

## THEIR TAKE ON DIALOGUE CALL

“By demanding dialogue you are giving these terrorists hope that their tactics might work. By blaming both sides you are trying to divert blame away from them. By not calling them out by name and demanding they stop unconditionally you are encouraging them to continue. By doing all this our so called “civil society” is indirectly helping these terrorists.”

**SAJEEB WAZED**  
PM's ICT Affairs Adviser

In a note posted on his Facebook page yesterday



'Nagorik Samaj' today [Friday]. I humbly request them to visit the burn unit at DMCH before meeting the journalists.”

**QAMRUL ISLAM**  
Food Minister  
At a rally of Samyabadi Dal

“We have come to know from newspaper reports that some learned members of our society have organized a press briefing under the banner of



First, they should have called for stopping the terrorist activities and the violence. But none did that.”

**SURANJIT SENGUPTA**  
Senior AL leader  
At a programme at IDEB yesterday

“It seems those proposing dialogue for negotiations have failed to gain people's trust as their impartially can be called into question.



## Violence has to stop right away

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has led to widespread arson and bomb attacks.

Over 70 lives have been lost with economy suffering a loss of Tk 2,877 crore a day. Education too has been hit hard, especially due to shut-downs on top of the blockade.

Against this backdrop, Huda wrote to President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia on February 9, requesting a national dialogue on behalf of some civil society members.

Addressing yesterday's press conference, the ex-CEC said burning people alive can in no way be termed political activities. “We have seen many movements in our life, but we have not seen killing people like this way in the name of a movement.”

On the impacts of blockade, he said economy would be destroyed if it continued to suffer every day. The rural economy is already on the verge of collapse. Farmers cannot sell their products, students cannot take their exams.

“It's not a matter of two or four days, we have passed 39 days already. How long will we wait?” Huda asked and said, “The violence must be stopped immediately.... And then a situation for talks will be created.”

“At the same time,” he went on, “the opposition which is carrying out the nonstop movement has to be assured that its grievances will be addressed. Without such assurance, it will not feel encouraged to give up its movement.”

Announcing the formation of a 13-member committee of professionals to push for the talks, Huda said, “We, the conscious citizens of the country, are gravely worried about the current situation. So we think that we need to play a role. And for this reason we got united.

“We did not get united to fulfil any agenda of any particular political party.”

Huda, convener of the new platform, said they will hold further meetings and sit with different professional bodies.

Asked about bringing in the UN or any foreign mediator, he said this would not be something the nation would be proud of. “Why won't we

Former chief election commissioner  
**ATM Shamsul Huda**, convener

### MEMBERS

**M Hafizuddin Khan**  
Former adviser to caretaker government

**ASM Shahjahan**  
Former adviser to caretaker government

**Jamilur Reza Choudhury**  
Former adviser to caretaker government

**Akbar Ali Khan**  
Former adviser to caretaker government

**CM Shafi Sami**  
Former adviser to caretaker government

**Rasheda K Chowdhury**  
Former adviser to caretaker government

**Rokia Afzal Rahman**  
Former adviser to caretaker government

**Syed Abul Maksud**  
Columnist

**Shahdeen Malik**  
Jurist

**Anwarul Alam Chowdhury Pervaz**  
Former president of BGMEA

**Ahsan H Mansur**  
Former World Bank official

**Badiul Alam Majumder**  
Shujan secretary

Alam Majumder -- were present at the press conference.

Former caretaker government advisers ASM Shahjahan, Jamilur Reza Choudhury, Akbar Ali Khan, Rasheda K Chowdhury and Rokia Afzal Rahman, columnist Syed Abul Maksud and former BGMEA president Anwarul Alam Chowdhury Pervaz are also in the committee.

On the formation of the platform, Huda said it came into being following their first meeting at the residence of a distinguished professional.

About excluding politicians from the committee, the former CEC said there were some politicians from small parties with the initiative as the primary stage.

“But after discussion among ourselves, we decided that political personalities will take a separate initiative as we want to work solely as professionals. Problems might arise if politicians and professionals jointly make the move.”

Asked about the name of the platform, he said they were still working on it.

### ON CRITICISMS, ALLEGATIONS

Huda said those who are against dialogue should come up with an alternative.

He added they have positively taken the criticism by the PM and some ruling party men. “It means they are giving us importance,” he said. “We will have to tolerate such badmouthing and criticism in the hope that something good will come out of our initiative.”

Refuting the ruling party's allegations that they have advocated only for dialogue but remained silent about the blockade violence, Huda said media did not highlight the enclosures sent with the letters to the president, the PM and the BNP chief.

In the enclosures, they have categorically opposed the mindless act of violence and burning of innocent people.

Asked whether they support the government's stance that there will be no dialogue with the anti-liberation elements and “killing force” like Jamaat, Huda said this is not their headache and “we are none to comment about this.”

be able to resolve our problems ourselves?”

On a query about the modality of the proposed talks, Huda said they did not outline any proposal of their own.

“We have urged them [president, prime minister and BNP chief] to take initiative for dialogue. If the initiative is taken, then it's also up to them how they will move ahead. We, some professionals from outside, don't want to impose anything in advance.”

The citizens expect the president, as the custodian and guardian of the constitution, to make a move using his moral authority, Huda added.

Five members of the committee -- former caretaker government advisers M Hafizuddin Khan and CM Shafi Sami, jurist Shahdeen Malik, ex-World Bank official Ahsan H Mansur and Shujan Secretary Badiul

## Taranco starts off with Biswal update

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“That is something he is doing,” the spokesman said.

“And the Secretary-General is obviously personally committed to the stability of and development in Bangladesh, and we continue to deplore the loss of life. And I think the key message is for a peaceful and... peaceful resolution to the ongoing crisis,” he added.

Both Taranco and Biswal visited Bangladesh ahead of the January 5 general election last year, but they could not bring out any breakthrough as the major political parties had stuck to their guns on issue of election-time government.

They held a series of talks with the Awami League and BNP leaders.

Taranco came to Dhaka on December 6, 2014, and stayed here for six days. Although he succeeded in getting the AL and the BNP leaders to sit for two rounds, it did not bring forth any result.

He left the country leaving a note for Bangladeshi leaderships that the solution has to be a homegrown one. “I firmly believe there's a ground for an agreement... Bangladesh leaders must continue to come together. I encouraged both sides to continue the dialogue in the spirit of goodwill and compromise,” the UN assistant secretary general told

reporters after wrapping up his six-day hectic tour at that time.

Dozens of lives have been lost in violence since the BNP-led opposition combine announced an indefinite blockade on January 5 this year. The UN, United States, European Union, United Kingdom and Canada have deplored the violence against innocent people and reiterated call for dialogue to break the current political crisis.

India said it would not interfere in the internal matters of Bangladesh and hoped that the people and the government of Bangladesh would resolve the issues themselves.

## Greece starts bailout talks as hopes rise

AFP, Brussels

Greece began tough negotiations with its creditors yesterday as hopes grew of a deal to replace its detested bailout after new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras pushed his case at a European summit.

Officials from Athens held technical discussions with the EU, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank in Brussels ahead of a last-ditch meeting of eurozone finance ministers on Monday.

European and Asian stock markets yesterday rose on the more positive mood after hard-left leader Tsipras met German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the leader of Europe's biggest economy, and other counterparts in Brussels.

Tsipras vowed after his election in January to replace the current 240-billion-euro (\$270-billion) EU-IMF bailout with its heavy austerity measures, and to ditch the so-called troika of its creditors.

But with the Greek rescue programme due to expire at the end of the month, time is running out to prevent a possible Greek default and a potentially catastrophic exit from the 19-country eurozone.

A senior EU official closely involved in yesterday's technical-level talks said that a new bailout programme was an

option, despite the insistence of Greece's eurozone counterparts until now that Athens stick to the current rescue package.

“It is not crucial to extend. One could also agree that one will commence discussions on a new programme,” the EU official said on condition of anonymity. “I would not exclude it.”

While the Greek negotiators are meeting the same group of creditors they have vowed to abandon, the EU official also raised the possibility of a new format, or at the very least a new name for the group.

“There is no desire on anybody's part necessarily to call it the ‘troika’,” he said.

There was cautious optimism on Friday in Greece, which has suffered from the harsh austerity measures imposed under the international bailouts that have kept it from bankruptcy since 2010.

Greek stocks were up 4.65 percent, even though new data showed Greece's recovery from recession stalled in the last quarter of 2014 amid the political crisis that led to Tsipras's election and the ouster of the conservative government.

“Bridge of dialogue,” wrote centre-left Ethnos daily while liberal Kathimerini saw a “window of opportunity for compromise.”



Foreign nationals taking part in a rickshaw relay competition in front of the Canadian High Commission in the capital yesterday. The sponsored event was organised by the staff at the high commission to raise funds for children with cancer and acid victims.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

## Outburst of joy

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the vivid colours of spring, men and women, children and the elderly, thronged the cultural centres of the capital with renewed optimism. The vitality of spring, like the laughter of a little girl dressed in a bashanti sari, was indeed infectious.

“A poet once said, ‘You can cut off all the flowers but you cannot stop spring from coming,’ and our celebration of Falgun proves just that,” said Nirmala Sen, a student at Dhaka University, as she wore a garland of marigold around her braid. “You can threaten us, maim us, kill our loved ones, but you cannot destroy our zest for life.”

Mamun, the flower vendor who sold her the garland, grinned from ear to ear, ecstatic that after more than a month of poor business due to the ongoing blockade and hartals, his small shop would finally make a profit.

“I want to give two bouquets of my best flowers to our two leaders and ask them to stop destroying our

lives,” he said.

Others, too, yearned to leave behind the desolation of recent times.

“Maybe the spring blossoms can rekindle some sympathy in our politicians. But how do you make them see the beauty of flowers when they only see power?” asked Jishan Hawladar, an IT specialist.

Cultural activist Ferdous Rahman argued that there is something about spring that reinvigorates Bangladeshis to rebel against injustices. “We rose in the spring of 1952, in 1971 and then again in 2013. Who knows, perhaps we will rise up again this spring, and say enough is enough?”

The songs of Rabindranath and Nazrul, Lalon and Hason filled the crisp spring air and soothed our melody-laden souls in concerts throughout the city. The Ekushey Book Fair, which over the last two weeks saw a relatively thin crowd as a result of the continuous blockade and violence, yesterday teemed with visitors.

## It's cricket time

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Then on Sunday, South Africa meet neighbours Zimbabwe in Hamilton and India clash with their fiercest foes Pakistan in Adelaide. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif, on Friday to wish his country luck in the World Cup. The tournament's chief executive John Harnden has high hopes for the clash between the fierce rivals.

“This could very well be the most watched game of cricket in that point of time in the history of cricket,” he said.

For some of the teams, just making it to the World Cup is a dream come true. Afghanistan are competing for the first time and they will begin their campaign against Bangladesh on February 18th. The Tigers reached Canberra yesterday to start their preparations ahead of their game there.

Fourteen teams have been divided into two pools for the six-week tournament, with the top four from each pool advancing to the quarterfinals.

Pool A will be fiercely competitive with Bangladesh competing for a coveted

spot in the second round but, Australia, New Zealand, England and Sri Lanka are favourites to advance ahead of Afghanistan, Scotland and the Tigers.

Shane Warne, a World Cup winner with Australia in 1999, is tipping his country to win again but concedes the title is wide open.

“We've been favourites a few times,” Warne said on Friday. “But I don't think I've seen Australia go into any World Cup with so many match-winners.”

“A lot of teams can win this... Australia's biggest threat is there are just so many good teams.”

Pool B is slightly more open. South Africa, India and Pakistan should all progress safely but West Indies, a fading giant in the 50-over game, are no sure bet to advance ahead of rank outsiders United Arab Emirates and the improving Zimbabwe and Ireland teams.

Bookmakers have tipped Australia as the early favourites, although host nations have a poor record in the tournament. In the previous 10 World Cups, only India (2011) have won the tournament on home soil.

## Modi talks

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Land Boundary Agreement and the Teesta Water-sharing deal.

Meanwhile, the state-owned BSS news agency reported that Modi told Hasina he would visit Dhaka very soon “with good news”.

“Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi this morning phoned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, wished her wellbeing and said that he would visit Dhaka very soon with good news,” PM's Private Secretary-1 Abdul Malek was quoted by the BSS as saying.

Modi phoned Hasina around 10:30am, sources at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) told The Daily Star, adding that Hasina too wished the Indian team success in the biggest event in the cricketing world.

However, the duration of the conversation could not be known immediately.

Modi also said Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar would visit Dhaka, according to sources.

On his twitter page, Modi said he had spoken to Bangladesh Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena to convey “best wishes” to their teams for the WC.

“Cricket connects people in our region & promotes goodwill,” Modi said in a tweet. “Hope players from SAARC [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation] region play with passion & bring laurels to the region.”

“5 SAARC Nations are playing & are excited about the World Cup. Am sure WC will celebrate sportsman spirit & will be a treat for sports lovers,” the Indian PM said in another tweet.

Hasina could not attend Modi's swearing-in last year but she held substantive meetings with Modi on September 27 last year on the sidelines of the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York and on November 26 at the 18th SAARC Summit in Kathmandu.