

Stop this carnage

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

LET me start this piece today with a joke that fits in here so perfectly. God created this subcontinent as a wealthy, fertile and prosperous land. The other nations protested about this favouritism. So, God in His infinite wisdom will the type of governments we have had in this region to balance matters. We have been cursed since then.

With death figures of the 'killing and burning mission' of BNP and its allies Jamaat-Shibir cadres mounting to 72, including 10 children, on the 35th day of the blockade, leaving thousands injured, disabled and disfigured for life, a catastrophic situation has engulfed the whole country. The business sector has sustained a loss of about Tk. 75 thousand crore.

Leaders are drifting like sailors oblivious of the thunderheads piling up on the horizon. Nobody realises that the country is sliding into a crisis -- loss of faith in all. This serious erosion of confidence in the leaders may be fatal to survival of our fledgling democracy. The optimism in every mind before January 5 has given way to fear for the future and anger at politicians who have seemingly 'mortgaged' it for short-term gains.

The politicians, especially in the ruling party, steering the nation's ship through a turbulent sea with a dark cloud looming on the horizon have to show prudence, pragmatism and statesmanship to tide over this present tumult and unprecedented crisis. People want peace, safety and security in their daily lives. The hurling of petrol bombs on buses and trucks and killing of women and children has led people to believe that some groups with terrorist philosophy and ideology are out to destroy what this country has achieved during the last 43 years. True, the government has posted more police, Rab and BCB at bus stands and market places, but how do we put back the confidence in an ordinary person that the state will protect him from such terrorist attacks. The government may be justified in saying that the culprits will be hunted down and punished. But by killing them you only treat the symptom, not the disease.

The disease is fanaticism, which is inculcated into the minds of people who are made to believe that their religion, or their cause or their thinking is the just one and must prevail. The fanatics are only a handful compared to the millions who believe in interplay of ideas and opinions in most democratic countries. Their purpose is to strike terror in an ordinary person, who wants to be left alone in his own way according to his own belief. In a word, terrorism is the antithesis of all that stands for peace.

Admittedly, BNP may have a cause to agitate against the government because it was

not allowed to hold rallies, and chairperson Khaleda Zia has been kept confined in her Gulshan office. They could justifiably protest, and even start agitation on the streets to press home their demands for a free, fair and credible election. But the cruel and dastardly way BNP activists and Jamaat-Shibir cadres have unleashed war on poor and innocent people has touched a chord in the citizenry. These people are not in any way linked to politics and there is no reason why they should be the targets.

All people, regardless of their standing in the society, condemn in unequivocal terms the lackadaisical attitude of the mainstream opposition party and its total disregard of people's pain and sufferings; for not controlling the deviant activists, including Chatra Dal and Jamaat-Shibir cadres; and also for not calling a halt to this nefarious killing of ordinary people. Are these innocent, poor people their enemies

should immediately call a halt to this horrendous mission of killing ordinary people and sever ties with Jamaat-Shibir, once for all. BNP would be totally mistaken if it thinks that it is garnering public support by continuing this "Kill and Burn" movement.

People feel that there is need for a national dialogue about all contentious issues like future election, restructuring of EC and ACC, etc., to avoid problems and conflicts in future.

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia's latest statement that "there could be no resolution of the political crisis unless the AL government agrees to step down and allow new election" is highly alarming. It seems that the contending parties have taken a 'scorched-earth' policy and the country may soon end up as a wasteland.

Historical records are galore with instances where great leaders imbued with statesmanship and pragmatism played very crucial roles in saving their countries from ignominy.



or adversaries? Let us not think about the colossal loss and damage inflicted on business and education in the name of restoring democracy, but how can we turn a blind eye to the pain, suffering and distress of the innocent poor people?

Does BNP realise that ultra-religious groups and anti-liberation forces have now taken shelter under its umbrella to implement their unfinished agenda? Through their 'burning and killing' mission, they have succeeded to a large extent in creating fear and panic in the public. Their horrendous activities have tarnished the image of BNP, a party we have so long known to be based on and guided by the spirit of the Liberation War. In the last one decade, the country has seen an upsurge in extremist movement, zealotry and fanaticism that has shaken the foundation of the fledgling democracy.

If BNP's call for a peaceful movement has been hijacked by its allies Jamaat-Shibir, then it

Looking back to America in the past century, we can see that Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Truman owe their reputation to leadership during crisis. By the same analogy, many leaders were destroyed by crises, despite other accomplishments. L.B. Johnson was devalued by the Vietnam war, Carter by the Iranian hostage crisis, Nixon by the Watergate scandal and Hitler for unleashing the Holocaust.

Leadership during a paramount crisis is a superhuman quality that must be called into play. There is no second thought or shadow of doubt about the fact that almost all crises are consequences of blunders we had committed earlier. There comes the necessity of grasping the future implications of present events, and forestall any further catastrophe.

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MAD politics

SHAKHAWAT LITON

POLITICS seems to have gone mad! It has ruthlessly been harming future nation-builders by shattering their academic life alongside killing innocent people and destroying the country's economic backbone.

Yet, both the ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP seem to have remained nonchalant even after 30 days of non-stop blockade. They have kept on taking excessive measures to counter each other by setting more bizarre precedents. Those precedents, as noted by political analysts, have been worsening further the confrontational culture in politics and making it difficult to improve the culture in future.

If we look at the recent political developments carefully we can surely say that nothing has happened suddenly. The situation has gradually deteriorated over the months because of the whimsical and aggressive attitude of both sides towards each other. The way they have been playing their cards has prompted many to presume that the top politicians have not been able to see that what is a prestige game to them is a question of life and death for people.

Our children, the future generation, have been made victims of their battle. The first day of the New Year was supposed to be a joyful day for the children because of the smell of new textbooks they get. But on the day they received the new books they had to feel the brunt of the confrontational politics as the Jamaat-e-Islami, a component of BNP-led alliance, enforced a countrywide hartal on the day.

As things got worse, they were able to attend schools for only two or three days in January. Authorities of many schools were forced to keep the schools closed in the face of increasing street violence. Anxious guardians could not dare to take the risk of sending children to schools in such a situation.

The violent politics effectively confined our children to their homes, denying them their rights to free movement and to education. Alongside the school kids, students of high schools, colleges and universities have been facing the same problem. Their academic calendars have already been messed up.

Around 15 lakh students sitting for SSC and equivalent exams have also been made victims. Calling of frequent hartals by the BNP-led alliance in addition to the ongoing blockade has forced the education ministry to defer the scheduled examinations. But the defer-

ment could not remove the growing anxiety of students and guardians as there is no guarantee that students will be able to sit for examinations on time. They are concerned as there is no visible sign of a solution to the ongoing political impasse.

With the deadlock continuing to wreak havoc, some simple questions arise in people's minds. Aren't the students our future anymore? If so, won't we take their responsibility? What examples are we setting for our children? Are we preparing them properly to lead us in future?

The country's economy has been bleeding due to the nonstop blockade that began from January 6. All the sectors, including garment, apparel, agriculture, real estate and wholesale and retail markets, are suffering because of the blockade and hartals.

According to Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, businesses are losing over Tk. 2,277 crore every day due to the political unrest, with the garment sector receiving the hardest blow. This means the economy has already lost at least Tk.84, 249 crore in the last 37 days due to political unrest.

The unrest has been a big blow to those who live from hand-to-mouth. They have been struggling to earn their daily bread. They have no alternative but to come out of their homes for work, putting their lives at risk. More than 70 people were killed; most of them were innocent with no link to the politics.

Yet, nobody knows when and how all this will come to an end.

The government still remains rigid to bring an end to the political crisis through administrative measures, instead of political ones. The BNP-led alliance on the other side appears hell-bent on achieving its goal of forcing the government to call for an early parliamentary election under a non-partisan administration.

Their fight is for nothing but power. One side wants to retain it and the other wants to return to power.

Who is holding the lead in the battle -- AL or BNP? To answer the question, one needs to analyse the steps the two sides have already taken. Whatever the answer is, it will be questioned. But it is crystal clear and beyond any question that the people have lost and have been victimised all along. Who will compensate for the damage to our children, students, economy and the people in general?

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Growth rates and instability

FAARIA TASIN

AN interesting trend can be observed when one takes a look at the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates of the country during the past few years. If GDP growth rates are plotted according to year, it has a resemblance to a wave, containing a peak and a trough. The dips in the economic growth rates can be seen during election years where rates start to decline in the years preceding the election years.

We have seen that every election brought along with it an element of political violence. This violence in turn disrupts normal economic and social activities. So when the economy got a respite from the political violence of 2013, many of us may have breathed a wary sigh of relief. This, however, was very short-lived as the economy faced another gust of political vio-

lence since the beginning of this year.

One of the key drivers of economic growth is investment in Bangladesh. Total investment as a proportion of GDP has been hovering around 26% - 28% for the last five years. One reason for lower public investment is inadequate tax resources; for private investment, the main binding constraints are energy, land and transport. In the face of these existing constraints, political violence certainly makes the investment environment even more stagnant.

So why can't the country afford to compromise with investment at this stage? One reason is that the country is currently experiencing a 'demographic dividend' (a rise in the proportion of people in the working age population accompanied by a decline in dependent age population), and 1.8 million people are entering the

job market every year. Without adequate expansion, the economy will not be able to absorb all the people entering the workforce. If we look at the information available for private sector credit growth, we will see that between

June 2014 and November 2014, growth rates on average were 12%. This was lower than the projected rates and was done for a period when political instability was not as intense as it is currently. Another problem of low

investment and GDP growth rates is that a decline in GDP growth rates also implies that many people are deprived of a chance to move up the poverty line. One group that bears the biggest brunt of political instability is that of the daily-wage earners. On one hand their daily incomes fall and, on the other, disruption in the transport system leads to a rise in food prices, causing their real income to decline further.

Wholesale shops and shopping malls experience a fall in sales during periods of political instability. Although businesses have different coping strategies to make up for some of the loss due to instability, however, what the industry most certainly cannot make up for is the clear signal of an unreliable market. Skepticism regarding the economic health of the country may discourage foreign investors from investing as there are other countries offering competitive

factors and better political environment.

According to Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry's (DCCI) calculations, losses stand at around Tk. 22.77 billion (\$285 million) a day. In addition to economic costs, there are social and human costs associated with political instability. Students are faced with missed classes and postponed exams, which adversely affects their performance and hampers future prospects. Human costs exist in the form of lives lost and injuries; however, social and human costs are harder to quantify.

As far as GDP growth rates are concerned, growth rates climbed up steadily after election years. What lies for future growth rates of the country at this point is uncertain and will be revealed with time.

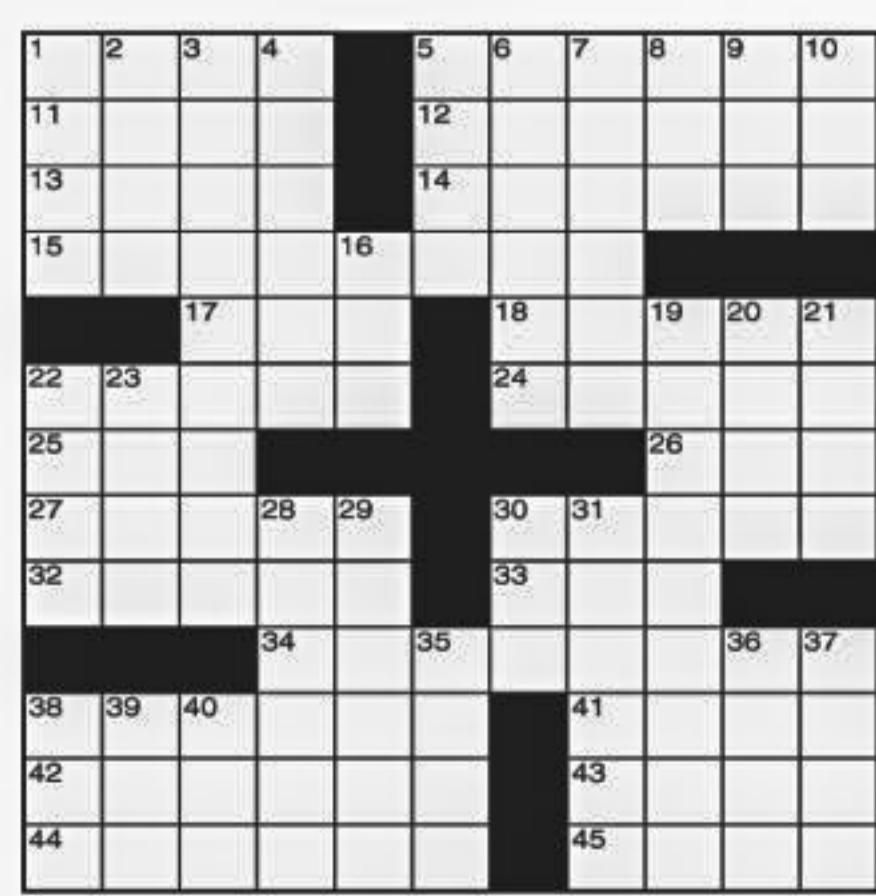
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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS
1 1975 Wimbledon champ
5 Blast sound
11 Very bright
12 Scaly pet
13 Circus sight
14 Lab worker
15 Newly arising
17 Porpoise's place
18 Walrus pair
22 Kathy of 'American Horror Story'
24 Book part
25 In the style of
26 Rebel general
27 Picture puzzle
30 Ignore the limit
32 Bring to bear
33 Brood watcher
34 One with drive
38 Fail to follow suit
41 Plot unit
42 Mute of astronomy
43 Reclined
44 Physics topic
45 Winter glider
- DOWN
1 Price to play
2 Appear
3 Presidential nick-name
4 Menu choice
5 Flying toy
6 Hollywood bunch
7 Serious quarrel
8 Granola bit
9 Binary digit
10 Spoil
16 Empty talk
19 Presidential nick-name
20 Dandling spot
21 Parrot snack
22 Au naturel
23 English of the NBA
28 Memo stamp
29 Smelly smoke
30 That lady
31 Potpourri bits
35 Equipment
36 Ontario's neighbor
37 Split
38 Grog base
39 History segment
40 DC baseballer

I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.

-- Mark Twain



Yesterday's answer

TEMP QUAKER
ALOE UNLIKE
FLOW ELATED
TARBEESES
EVANS MAP
APHID SCONE
VIES LONG
ISAAC FUSES
DAD ADOBE
AJAX HAT
AMOSOZ AERO
COUPLE PAIN
HORSES EDDY

BEETLE BAILEY



CRYPTOQUOTE

DBNZ ZBQ MQD SQNT OTHMIU ZV SVC DHFF KQAQMK N ITQNZ KQNF VM DBNZ SVC OTHMIU ZV ZBQ MQD SQNT.

1-1

-- XQTM RGFQFFNM

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

MAKE IT A SAFE NEW YEAR'S EVE: DON'T DRINK IF YOU ARE DRIVING, AND DON'T DRIVE IF YOU'VE BEEN DRINKING.

-- YOUR CONSCIENCE

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.