

BNP's Dilemma



AHMEDE HUSSAIN

UNOFFICIAL though it is, the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) decision to participate in the Dhaka and Chittagong City Corporations elections is a trifle surprising. This is especially so for it came within weeks after the disappearance of its leader Salahuddin Ahmed, who the party claims was abducted by plainclothes policemen.

The BNP now faces an array of hurdles, difficult and dangerous, before its future politics. Thousands of its members and workers are behind bars and a few thousand more are hiding. BNP leaders in Dhaka and some other major cities such as Chittagong and Sylhet have not been successful in carrying out the party's agitation programmes or enforcing a slew of general strikes that the BNP has called. The strike has turned into a farce in Dhaka, so is the blockade in some parts of the country.

To make matters even more complicated, some of its leaders, in private conversations, acknowledge that they might not be able to force the Awami League (AL) to hold a dialogue over the next general election. In fact, a lot of old guards in the party think that it is high time that the BNP withdraws its agitation programme, leave Jamaat and wait for the AL government to call snap polls, which they are not even sure the AL will do.



In a rare display of the party's softened stance, BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, in her latest presser, hinted at giving the biggest leeway so far, that her party might participate in the next election even if the AL remains in power. The party does not have many options at hand either. Its grassroots are

tired and are increasingly finding it difficult, if not impossible, to carry the ongoing movement forward without losing public support. Then there are the BNP leaders themselves—almost all the BNP Standing Committee members are in their early and late sixties, too frail to participate in street agitations and too old to read the pulse of a country that is brimming with young voters.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), the BNP's major partner in the alliance, has restricted itself to bringing out routine processions and that too at the very crack of dawn and with a handful of its workers. The JI heartland in Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj were unusually calm last month, so were Lakshmipur and Cox's Bazaar. On top of it all, the capital is rife with a rumour that the JI might strike a deal with the government, an agreement that will save the party from possible banning. Now the situation is such that perhaps the BNP needs the JI as much as the Islamist party needs the BNP.

There is no denying that the BNP now faces one of the worst moments in its 36-year-old existence. Having said that, there are reasons why the BNP, which has not yet withdrawn its countrywide blockade, has finally decided to put candidates in the city polls. Strange as it may sound, the elections have actually given the BNP an opportunity to regroup and take its politics to the masses, a chance they have not been given in the cities, especially in Dhaka in the last couple of months.

It is also time for the BNP to seize the opportunity and show the world that the party still enjoys popular support in the major cities, some of which have been the worst victims of the ongoing

blockade. During the electioneering, the BNP will try its best to mobilise its workers in Dhaka and Chittagong, and a big rally in the capital may be on the cards.

It is not clear though what the BNP's future course of action will be if the party gets a mixed reaction from the electorate, or if all its mayoral candidates win. Movement-wise, that will be the worst case scenario for the party as it will be difficult to go back in full swing to the blockade/hartal days after a resounding victory in the city elections.

There is little doubt that the BNP is still a formidable force in Bangladesh's politics. The city corporation elections in Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet and Gazipur, which took place in the run up to the January 5, 2014 national election, are a testimony to that. In the absence of any true liberal centre-right political party, the BNP, as an umbrella organisation for anti-Awami League voters, has never got less than 30 percent in any national election, which makes it an important element in the development of a democratic, inclusive and prosperous Bangladesh.

BNP now quietly stands at a critical juncture in its history, a time that is going to decide the party's future, especially the fate of its movement that has so far claimed the lives of so many people. Only time can tell if the BNP leadership has what it takes to steer the party through such a difficult time.

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FRAGMENTED THOUGHTS

Speaking of the 'unspeakables'

What is the etiology of the use of such a vile act to punish your significant other? Put him or her in "their place" as if it is up to them to decide who belongs where? How has it become such a tool of oppression on all levels -- micro (individual), mezzo (households), and macro (national/international) levels? How does it continue to go on with consequences that do little to protect potential victims of rape?



NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

THERE is something fundamentally wrong with men (and women) who rape. It is a mal-adaptation of sex, a manifestation of psychopathology, a sign of being a sociopath or a psychopath, a tool to garner control, and an outward expression of deep internal anger and resentment. In the context of Bangladesh (as

elsewhere), it is also a response to sexual repression, lack of education about sex and appropriate sexual behaviours, and patriarchal values that give men (or those with power) the right to dominate and control women and their bodies (or, whichever party is deemed to be powerless).

And there are different kinds of rape -- ones that happen within closed doors, between husbands and wives, or between significant others; acquaintance rape or date rape, where one is raped by someone they know, or someone they are trying to get to know; rape by strangers that may occur not only in public secluded places but also within the confined spaces of peoples' own homes; gang rape; and then, there is rape as a weapon of war, a tool of both individual and mass oppression. It is, however, important to note that barring war and conflict zones violence against women is committed predominantly by intimate partners across the world. In Bangladesh, the prevalence rates are high -- national samples indicate that approximately 53 percent of women in Bangladesh experience physical or sexual violence by their husbands at least once in their lifetime (BDHS 2007).

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finger rule" in gender insensitive ways. Public knowledge of law enforcement officials raping women in custody further deters women (and men) from seeking help. Where men/boys are concerned, help seeking is close to non-existent. For them there is an added layer of stigma: stigma of their manhood being stripped; and fear of being ridiculed for not being able to stand up for themselves that prevents them from seeking any kind of recourse or justice.

But when women (or men) do seek help from existing laws they are ridiculed into non-action or marginalised by their communities to the extent that they are forced to withdraw their complaints. On the rare occasion that they are able to seek help with the support of their families, they have

ble for what happened to them, for the rape. In an environment where there is extensive victim blaming (for example: in the media, and in social circles), and normalisation of rape (for example: via violent movies, pornography) there is increased likelihood of both feeling further victimised and being further victimised.

Needless to say, such trauma is debilitating for those who are at the brunt of such heinous acts. It is also debilitating for a nation that has limited resources and understanding of how to deal with rape and rapists, in spite of laws such as the Violence against Women's and Children's Act in Bangladesh that are well intended, but rarely accessed due to lack of knowledge, fear of retribution, and a tendency to keep private things private.

the environment a safe one -- safe to speak, safe to share, safe to feel what they feel -- without fear of gossip and retribution, judgment and ridicule.

Recently, Theresa Fedor, a lawmaker in Ohio spoke before the state senate about her own experiences before the state talking about reproductive health and abortion, and found that a man in the audience found it funny enough to laugh, which she then addressed. But not everyone can address such blatant disrespect; not everyone can call people out to tell them that rape is no laughing matter. But just because no one says anything doesn't mean that it's not wrong. If you find rape to be funny you need to seek help -- there is obviously something that you don't understand about



Because people don't seek help
Help-seeking for rape is rare to begin with, particularly in Bangladesh, despite the severity of violence involved. Be it from friends and family (due to shame, stigma, fear of being ostracised, fear of being blamed), law enforcement agencies (because justice is illusive, expensive, and public), and service providers (due to lack of information about them, misunderstanding or no understanding of the services they provide, and in many rural areas the dearth of such services). To add to that, the legal system in Bangladesh protects rapists by further traumatising rape victims who seek justice by using questionable rape kits that use the "two

to work with law enforcement personnel who are often gender insensitive and discriminatory in their practices and have been accused of using victim-blaming tactics to marginalise violence against women as a social problem.

Amidst dire consequences
Consequences of rape are well documented: mental health issues -- particularly PTSD -- guilt complex, and self-esteem issues; physical health issues such as arthritis, digestive problems, chronic pelvic pain, and seizures; and engagement in risky and unhealthy behaviours such as substance abuse and self-injury. At the root of some of these consequences is perhaps the belief that it was their fault, that they were somehow responsi-

That rape remains one of the most under-reported crimes in the world is indicative of how exclusionary the experience of rape is and how it makes individuals feel unsafe even in their own homes, unsafe enough to keep it to themselves.

The silencing role of the environment
That unsafe place is, to an extent, an element of mistrust that is adaptive for those who experience such violence. However, the environment in which they live fuels a large part of that mistrust as well. It is safe to say that friends and family, together with the larger social world including institutions such as the media, education, the arts, and literature have a large role in making

rape that makes it funny for you. Find out what it is, for your sake and the sake of people around you.

And for everyone who justifies rape or violence against women (data from 2011 show about 30% of a national sample of women justified "wife beating" under certain circumstances) consider this: conflict management is a skill that can be learned and violence cannot be a healthy part of conflict resolution. Once violence is used, violence will be used again unless you play a part of corralling that.

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QUOTABLE Quote

If we don't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't really living.

Gail Sheehy

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 November birthstone
- 6 Serious
- 11 Corpulent
- 12 "Meet John Doe" director
- 13 Pane material
- 14 Cook's wear
- 15 Attack command
- 16 Road sealer
- 18 Co. abbr
- 19 "Gross!"
- 20 Bar need
- 21 Bee follower
- 22 Annoy
- 24 Dictionary entry
- 25 Prince topper
- 27 1975 Wimbledon champ
- 29 Mishandle
- 32 Big truck
- 33 Crow cry
- 34 Sought a seat
- 35 As done by
- 36 Court figure: Abbr
- 37 Adj modifier
- 38 VCR inserts
- 40 Delhi tongue

DOWN

- 1 Dresses
- 2 Compel
- 3 Fruity spirits
- 4 Cart puller
- 5 More piquant
- 6 Spook
- 7 Keg need
- 8 Fruity spirits
- 9 Laundry worker
- 10 Emulated Astaire
- 17 Circus performer
- 23 Low digit
- 24 Fly catcher
- 26 "Moving right along..."
- 27 Film set on Pandora
- 28 Seasoned sausage
- 30 Highland boy
- 31 Is jealous of
- 33 Batter of verse
- 39 Moose cousin
- 41 Altar vow

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
13									
15									
19									
22									
27	28								
32									
35									
36									
38									
42									
44									

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

A	L	G	A	E	C	O	L	O	R
L	O	O	N	Y	A	D	O	R	E
A	T	O	N	E	M	I	X	E	D
V	E	R	E	E	N				
O	N	E	O	N	O	G	I	L	
H	A	R	O	L	D	S	O	D	A
G	O	B	A	L	L	I	S	T	I
O	M	I	T	I	N	T	O	N	E
D	I	G	D	N	A	W	A	D	
C	O	U	R	T	T	A	S	T	E
A	R	N	A	Z	E	L	T	O	N
B	O	O	T	Y	W	E	E	P	S

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

WHAT'S THE GENERAL DOING? OH, THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN IS WINDING DOWN.

HE'S GETTING READY FOR A GARAGE SALE.

HENRY by Don Trachte

A XYDLBAXR 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.

CRYPTOQUOTE 2-17

ZLQHH GOOGEVNFVBVYZ QEY GRVYF VKY JYPBFFBFP GRPEYQV YFVYEOEBZY.

-- CYLZVKYFYZ

YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE:

YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN AND YOU KNOW WHAT YOU KNOW. AND YOU ARE THE GUY WHO'LL DECIDE WHERE TO GO.

-- DR. SEUSS