

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA TUESDAY APRIL 7, 2015

A return to sanity, hopefully?

Khaleda Zia's bail and opening of BNP's office

KHALEDA Zia's bail and the opening of the BNP's central office in Nayapaltn by law enforcers have brought in a sense of relief for the people of this country. This, along with the BNP's participation in the city polls indicate a possible way out of the painful political stalemate we, the people, have been kept hostage to.

Khaleda Zia has hopefully realised that her political strategy has failed to garner support of the people. In fact, there can be no excuse for the suffering her continuous blockade has caused. The heinous petrol bombings that have killed over a hundred people and maimed innumerable others has been a reprehensible method of continuing her movement. Khaleda Zia's denial, moreover, of her party and its alliance being involved in this violence is hardly credible.

The ruling party, meanwhile, has demonstrated a very oppressive, intolerant side in the way they have denied their political rivals a democratic space, leaving them with little or no options.

We hope that the sanity that the recent political developments have demonstrated will continue to be adhered to by both sides. The government must concede to giving a legitimate space to its political opponents and in turn, the BNP must stop its pernicious blockade-hartal movement that only serves to irrevocably hurt the people and the economy.

In this refreshing climate of relief the Jamaat-e-Islami's call for a 48-hour hartal to protest the SC's rejection of Kamruzzaman's review plea appears more like a ritual and is completely unwarranted and condemnable.

We urge our political parties to move forward in the positive direction and not regress to the unwholesome political gridlock we have been experiencing since January. However, much will depend on the AL and its government ensuring genuinely free and fair mayoral polls.

An avoidable public nuisance

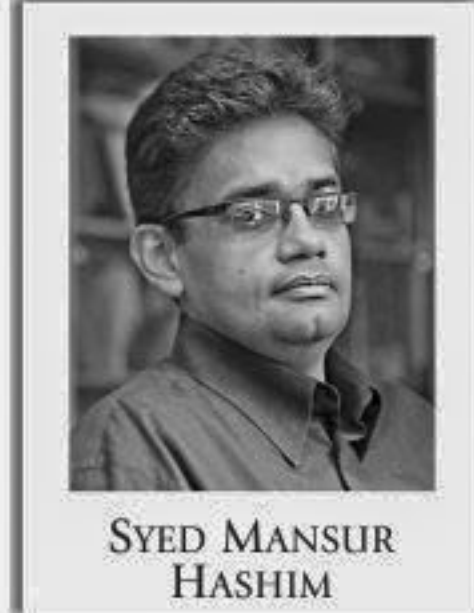
Minister's procession causes traffic mess

WE are aghast by the shameful display of indifference to public suffering that Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan and his supporters had shown day before yesterday by bringing out a one-kilometre-long march, creating hours of gridlock across the capital. The procession started from the outskirts of the Parliament and ended at the Suhrawardy Udyan before parading through some of Dhaka's busiest traffic intersections, resulting in a domino effect in the other parts of the capital that had forced the city dwellers into untold misery.

Blocking busy thoroughfares in such a manner is despicable as it is, and we cannot but throw our hands up in despair when a ruling party leader himself leads a rally that makes ordinary people wait in tailbacks for hours on end. And that too for demands to arrest Khaleda Zia at a time when the government is showing some flexibility in accommodating the opposition.

While we understand that in a democratic society everyone has the right to freely assemble, it should not come at the price of people's suffering. This is especially so when it comes to Dhaka's ever deteriorating traffic situation, which the government, instead of exacerbating, should try its best to manage properly.

A Sino-centric economic order



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

MUCH to the dismay of the United States (US), the Europeans are filling in applications to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

(AIIB). With staunch ally United Kingdom (UK) followed by France, Germany, Italy and now other countries like Luxembourg and Switzerland have joined the ranks of a rising number of nations that view AIIB's existence as a parallel source of finance for major infrastructure development efforts.

Despite an attempt to portray AIIB as a purely Chinese affair by some Western experts, both the UK and Switzerland have been formally accepted as founding members of the institution. The message being sent out by China is that the bank has a global outlook and is open to participation. The joint statement issued by Italy, Germany and France which stated that these countries were "keen to work with the AIIB as founding members to establish an institution that follows the best standards and practices in terms of governance, safeguards, debt and procurement policies" negates US claims that AIIB's activities may lack transparency.

The basic reality is that there is need for an institution such as the AIIB that focuses primarily on infrastructure development, which is a key prerequisite to meaningful development in both developing and developed nations. The other reality is that China has emerged as a global economic power house and trade

and investment cooperation with that country is of significant and strategic importance to advanced countries. In fact, by Asian Development Bank's (ADB) estimates, AIIB's infrastructure funding could reach US\$730 billion over the next decade.

From that point of view it is a natural choice for many EU countries to want to be part of the next big windfall in terms of investment opportunity that will come lending opportunities from beyond the EU. Beyond traditional global lenders such as the World Bank and ADB, AIIB's open outlook towards participation in "leadership role" has helped in attracting such widespread membership. By including UK and EU, powerhouse Germany will certainly benefit the new bank in terms of developing the guidelines and tools to ensure better risk management, performance evaluation and decision-making mechanisms.

These measures should ally to a great degree US concerns about the UK's decision to join the AIIB. In what is now emerging as to be a public relations embarrassment, the White House had issued a statement last month stating its unease about the China-led initiative. The statement which was published in *The Guardian* on March 13 said: "Our position on AIIB remains clear and consistent. The United States and many major global economies all agree there is a pressing need to enhance infrastructure around the world. We believe any new multilateral institution should incorporate the high standards of the World Bank and the regional development banks. Based on many discussions, we have concerns about whether the AIIB will meet these high standards, particularly related to governance, and environmental and social safeguards...The inter-

national community have a stake in seeing the AIIB complement the existing architecture, and to work effectively alongside the World Bank and Asian Development Bank."

That AIIB will be following a different path to development is quite clear. With less emphasis on governance issues that includes human rights as a major prerequisite to availing loans is of major headache to leading Western democracies. Since the primary lending focus will be

American pundits agree that China is an emerging great power. However, it will be many decades before China is in a position to challenge the US in terms of supremacy, whether military or economic. As pointed out by Zbigniew Brzezinski (a senior research professor of international relations at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, in Washington, D.C.) in 1997: "No state is likely to match the US in the four key dimensions of power – military, economic, technological, and cultural – that confer global political clout."

Those basic assumptions have not been refuted today. The neo-right may raise the China-bogey to raise fears that the global financial leadership held by a US-led West is now under threat by the emergence of institutions like the AIIB, a notion that is likely to be proven wrong. Per capita income in China puts that nation squarely in the middle income country and it is not entirely clear whether the country will graduate to become a high income country by 2030.

The AIIB should be treated as it is, an international financial institution that will complement, not replace globally established and recognised institutions, which have played and will continue to play an important role in economic development in the world. The fear of a new Sino-centric economic order replacing the existing one is unfounded in the near term. Whether AIIB will emerge to be a contender to take a leading position vis-à-vis players like the World Bank or ADB in the decades to come is a question that had better be left for tomorrow, not today.

The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

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to established and upcoming Asian economies which do not necessarily have the best track records on protecting human rights, the new bank has the potential to upset the global financial order that has been in place since the Bretton Woods conference in 1944. However, now that the UK and other EU countries are on board as founding members, many of those fears that have been justly or unjustly blown out of proportions, can be addressed.

A Massacre in Africa



GORDON BROWN

WHY is it that schools and schoolchildren have become such high-profile targets for murderous Islamist militants? The 147 students killed in an attack by the extremist group Al-Shabab at a college close to Kenya's border with Somalia are only the latest victims in a succession of outrages in which educational institutions have

been singled out for attack.

Last December, in Peshawar, Pakistan, seven Taliban gunmen strode from classroom to classroom in the Army Public School, executing 145 children and teachers. More recently, as more than 80 pupils in South Sudan were taking their annual exams, fighters invaded their school and kidnapped them at gunpoint. Their fate has been to join the estimated 12,000 students conscripted into children's militias in the country's escalating civil war.

Every day, another once-vibrant Syrian school is bombed or militarized, with two million children now in refugee camps or exiled to makeshift tents or huts. And next week will mark the first anniversary of the extremist group Boko Haram's night-time abduction of 276 schoolgirls from their dormitories in Chibok, in Nigeria's northern Borno state. With continued assaults on local schools, Boko Haram has escalated its war against education – making the last two years Nigeria's worst in terms of the violation of children's rights.

In the past five years, there have been nearly 10,000 attacks on schools and educational establishments. Why is it that schools, which should be recognized as safe havens, have become instruments of war, and schoolchildren have become pawns in extremists' strategies? And why have such attacks been treated so casually – the February abduction in South Sudan elicited barely any international comment – when they in fact constitute crimes against humanity.

In the depraved minds of terrorists, each attack has its own simple logic; the latest shootings, for example, are revenge by Al-Shabab for Kenya's intervention in Somalia's civil war. But all of the recent attacks share a new tactic – to create shock by exceeding what even many of the most hardened terrorists had previously considered beyond the pale. They have become eager to stoke publicity from the public outrage at their methods, even transmitting images of their crimes around the world.

But there is an even more powerful explanation for this spate of attacks on children. A now-common extremist claim is that education is acculturating



A woman is rescued from the building where she was being held hostage during the attack by Al-Shabab.

PHOTO: DAI KUROKAWA/EPA

African and Asian children to Western ways of thinking (Boko Haram in the local Hausa dialect means "Western education is a sin"). Moreover, extremists like Boko Haram and Al-Shabab calculate that they can attack schools with impunity.

Hospitals tend to be more secure, because the Geneva Conventions give them special protection as safe havens – a fact often recognized by even the most murderous of terrorist groups. Until recently, we have done far too little to protect schools and prevent their militarization during times of conflict. But, just as wars should never be waged by targeting hospitals, so combatants should never violate schools.

Once slow to respond, the world is now acting. Thirty countries have recently signed up to the Lucens or Safe School guidelines, which instruct their military authorities how to prevent schools from being used as instruments of war. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, recommends designating abductions of children from schools a "trigger violation" for the naming of terrorist organizations in the secretary-general's annual report to the Security Council.

And, thanks to the United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF), the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, the Global Business Coalition for Education, and former Nigerian Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigeria has now piloted the concept of safe schools. This has meant funding school guards, fortifications, and surveillance equipment to reassure parents and pupils that everything possible is being done to ensure their school is safe to attend. Now, under Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif Pakistan is adopting the safe school plan.

In a year when there are more local conflicts than ever – and in which children have become among the first (and forgotten) casualties – it is urgent that we make stopping attacks on schools a high priority. In dark times, children and parents continue to view their schools as sanctuaries, as places of normality and safety. When law and order break down, people need not only material help – food, shelter, and health care – but also hope. There is no more powerful way to uphold the vision of a future free from conflict than by keeping schools running.

The writer is former Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom, is United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education.

COMMENTS

"SC upholds Kamaruzzaman's death penalty" (April 6, 2015)

Aam janata

He's a known razakar and there shall be no mercy for him.

"Khaleda returns to her residence after 92 days" (April 5, 2015)

Shafiq Ahmed

She's back in her home and surely she's feeling happy but what about the people who lost their lives during the hartals and blockades called by her party?

"Pension for pvt service holders" (April 3, 2015)

Saiekh Sohrauddin

Obviously it will be a good initiative for the private service holders.

"No big deal, but yes big deal" (April 4, 2015)

Sujata Roy

Being an Indian I was not overwhelmed by India's victory over Bangladesh in ICC QF on March 19, 2015. It seems to me that Srinivasan does not care about ethics. I respect Mr. Kamal from the very core of my heart.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Malpractice rampant in private healthcare

It is very sad that most of the glossy, multi-storied private hospitals and clinics in Dhaka are running unscrupulous business in the name of healthcare. They have no professional ethics or code of conduct. Mismanagement, lack of cleanliness, patient negligence etc. are rampant. Post-operative care is horrifying and beyond imagination. Where saving lives should have been the motto, ending lives have become more common.

Every single life has value. It's an earnest request to the honourable Prime Minister and health minister to look into the matter and set strict rules and regulations for these private clinics and hospitals. The health ministry should start thinking about adopting a standardisation policy for healthcare estab-

lishments to ensure the safety and proper treatment of patients. Yearly accreditation and certification should be made compulsory for all healthcare establishments. In the US, an independent, not-for-profit organisation, the Joint Commission accredits and certifies more than 20,500 healthcare organisations and programmes. Joint Commission accreditation and certification is recognised nationwide as a symbol of quality that reflects an organisation's commitment to meeting certain performance standards. The health ministry should start adopting a health standardisation policy like Joint Commission which will no doubt, save many lives.

Aeman Rasul
Virginia, USA

Partiality towards BD in cricket arena

Ever since Bangladesh came into the international cricket arena, losing to Bangladesh has become a matter of embarrassment and disgrace, especially for teams like India and Pakistan. This is the reason they adopt any unfair means to win a match against Bangladesh. I still recall when Bangladesh toured Pakistan and was closing in on a win when Rashid Latif cheated to win. This was again witnessed during the finals of the 2012 Asia Cup and the quarter finals of the 2015 WC. I recall when India lost to Bangladesh in the 2007 WC and got knocked out of the group stages, Mandira Tribedi moaned and groaned about it throughout the entire tournament and even expressed her disgust for Bangladesh. Even sometimes umpires can be seen acting in a partial manner. It is indeed a great pity for us.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

