

People continue to suffer

The stalemate must end

WE condemn, as we have done before, the continued violence caused by the 20-party alliance programmes of oborodh and hartals. The BNP programmes have gone on for more than 45 days without any sign of let up. It is highly condemnable that even on February 21 the alliance did not call off the blockade. Not only that, a further 72-hour hartal has been called from today! We find such actions most reprehensible. We also condemn the total disregard for the plight of the 1.4 million students who could not sit for their exams due to the reckless, mindless and meaningless hartals.

We thus have a situation where the opposition is hell-bent on continuing with violence and the government is unwilling to relent on the suggestion of talks. The net victim of these two intractable positions is the people. Besides the harrowing tales of people's sufferings that we have been subjected to during the BNP-led movement, economic activities are slowly grinding to a halt.

We are sorry to note that nobody is thinking of the people. It is clear that BNP will not climb down from its position, and the government will stick to its position. Regrettably, the people are caught between an irresponsible opposition alliance which has become completely inured to public suffering and an insensitive government that is unwilling to take any step to end the stalemate. Who will then think of, for and about the people? How long can the situation continue without telling on the country and the people? Thus we feel that people's concern must take centre stage in any action.

Promote indigenous languages

Or else spirit of Ekushey will remain unfulfilled

AS we commemorate our right to express ourselves in our mother tongue this Ekushey, we observe with concern the state of indigenous languages in the country. In the Amar Ekushey Granthamela, for instance, there are no books written in indigenous languages. This absence can be attributed to an inequitable state policy and minimum interest of mainstream publishers in promoting indigenous literatures; it also speaks of a larger problem of our minority languages being pushed to the margins.

Ekushey upholds the right of all to communicate in their mother tongues. The primary purpose of Unesco's proclamation of Ekushey as International Mother Language Day is 'promoting and preserving linguistic and cultural diversity and multiculturalism.' It is, therefore, unfortunate that many minority languages have become extinct and/or endangered partly due to neglect.

Though our constitution guarantees the right to study in one's own mother tongue, Bengali still remains the language of instruction in all government educational institutions in Bangladesh. This is a significant cause for the high drop-out and low enrolment rate of children in the CHT and of other indigenous groups in the country. No government has made any serious effort to provide primary education to indigenous children in their mother languages, which is stipulated in the Parbatta Zila Parishad Act 1989 and CHT Peace Accord 1997.

The initiative to publish primary textbooks in six national languages in January 2014 was noteworthy, but it is yet to be implemented.

If we are to remain true to the spirit of Ekushey, we have to seriously commit to protecting, preserving and promoting the mother-tongues of the non-Bengali populations.

COMMENTS

"Free media not the enemy"
(February 20, 2015)

Barkat

Mr Editor, press freedom is always threatened when democracy is weakened. There is a direct relation between crushing democracy and threatening free press. A parliament where the so called opposition is part of the government will not understand press freedom as they have not understood the basics of parliamentary democracy.

Molla A. Latif

Yes, that very poster was seen pasted in many corner walls of Dhaka city and it is no fault of TDS to take a snap of it and publish it for the information of the public and caution of the government. This was wrong thumping of table in the Parliament and the PM should not have been swayed by that.

Saikat

Is it legitimate to publish a poster of a banned group in newspaper? Before we go for any dispute I sincerely believe we should clarify on that.

Akhtar Shah

Such a simplistic view and an 'enthusiastic thumping' thereon of a news item (be it a very serious one) shows the depth of "democracy" and the understanding of it in the country.

The fact that the Editor is having to explain his paper's position in such detail is yet an example of the HOODOO in Bangladesh politics that simply won't go away!

"Political violence: A threat to national security"
(February 17, 2015)

Hafeejul Alam

It's not a political violence. It's terrorism to destroy our economy and the polity. Government alone is just unable to solve this problem. Peace loving people of Bangladesh must come forward to resist the arsonists and assist the victims.

Morality is the new medium of exchange

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSEN

WHILE HSBC in recent years has repeatedly scandalised itself with shocking skeletons tumbling out of its cloistered closet, its chief executive Stuart Gulliver lately said that the bank has sometimes failed to live up to the standards expected of it. It wasn't a pro bono admission of guilt, which came after his conscience had kept him awake, but a clever confession of cautious someone who has been caught in the act. A huge cache of leaked secret files recently revealed that HSBC's Swiss banking arm helped wealthy customers dodge taxes and conceal their assets.

Until one of the bank's former employees blew the whistle on it, Hervé Falciani, responsible for one of the largest leaks of banking data in history, informed the world that money was coming from mafia, drug traffickers, blood diamond and tax evasion. Thanks to him, as a result of his leaks, governments around the world have recovered billions of US dollars in unpaid taxes.

In all fairness, HSBC hasn't been alone in this moral muddle or ethical escapade. Other big names in banking have also joined the fray. The tastefully decorated bank branches now stir up the same anxiety that public buses do in our minds.

Former American president Thomas Jefferson had warned his people that banking institutions would be more dangerous to their liberties than stand-

ing armies. He said that banks and corporations growing up around them would deprive the people of all property and their children would one day wake up homeless. But banks are the pillars of finance in any country today. Export, import, credit flow and other financial transactions are conducted through these institutions, which are to economy what arteries are to cardiovascular system.

That tells why no bank CEO has gone to jail after the recent economic melt-down. Instead, the governments desper-

trillion and US\$14 trillion. It also said that the cost possibly was twice that amount if untold costs from "special treatment" that too-big-to-fail banks received were counted. In 2011, the British government had estimated that the total cost of avoiding the banking crisis could run up to US\$15 billion. But nobody has been sentenced for such monumental mismanagement. Some of it may have been errors in judgment, but a lot of it was maneuvered to make money.



ately pumped taxpayers' money to resuscitate the banks because both are tied to a lockstep dependency. Bank failure could quickly trigger political failure in the consequent chaos if businesses were disrupted, depositors were panicked, investment evaporated and employment lost steam.

The Dallas Federal Reserve assessed that the 2007-09 financial crisis cost the US economy anywhere between US\$6

trillion and US\$14 trillion. It also said that the cost possibly was twice that amount if untold costs from "special treatment" that too-big-to-fail banks received were counted. In 2011, the British government had estimated that the total cost of avoiding the banking crisis could run up to US\$15 billion. But nobody has been sentenced for such monumental mismanagement. Some of it may have been errors in judgment, but a lot of it was maneuvered to make money.

Whereas people go to prison all the time for lesser crimes involving lesser amounts of money, they're arrested for missing mortgages or credit card bills or car payments. Husbands are harassed if they fail or forget to put alimony checks in the mail, fathers for child support. In most cases, the amounts don't exceed a few hundred dollars.

That banks have so far gotten away with murder is proof that they enjoy

tremendous clout in every society. These financial institutions have overtaken economies like humongous tree roots overtake entire buildings. And it becomes a difficult problem to correct, because killing the trees can damage the structures of those buildings.

So banks can afford to be abusive since they know economies cannot function without them. They also know they run with the most coveted item of this modern civilisation, which is money. If money is god, banks are houses of worship. But behind their sacred image as safe-keepers of money, their activities are increasingly involving sacrilege.

In the last decade of the last century, Bank of Credit and Commerce International embodied that contradiction. Its employees weren't allowed to smoke, drink, or gamble, and they received a bonus of 3% to be given to charities of their choice. But the same bank was serving Saddam Hussein, Ferdinand Marcos, Manuel Noriega, and the CIA. Before the international regulators shut down the bank, it was accused of bribery, extortion, drug money laundering, financing terrorists, facilitating illegal arms sales, evading taxes, doctoring books, and providing special clients unsecured loans and prostitutes of their choice.

In varying degrees, these vices are practised by many other banks. Why none of these banks has been shut down is a million dollar question. Perhaps morality, not money, is the new medium of exchange.

The writer is Editor, First News and an opinion writer in *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com
(The column could not be carried last Friday for unavoidable reasons. We apologise for it.)

Will sweet words cut any ice?

BOTTOM LINE



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

THE West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee arrived in Dhaka on February 19 for a three day visit. Her entourage includes ministers, businessmen, media and eminent cultural media personalities who are popular in Bangladesh. The visit has drawn wide-

spread attention since it was due to her opposition that the Teesta water agreement could not be signed.

Mamata is quintessentially a politician and observers say "she came, she charmed the people of Bangladesh with her personality and she left, with reassurance of love for Bangladesh."

On thorny issue of the Land Boundary Agreement which envisaged the swapping of enclaves between the two countries. Ms. Banerjee had earlier opposed that too but recently softened her stand.

The West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sought to reassure the people of Bangladesh ahead of her crucial meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina: "You may have questions in your mind about Teesta. Please keep faith in me about that. You have some problems, we have some problems. I will discuss that with Hasinaji on February 21 when I meet her. Leave it to us. Don't worry about it. Padma, Megna, Ganga, Jamuna - we have never seen divisions there. No one will be able to divide us even if they want to," Ms. Banerjee said in Dhaka.

Her story seems to be that the Central Water Commission is a premier technical organisation of India in the field of water resources and is presently functioning as an attached office of the Ministry of Water Resources, Government of India. Teesta River flows from Sikkim and Sikkim has many water projects which deplete flow of water to West Bengal. If Sikkim can be persuaded by the Modi government to release more water to West Bengal, the chief minister will then be able to share the water with Bangladesh. It may be recalled that in September 2011, Ms. Banerjee had pulled out of a delegation to

Dhaka led by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who was expected to make a major announcement on the sharing of the water of the Teesta. She claimed the pact would harm the interests of the people of north Bengal through which the Teesta flows. Her move had embarrassed Manmohan Singh and he was not able to sign the pact.

But the question mark over Teesta remains for two reasons; first the election in West Bengal will take place in 2016 and, second, the BJP and Trinamool Congress of Banerjee are likely to contest the election. It is reported that it is not desirable politically to sign the Teesta water sharing agreement with Bangladesh before the state election.

Furthermore, Ms. Banerjee seems to have become politically weak. The divisions among the leaders have led to the loss of the two by-election results in the state. BJP, which has been gaining ground in West Bengal riding the Saradha scam, has posed the biggest political threat to the TNC of Banerjee at the West Bengal election.

It may be recalled that the Saradha scam seems to have tainted the reputation of Ms. Banerjee and her party leaders. The Kolkata-based Saradha Group is said to have defrauded thousands of investors, including poor people, in West Bengal, leading to the arrest of its owner Sudipta Sen. Saradha Group had over 10,000 registered chit funds across the country and with an aggregate turnover of Rs. 30,000 crore per annum.

The shadow thrown by the Saradha scandal is slowly creeping up the hierarchy of the Trinamool Congress. After two Rajya Sabha MPs, the CBI arrested Madan Mitra, one of most powerful ministers in Mamata Banerjee's cabinet, for his alleged involvement in the multi-crore chit fund scam.

The BJP president alleged that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was more interested in trying to save her scam-tainted party leaders than developing the state. Shah also reminded people that the Mamata government had opposed an NIA probe into the Burdwan blast in January, throwing a question to his audience: "Will you allow such a state government which gives priority to vote bank politics over national security?"

The question is why did she come to Dhaka? There are several reasons, some of which deserve mention. First she wants to

soften the minds of the BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Modi, towards her by visiting Bangladesh so as to enable her to become a "goodwill messenger" between the Bangladesh government and the Modi government in resolving long-pending issues between Bangladesh and India. Second, she wants to demonstrate to the people of West



Bengal that she is popular with the government and people of Bangladesh with a view to winning the 2016 legislative election in West Bengal. Third, although her party has won 34 seats out of total 42 in the Lok Sabha in the May parliamentary election, BJP's overwhelming victory with 282 seats (BJP and its allies NDA =336) has diminished her political leverage with the Modi government.

Let us now wait how the political game is played out between TNC and BJP in the coming months.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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BRTA's role to reduce road accidents

Road accidents are occurring every day and most of the accidents are taking place because of unskilled drivers and unfit vehicles. Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is the governing body which issues vehicle fitness certificate and driving license. Sometimes unscrupulous BRTA officials issue fitness certificates to unfit vehicles and driving licenses to unskilled drivers in exchange for money. This practice must be stopped immediately. Government should look into this matter seriously and punish the corrupt officials. At the same time unfit vehicles should be ordered off the roads to ensure people's safety.

Mustasin-Bin-Zahir
East West University, Dhaka

Loss of pension document in post office

I want to draw the attention of the postal department of Dhaka for investigation of the facts of my lost pension documents for years. United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF), New York, USA sent my certificate of entitlement for pension in October 2013 but that was not delivered by Goran, Khilgaon Post Office to my address. UNJSPF sent it the second time in January 2014 which was also remained undelivered. UNJSPF dis-

patched it the third time in October 2014 but that too was not delivered. Even the fourth UNJSPF letter met the same fate. Despite my repeated contacts with the post master and the post man of Khilgaon/Goran, nothing fruitful happened and all my efforts went in vain. I didn't get my pension document; they did not pay any attention and rejected my grievances.

I am badly in need of the documents and request the authority concerned to investigate the matter and help me find my pension documents.

Md. Joynal Abedin Bhuiyan
East Goran, Dhaka

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