



Late-night Talk Show on Paper

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Perhaps it was *Janakantha* (correct me please if I am wrong), who started the "readers' poll" on a daily basis. And, because it was a good thing, if not anything was popular with some online readers, most other newspapers followed. Who said we were not going digital?

In view of the ongoing political situation turning to murder-of-the-innocent on the street, I picked up some of the opinions expressed by readers of *Prothom Alo*, most so because many readers of the Daily Star may be unaware of the viewpoints expressed in the popular Bangla daily.

Opinions are just that. If you agree with them, they are the words of wisdom of the neutralists. Otherwise, you have never heard of a more biased view.

It is said that the public is seldom wrong. But, last 25 January, over seven thousand readers of popular Bangla daily *Prothom Alo* messed up their assessment of both the Bangladesh and the Saudi Arabian governments. The opinion poll sought to know whether, as stated by the Probashi Kalyan (Expatriate's Welfare and Overseas Employment) minister, 15 to 20 thousand Bangladeshi workers would be able to go to Saudi Arabia (for employment that is). Eighty percent of the over nine thousand readers who took the time to press the online options voted 'No'.

Ahem! Barely a week later local media reported that "The Saudi Arabian government has lifted ban on recruiting Bangladeshi workers" that had been in effect since 2008.

Indeed the Expatriate's Welfare and Overseas Employment minister has remained an unsung hero, although there has been major strides made in the sector, especially in terms of expenses incurred by workers for seeking a worthwhile job abroad, and several job markets opening their doors.

One of the curses of Plato's post-'Republic' era (still ongoing), is that there is a general disbelief in the incumbent governance, and that axiom is true in almost any country, society, office, and (psst!) home. But, some are more incredible than the government. Here's how:

On 24 January's poll, readers responded

negatively to a poll whether they "consider Jatiya Party as a reliable 'friend in distress' of the government?" The 'distress' was in reference to the current awkward situation the government along with the people is steeped in in view of the unabated spate of violence striking intermittently various parts of the country. Would you believe it? With Roushan Ershad sat cozily in parliament, nearly 70 percent of the almost eight thousand online voters said 'No'.

Now you will see who is winning points on the outside the house (pun not intended). Two days later, readers (you can be certain that there are a good number of repeat voters, who log in every day to express their two pence) gave the impression that 'Chacha' was okay, his party was not. Nearly 80 percent of the almost ten thousand readers who gave their opinion thought Ershad (shaheb) was right when he called for "a national conference with the participation of all parties to solve the crisis", meaning the ongoing blockade-hartal-arson-killing.

Public opinion can be quickly contradictory too. So who should call the 'national conference'? You would have the president would be a great possibility. Heck, no! In response to whether "the President has to take the initiative for meaningful dialogue", as stated by *Sushasoner Jonno Nagorik* (Sujan) (Citizens for good governance), on 10 January, 60 percent of the 16,492 clicking readers said, 'No!'

But, does the government have to tackle political problem politically, to Gonojagoron Mancha's 2 February statement, 79 percent of nearly 7,000 said 'Yes'. (Is it political any more, you could pinch yourself?)

So, 'yes' to a national conference. 'No' to an initiative by the president. And, again 'yes' to a political solution. Does that sound like a late night talk show? You bet!

Early in this now month-long disturbances, people had opined that BNP will go hardline. Readers were asked, "Do you think BNP will respond to the call to lift blockade in the interest of Biswa Ijtema (a Muslim religious gathering)? 66 percent of well under 4,000 button-pressing readers said, 'No'.

How did they know as early as 8 January?

A good number of readers seem to have trust in Awami League's statement. Nearly 50 percent of the 15,170 proactive online readers said 20 January they have confidence in the party's announcement that "the terrorism incidents in the country will die down quickly". If only they could prove the other over fifty percent wrong, we could save the meaningless loss of blameless lives.

Could a social approach help overcome the

against "use of additional force against terrorism/violence as a solution", and they gave their characteristic statement. So, does the public agree to AI's position? 60 percent of the over 18,000 repliers said, 'No', (31 January). Spread over two weeks and many more deaths, public opinion was in favour of the government getting tough (or tougher). But, how? Contradictions galore. I told you it was like a late-night talk show.

Question in a poll: "Do you think the surrepti-



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bombs and tombs state of affairs? Over half the nearly eight thousand readers thought that "the ban on pillion riding in the capital will be effective in controlling terrorism" (22 January) The voting by nearly fifteen thousand readers was split, but with an edge for the 'ayes', when asked, "Do you think the announcement of one lakh taka prize money for arresting saboteurs will reduce sabotage and violence?" (21 January). But, can the government "close down Viber, Tango, Whats App and other voice and messaging services?" You must be out of your mind. 80 percent said a big 'No'. (19 January). Brother, for many these are lifelines.

Despite the anti-incumbency psyche, there is an overwhelming support for the government to go tough on terrorism and violence. *Prothom Alo* asked its readers, "Do you think if the government gets tougher the present violent situation will be resolved?" 70 percent of the 14,978 readers answered in the affirmative (15 January).

Can additional force be used by the government? Well, Amnesty International in its principled logic is

tious (*chora-gopta*) attacks will stop if police is given highest power?" Number of readers replying: 21,840. Yes: 38 percent, No: 61 percent (11 January) Therefore, no power to the police against some very tough guys.

Question in another poll: "BGB (Border Guards Bangladesh) will retaliate with arms if attacked – do you think this statement is within the jurisdiction of the chief of that force?" Number of readers replying: 15,575. Yes: 38 percent, No: 62 percent (16 January) Therefore, no backing for the BGB even if they attack in self-defence.

Question in yet another poll: "Do you think it will be right to employ Mobile Court under a Superintendent of Police to prevent destruction and arson?" Number of readers replying: 7,599. Yes: 29 percent, No: 68 percent (28 January) Therefore, the police cannot be trusted.

No wonder we are moving in endless cycles with the spoke heads made of violence, terrorism, petrol bombs, arson, deaths, innocents killed, families devastated, terrorism...