Hot milk coagulates and gives grainy curd. Heated politics has fragmented us; it has created splinter groups coalescing narrow interests.

This nation needs to unwind itself from individual to plural, from parochial to profound, from divided to united. One more dialogue or another election can't do the trick but it can start the healing process if the emphasis is on the wilderness of intentions, not the wilderness of contentions. The difference lies in another reversible trench coat parallel. We can't end the war to find the peace before we find the peace to end the war.

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The writer is Editor, *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*.  
Email: Badrul151@yahoo.com



YOU SAID,

"We [policemen] have the ability to kill two people for your [arsonists] every single killing." That was the comment of Shafiqul Islam, DIG Chittagong Range.




WE SAY

The police must not approach their current task of combating the ongoing violence with revengeful attitude. Understandably, they have so far been less than successful in halting the spate of arson attacks targeted mainly at public transports. But their utterances should not betray that. The 'two for one' is a belligerent attitude which will be counterproductive and derail their efforts to detect and arrest the arsonists. Rather, more efforts should be made to beef up human intelligence which might help preempt the attacks.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

A Greek morality tale

BUSINESS & FINANCE



JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

WHEN the euro crisis began a half-decade ago, Keynesian economists predicted that the austerity that was being imposed on Greece and the other crisis countries would fail. It would stifle growth and increase unemployment -- and even fail to decrease the debt-to-GDP ratio. Others -- in the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), and a few universities -- talked of expansionary contractions. But even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) argued that contractions, such as cutbacks in government spending, were just that -- contractionary.

We hardly needed another test. Austerity had failed repeatedly, from its early use under US President Herbert Hoover, which turned the stock-market crash into the Great Depression, to the IMF "programmes" imposed on East Asia and Latin America in recent decades. And yet when Greece got into trouble, it was tried again.

Greece largely succeeded in following the dictate set by the "troika" (the EC, the ECB, and the IMF): it converted a primary budget deficit into a primary surplus. But the contraction in government spending has been predictably devastating: 25% unemployment, a 22% fall in GDP since 2009, and a 35% increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio. And now, with the anti-austerity Syriza party's overwhelming election victory, Greek voters have declared that they have had enough.

So, what is to be done? First, let us be clear: Greece could be blamed for its troubles if it were the only country where the troika's medicine failed miserably. But Spain had a surplus and a low debt ratio before the crisis, and it, too, is in depression. What is needed is not structural reform within Greece and Spain so much as structural reform of the eurozone's design and a fundamental rethinking of the policy frameworks that have resulted in the monetary union's spectacularly bad performance.

Greece has also once again reminded us of how badly the world needs a debt-restructuring framework. Excessive debt caused not only the 2008 crisis, but also the East Asia crisis in the 1990s and the Latin American crisis in the 1980s. It continues to cause untold suffering in the US, where millions of homeowners have lost their homes, and is now threatening millions more in Poland and elsewhere who took out loans in Swiss francs.

Given the amount of distress brought about by excessive debt, one might well ask why individuals and countries have repeatedly put themselves into this situation. After all, such debts are contracts -- that is, voluntary agreements -- so creditors are just as responsible for them as debtors. In fact, creditors arguably are more responsible: typically, they are sophisticated financial institutions, whereas borrowers frequently are far less attuned to market vicissitudes and the risks associated with different contractual arrangements. Indeed, we know that US banks actually preyed on their borrowers, taking advantage of their lack of financial sophistication.

Every (advanced) country has realised that making capitalism work requires giving individuals a fresh start. The debtors' prisons of the nineteenth century were a failure -- inhumane and not exactly helping to ensure repayment. What did help was to provide better incentives for good lending, by making creditors more responsible for the consequences of their decisions.

At the international level, we have not yet created an orderly process for giving countries a fresh start. Since even before the 2008 crisis, the United Nations, with the support of almost all of the developing and emerging countries, has

been seeking to create such a framework. But the US has been adamantly opposed; perhaps it wants to reinstitute debtor prisons for over indebted countries' officials (if so, space may be opening up at Guantánamo Bay).

The idea of bringing back debtors' prisons may seem far-fetched, but it resonates with current talk of moral hazard and accountability. There is a fear that if Greece is allowed to restructure its debt, it will simply get itself into trouble again, as will others.

This is sheer nonsense. Does anyone in their right mind think that any country would willingly put itself through what Greece has gone through, just to get a free ride from its creditors? If there is a moral hazard, it is on the part of the lenders -- especially in the private sector -- who have been bailed out repeatedly. If Europe has allowed these debts to move from the private sector to the public sector -- a well-established pattern over the past half-century -- it is Europe, not Greece, that should bear the consequences. Indeed, Greece's current plight, including the massive run-up in the debt ratio, is largely the fault of the misguided troika programmes foisted on it.

So it is not debt restructuring, but its absence, that is "immoral." There is nothing particularly special about the dilemmas that Greece faces today; many countries have been in the same position. What makes Greece's problems more difficult to address is the structure of the eurozone: monetary union implies that member states cannot devalue their way out of trouble, yet the modicum of European solidarity that must accompany this loss of policy flexibility simply is not there.

Seventy years ago, at the end of World II, the Allies recognised that Germany must be given a fresh start. They understood that Hitler's rise had much to do with the unemployment (not the inflation) that resulted from imposing more debt on Germany at the end of World War I. The Allies did not take into account the foolishness with which the debts had been accumulated or talk about the costs that Germany had imposed on others. Instead, they not only forgave the debts; they actually provided aid, and the Allied troops stationed in Germany provided a further fiscal stimulus.

When companies go bankrupt, a debt-equity swap is a fair and efficient solution. The analogous approach for Greece is to convert its current bonds into GDP-linked bonds. If Greece does well, its creditors will receive more of their money; if it does not, they will get less. Both sides would then have a powerful incentive to pursue pro-growth policies.

Seldom do democratic elections give as clear a message as that in Greece. If Europe says no to Greek voters' demand for a change of course, it is saying that democracy is of no importance, at least when it comes to economics. Why not just shut down democracy, as Newfoundland effectively did when it entered into receivership before World War II?

One hopes that those who understand the economics of debt and austerity, and who believe in democracy and humane values, will prevail. Whether they will remains to be seen.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

## Measuring some sectors of economy

The survey by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) published in your business page on 4th February of a few sectors of our economy was quite interesting. However, from the data given, one could not get an idea of the gross margin for the entrepreneurs of these sectors. Without better idea of the variable costs, this was rather difficult.

However, it is hoped that BBS has these data. It would be worthwhile if they could publish a rough idea of cost benefit analysis on fish farming so that more people can be encouraged towards this important nutrition venture in the country.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR

## Why this carnage?

The political situation in the country is bad. Innocent people are being killed everyday. Politicians are playing with the lives of people and busy in blaming each other. They always talk about people and their welfare but their actions hardly match their words.

We, the common people of the country have no headache about who comes to power and who does not. We just want to live a peaceful life. We plead to the politicians to ensure the safety of our lives.

I.M. Rasel Rana  
Jahangirnagar University

## International Literary Conference

This year's Ekushey Book Fair has presented a great gift to the literature lovers. The authority of the fair organised the International Literary Conference from 1 to 4 February in the academy premises.

The duration of the conference was short. It would be better if the organisers increase it from next year.

MD. Muhtashimur Rahman (Shihab)  
On e-mail