

Death and violence during polls

Unacceptable and shameful

WE are deeply shocked and saddened at the tragic death of a ten-year-old who was caught in the crossfire between supporters of rival candidates at the union parishad (UP) elections in Keraniganj. What was supposed to have been a festive occasion where people could exercise their franchise turned into a battlefield where innocents have become the casualties of political brawls.

Already 8 people have been killed during the second phase of the UP elections and scores have been injured. Even the police have been attacked by political goons making the atmosphere more volatile and dangerous. It is incomprehensible how individuals can storm into polling stations with firearms and not be apprehended by law enforcers. This paper has repeatedly urged the authorities, especially the Election Commission, to ensure that these elections take place in a peaceful manner. But the EC is clearly ineffectual and possibly helpless, in curbing irregularities like stuffing of ballot boxes and the violent scuffling between rival groups. In such a situation it is incumbent upon the government to intervene and take effective measures to stop this violence and the activities that will make a farce of this election.

It is unacceptable that every time there will be elections, lives will be lost. Why should poll centres become the place for political gang fights? How can it be expected that voters will come out to vote without fear?

We urge the government to expedite a probe into these deaths as well as incidences of violence in general, carried out by individuals affiliated with political parties and bring the culprits to book. This has to be done irrespective of who these individuals are and what political party they are a part of.

Fighting human trafficking

Need concerted, vigorous efforts to stop it

DESPITE the continuous hue and cry about human trafficking (in the media), very little has actually been done to fight the menace, according to a recently held national seminar, jointly organised by the government and USAID. So it continues to thrive in circumstances created by the absence of proper cooperation among law enforcement agencies, a lethargic pace of investigation and trials of relevant cases, a delay in setting up special tribunals, and an inoperative state of counter-trafficking committees at the local levels.

Human trafficking is nothing but a fancy name for modern day slavery where lives are bought and sold with utter disregard for human dignity. It is a complex problem with complex roots. Research shows that a lot of victims originate from areas affected by natural disasters and climate change. In the absence of formal migration services, they become easy targets of human traffickers and smugglers. Reduced scope of formal migration also adds to the problem. And trafficking cases are usually not filed under the proper law which makes the job of prosecutors even harder.

We concur with the experts of the seminar that the capacity of law enforcement agencies and legal practitioners should be enhanced, the national action plan implemented and victims compensated. But without a strong political will of regional governments, none of these steps are likely to make much of a difference in combating a problem that, reportedly, has links to powerful people in many of the concerned countries.

COMMENTS

"Traffic terrible"

(March 31, 2016)

Anonymous

So what! There is nobody to care. Let people suffer for hours on the street!

"Obama blames media for Trump's rise"

(March 30, 2016)

Salahuddin Reagan

He is right. Continuous media attention is the reason behind his rise.

History of Bangladesh: First Decade

MO CHAUDHURY

THE first decade's history of Bangladesh is most consequential but often politically coloured. This historical commentary is different in two respects. First, it recounts the decade through the lens of ordinary citizens whose perception is truer than reality in politics. Second, it avoids straitjacketing of history by simultaneously acknowledging the contributions of a regime and drawing lessons from its mistakes.

Bangabandhu's regime actually started in 1970 with the sweeping victory of Awami League in the general election. Bangabandhu's political affiliation really didn't matter then since his personal charisma and the cause he championed inspired the people. Nonetheless, the Awami League party apparatus definitely played a crucial role during the Liberation War, but importantly far from being an exclusive or existential one.

Bangabandhu's greatest post-liberation legacy is the enshrinement of *Muktijuddher chetona* or the spirit of the Liberation War (a predominantly Bangalee but otherwise secular democratic society with unfettered freedom of expression and an equitable economy) into the 1972 Constitution. But Bangabandhu's regime faced sky high expectations from the people while challenged with the stark reality of little domestic resources and foreign reserves, incapacitated factories, broken infrastructure, and inexperienced business and administrative leadership; the 1974 famine and the dwindling foreign aid flow did not help either. With Awami League left unchallenged except from the JSD, the political vacuum degenerated into internal power struggle and distanced the party officials and activists from the electorate. This, along with the economic chaos generated by the post-liberation mixed economy venture, was

perhaps instrumental in Bangabandhu's introduction of the single party BAKSAL system in 1975. Tragically, Bangabandhu's assassination shortly thereafter, did not leave enough time to see if the BAKSAL system would have redressed the dire problems of the time.

A few lessons to glean from Bangabandhu's regime. First, the absence of a competitive multi-party political environment, by design, inattention or enforcement, is unhealthy for the nation and can be disastrous for the lone governing party. Second, the process is no less important than the end. The BAKSAL amendment to the Constitution was done without a clear electoral mandate for such a sea change. Third, concentration of power in a single position, either constitutionally or from the singularity of dominance within a party, is contrary to the development of a thriving democracy even when it is nested in a benevolent leader. Fourth, the economic pie needs to be sizeably enlarged first to achieve the eventual end of an equitable economy. Slicing a shrinking pie makes everyone worse off.

The abhorrent assassination of Bangabandhu shifted the power struggle to the new governors, the armed forces. Most of us, ordinary citizens, were not privy to the reported rampant executions. What we know is that the internal strife claimed the lives of a number of liberation war heroes and culminated in General Zia ascending to the helm.

General Zia's contribution to the new nation started in March 1971 with the announcement of an independent Bangladesh on behalf of Bangabandhu. To most people, Bangabandhu's March 7 speech is the de facto declaration of independence although his reported formal declaration directive during the night of March 25 was not heard by many. Major Zia's declaration, in Bangabandhu's name, from the clandestine radio station in Kalurghat,

Chittagong, was the first widely reached declaration of an independent country. It was important in inspiring the people into the armed liberation war and enormously boosted their morale.

Following Bangabandhu's 1975 assassination, General Zia established a firm hold on military governance, and became President Zia using a questionable referendum. He launched a new political party of his own, the BNP, and revived other political parties including Awami League to reorganise and emerge from the BAKSAL imposed freeze. The previously banned anti-secular and anti-liberation parties like the Jamaat and their war-crime laden leadership found their way back in. To build a separate electoral clientele for BNP, General Zia appealed to the religious sentiment of the Muslims and introduced the concept of Bangladeshi nationalism, a state-based identity instead of a culture-based one. To court experienced leaders and activists into BNP, he offered generous economic benefits.

President Zia encouraged transition to a private enterprise-based economy that was also open to foreign partners including those opposing the liberation movement. Partisan critiques may argue that the shift in economic and external relations paradigm would have happened anyway. Perhaps so. But what we factually observed is that the privatisation and internationalisation that started during President Zia's regime had been important in launching private sector led growth. The roots of vibrant private banking system and capital markets, the making of the world's second largest RMG exporter, the beginning of enviable foreign exchange reserves from Middle-East wage remittance, and the inception of mechanised and high-yielding agriculture, were all spurred by the policies adopted at that time.

A very important but shameful legacy

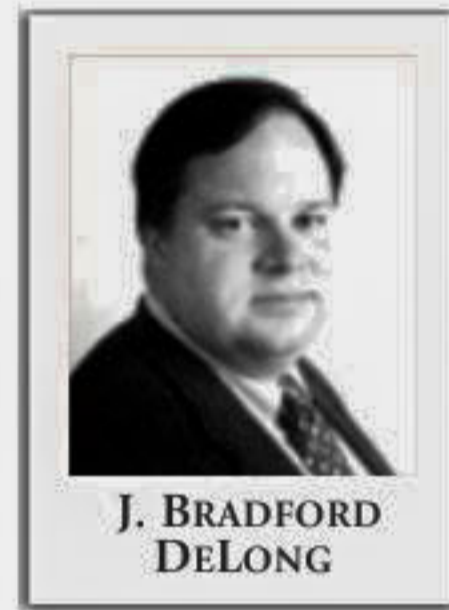
of President Zia, however, was the introduction of the Indemnity Act in our Constitution, giving legal protection to the self-professed killers of Bangabandhu and his family. Some key lessons to gather from the aftermath and after-shocks (to date) of President Zia's regime are as follows. First, commercialising politics and merging the interests of business and governance is a slippery slope that bankrupts the nation ethically. Second, inviting religion to the political/governance arena is a toxic elixir that instigates division, intolerance and violence. Third, if crimes against the people or in governance go unpunished, the culture of impunity spreads like a virus, infiltrates the deepest of veins and shreds the moral backbone. Fourth, constitutional amendments without a meaningful electoral mandate leads to centripetal governance and dictatorial democracy. It can set forth a fatal appetite among others to reach, exercise and retain that sole authority, as demonstrated by the power struggles that claimed the lives of President Zia, among others. Fifth, Bangladesh should not hesitate to forge ties with previously adversarial countries if it is beneficial for the country. That is, there is no permanent friend or foe in international geopolitics. Lastly, private entrepreneurship and generation of external income and resources are vital to keep enlarging the pie to be sliced equitably over time.

To conclude, it is most instructive for Bangladeshis to recollect the tumultuous first decade of Bangladesh with integrity. There is nothing to gain from the politics of blame and a lot to learn from a factual assessment of the past.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Debunking America's populist narrative



J. BRADFORD DELONG

ONE does not need to be particularly good at hearing to decipher the dog whistles being used during this year's election campaign in the United States. Listen even briefly, and you will understand that Mexicans and Chinese are working with Wall Street to forge lousy trade deals that rob American workers of their rightful jobs, and that Muslims want to blow everyone up.

All of this fear mongering is scarier than the usual election-year fare. It is frightening to people in foreign countries, who can conclude only that voters in the world's only superpower have become dangerously unbalanced. And it is frightening to Americans, who until recently believed – or perhaps hoped – that they were living in a republic based on the traditions established by George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt.

But what is even more unsettling is the political reality this rhetoric reflects. There can be no comparing Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders's policy-oriented critique of neoliberalism to the incoherent bluster of Donald Trump or Ted Cruz on the Republican side. And yet, on both the right and the left, a common narrative is emerging – one that seeks to explain why the incomes of working- and middle-class Americans have stagnated over the past generation.

Unfortunately, this narrative, if used as a basis for policymaking, will benefit neither the US nor the rest of the world; worse, it has yet to be seriously challenged. For decades, senior Republican politicians and intellectuals have been uninterested in educating the American people about the realities of economic policy. And Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton has been too busy trying to fend off Sanders's challenge.

Broadly, the narrative goes something like this. American middle- and working-class wages have stagnated because Wall Street pressed companies to outsource the valuable jobs that made up America's manufacturing base, first to low-wage Mexicans and then to the Chinese. Moreover, this was a bipartisan effort, with both parties unified behind financial deregulation and trade deals that undermined the US economy. First, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) led to the export of high-quality manufacturing jobs to Mexico. Then the US established permanent normal trade relations with China and refused to brand its government a currency manipulator.

The reason this narrative is wrong is simple. There are good reasons why the US adopted policies that encouraged poorer countries to grow rapidly through export-led industrialisation. In helping Mexico, China, and other developing countries grow, the US is gaining richer



PHOTO: THE ATLANTIC

trading partners. Furthermore, there is a strong case that US national security would be improved if, 50 years from now, schoolchildren around the world learn how America helped their countries prosper, rather than trying to keep them as poor as possible for as long as possible.

It was not globalisation that caused incomes to stagnate. Trade with countries like China and Mexico is just one factor affecting income distribution in the US, and it is by no means the most important one. The reason that incomes have stagnated is that American politicians have failed to implement policies to manage globalisation's effects.

As Steve Cohen and I argue in our book *Concrete Economics*, macroeconomic management requires the government to do what it always did before 1980: pragmatically adopt policies that promote equitable growth.

There were good reasons for the US to offload industries that required low wages to be globally competitive. But there was little reason for the US to offload industries that had become important "technology drivers." Nor were there good reasons for a lot of other bad decisions, such as allowing the financial industry to profit by convincing investors to bear risks they should not and allowing health-care providers to profit from administration at the expense of the care and treatment of the sick. Other bad decisions include

incarcerating 2 percent of the country's young men and concluding that America's economic problems would be solved if only the rich could keep more of their money.

It is not difficult to see where the blame lies. As Mark Kleiman of NYU's Marron Institute points out, the Republican Party's rigid and die-hard ideological opposition to "taxing the rich [has] destroyed, on a practical level, the theoretical basis for believing that free trade benefits everyone." It is difficult to argue for redistributing the benefits of globalisation when you believe that the market channels gains to those who deserve them. Nor can you ameliorate the painful effects of globalisation if you believe that social-insurance programmes turn their beneficiaries into lethargic "takers."

It is not globalisation, poor negotiation tactics, low-wage Mexicans workers, or the overly clever Chinese that bear responsibility for what is ailing America. The responsibility lies instead with politicians peddling ideology over practicality – and thus with the citizens who elect them, as well as those who don't bother to vote at all.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Allow construction materials into Gaza Strip

Nearly two years after the Operation Protective Edge (the military operation launched by Israel on July 8 2014 in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip), none of the 12,000 homes destroyed in Gaza have been rebuilt due to the ongoing Israeli blockade. The World Bank warns that the economy of Gaza is on the verge of collapse. Overall unemployment rate now stands at 43 percent — the highest in the world. Sixty-eight percent of Gazans aged between 20 and 24 are unemployed. Two-thirds of Gaza's 1.8 million

residents are now recipients of UN aid in one form or the other.

Palestinian people have survived a very dreadful winter in the different parts of the Gaza Strip, simply because they don't have proper housing. Unless there is more international pressure on Israel to allow construction materials into the Gaza Strip, the situation will not improve.

Ted Rudow III, MA
CA, USA

Money swindling

This refers to the report "Janata Bank to sue its officer for swindling clients' FDR Money" (March 22). This is not the first time such a crime took place. Online banking is not safe, withdrawing money from the ATM is not safe, as we are at risk of cards being cloned. Banks have to prepare themselves to face these challenges. But most importantly, bank officials have to be honest to protect the depositors' money.

Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail

The habit of newspaper reading

Newspapers serve us with various facts and information on a daily basis. To many of the readers, the morning starts with a cup of tea and a newspaper on the table. An English newspaper also helps us enhance our language skills as well as keep us informed about various issues. As the leading English daily in the country, The Daily Star deserves our praise. It has been

serving the readers for the last twenty-five years and has remained true to its motto: People's right to know.

We all should encourage young people to nurture the habit of reading newspapers so that they can grow up as enlightened individuals.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong