

# The 27 conditions and Bangladesh politics

## AL men not above the law

*Abolish the air of impunity*

**T**HE continuing intra party violence that is taking place within the Awami League and the incidents of death and destruction resulting from clashes between ruling party members is a bad example for both society and politics and is creating an environment of lawlessness that is worrying. According to a rights group, 52 Awami League men were killed from January last year till October this year. During the same period, nearly 3,500 individuals were injured in 334 incidents of internal clashes.

It has been alleged that the clashes have mostly been taking place over establishing supremacy in different areas and over making money in unlawful ways such as through extortion, tender manipulation and influencing the government's development works. All of these are matters of concern in themselves; the violence, however, that has followed only worsens the image of the ruling party to the electorates.

The fact that the party top brass has only dealt with party miscreants leniently at best has further created an environment of impunity where they possibly feel they can get away with just about anything. And this certainly does not help the law and order in society. Absence of any meaningful political opposition, according to political analysts, is another factor which has led to this air of impunity expanding to the point where some party members are carrying out such criminal activities openly.

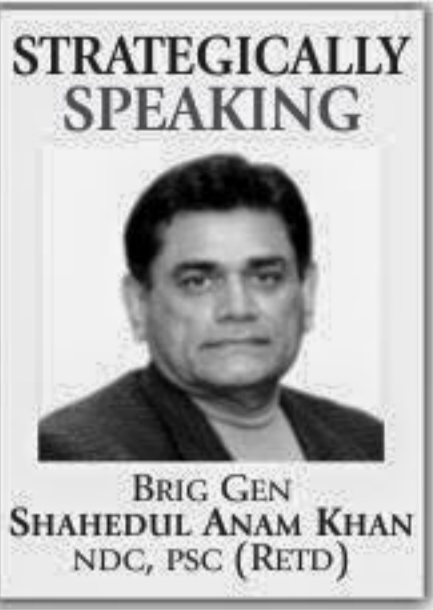
The Awami League, as the ruling party, has a special responsibility in thwarting such dangers to law and order. Law enforcement agencies also must deal with individuals who are involved in criminal activities, regardless of their affiliation with the ruling party, in the interest of upholding the law.

## Death on wheels

*Utter disregard for public safety*

**I**T is a common sight to see trucks plying on the roads and highways in the country with rods that protrude dangerously out of the backs of these vehicles, as shown in a picture printed in our paper on November 16. It is natural for some of these objects to come loose and become flying projectiles and kill or maim people who happen to be travelling behind. Although no exact data of such casualties exist in the country, the practice poses a clear and present danger. The scenario is not unique to Bangladesh. In fact, the Indian Supreme Court in August 2016 has called for strict implementation of a ban on killer trucks with iron rods protruding out which has taken 40,000 lives in road accidents in the past two years.

We need similar laws in the country that would make owners of transport companies liable for mishaps. Without regulations, the roads and highways department (RHD) cannot enforce any ban on this despicable practice that is causing physical harm to people and property. Strict guidelines need to be formulated and implemented that will govern the safe transportation of potentially lethal cargo such as iron rods on our roads. If owners of trucking companies and those hiring trucks faced the threat of civil and criminal proceedings because laws were enacted to that effect, the careless attitude of transporting haphazard material would be rethought and public safety could be ensured to a greater degree. But even if there were no such law specific to this problem, the police can and should take action against anyone who endangers public safety.



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN, NDC, PSC (RETD)

**T**HE 27 conditions imposed by the police on the BNP for holding a public meeting is another example how indirect pressure is applied to keep the opposition under the thumb. But the DMP should not get away with the idea

that people cannot see through the shenanigans it employed to prevent the BNP from organising a gathering in Dhaka. While some of the 27 points were related to public interest, and one must appreciate the police's concern in this regard, one wonders whether such conditions had also been put on other political parties holding public gathering in the past; and will this be applicable to all such meetings in the future.

The proposed public meeting was to observe November 7, a day which has been given different appellations by different political parties, and many question the rationale for a political party that was not even formed in 1975, for observing the day as "Revolution and National Solidarity Day." Can one build solidarity on the blood of officers?

It is an irony that the only political party that was instrumental in creating the events leading up to November 7, 1975, and hoping to reap political benefits from it, not only disowns the day now but never passes up the opportunity to excoriate the BNP, in particular its founder and the present leaders, perhaps because the outcome of the event did not go its way.

But be that as it may, holding public meeting is a democratic right. But some of the conditions laid down by the police were ludicrous and betrayed the actual intention as well as the double standards in dealing with the main opposition party. Engineers' Institute was never even a choice of the BNP. And can a political party organise a rally, and that too within the time caveat of 2:00 pm to 4:30 pm having received the DMP permission the same very day? And, for example, the condition that the BNP party members cannot approach the site in procession, imposed out of the very rhapsodic consideration for public inconvenience, was in stark contrast to what we saw during the recent Council of the ruling party when a good part of the main road was off limits to general traffic, albeit for some

period, and special traffic arrangements were laid out for the two days. And one wonders whether the AL had to arrange firefighting equipment on their own, as the BNP was required to do.

It was not as if this is the first time that one witnessed the exercise of a perfectly legitimate political activity blunted by directives and conditions of the law enforcing agencies. In March of 2012, 19 directives and 11 conditions were laid down by the police for the BNP to hold its rally in Dhaka. Everything was done to see that the rally could not take place then, and everything has been done short of a direct refusal by the police, to see that it could not hold the November 7 rally. It seems as if the largest spot for holding public gathering in the

And the government is happy sitting smugly on their laurels of development. Political discussions are hogged by the most dangerous refrain, "development first", given wide currency by the ruling party that the subject of development must prevail over any other matter during any discussion on national issues, including democracy and mode of election. And the ruling party is sitting smugly too on the prospect that the BNP shall have to come to the elections on the terms and conditions that AL sets. In the meanwhile, if BNP can be kept ineffective by preventing it from conducting political activity why not.

Not long ago in these very columns we opined that Bangladesh was falling into a state



*While some of the 27 points were related to public interest, and one must appreciate the police's concern in this regard, one wonders whether such conditions had also been put on other political parties holding public gathering in the past; and will this be applicable to all such meetings in the future.*

capital is reserved for the AL. That is the only conclusion a non-partisan observer can draw from the contrasting ways that the request for the use of the venue was treated.

That this should be the dispensation meted out to the only opposition party worth the name in the country dis-embellishes democracy. It is for democracy and freedom of speech that so many sacrificed so much, and to see that these very basic rights so severely abridged is alarming.

The activity of the main political party has been restricted to press conferences and insipid comments on some statement or action of the government. And they cannot even gather in front of their party office.

that Francis Fukuyama described as "Democratic Recession" following what his mentor Samuel Huntington described as the cresting of the "Third Wave" of democratisation around the world in the late 1990s. Interestingly, Bangladesh was caught in that very dynamics of the "Third Wave" which had started in the 1970s, its quest for democracy and democratic order having culminated in a war of liberation and establishment of a free country that coincided with the seminal stages of the "Third Wave." Regrettably, it seems that we have regressed even farther in the last four years.

The writer is associate Editor, The Daily Star.

# Bangladesh's role in the climate change negotiations



SALEEMUL HUQ

**P**RIME Minister Hasina is now in Marrakech, Morocco, for the 22nd Conference of Parties (COP22) of the United Nations Framework

Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

She was invited, along with other heads of government and ministers, by the King of Morocco to attend the opening of the first meeting of Parties to the Paris Agreement here on November 15.

In her speech, the PM highlighted the actions that Bangladesh is taking at home to tackle climate change and also reiterated the importance of dealing with migration and displacement at the global level which will become a bigger problem unless we plan for it under the UNFCCC.

This was a historic occasion as the

*This was a historic occasion as the Paris Agreement, which was negotiated and agreed upon last year at COP21 in Paris, was then ratified by over a hundred countries in record speed and came into force on November 4, with the first meeting of the Parties held in Marrakech on November 15.*



A Moroccan labourer drives a scooter at the site of the COP 22 in Marrakech

Paris Agreement, which was negotiated and agreed upon last year at COP21 in Paris, was then ratified by over a hundred countries in record speed and came into force on November 4, with the first meeting of the Parties held in Marrakech on November 15.

The presence of Prime Minister Hasina at this historic event showed the continued importance that Bangladesh gives to climate change and also to the significant role that Bangladesh has played at the COPs over the years.

As no country negotiates in the UNFCCC as a single country, but rather within negotiating groups, Bangladesh negotiates as a member of the Least Developing Countries (LDC) group and was at one time the chair of the group but now remains in the senior group of LDC negotiators.

There are a number of experienced negotiators from Bangladesh who

have been selected by the LDC group, due to their expertise on different topics, to represent the LDCs on those topics.

Bangladesh has also been selected to be a member of a number of important bodies set up by the UNFCCC over the years, such as the Adaptation Fund Board, the Green Climate Fund Board and the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage. This is another recognition of Bangladesh's expertise and importance in this area by the other countries.

In addition to the officials from government who attend the COPs, there are also many NGOs who hold side events on different topics as well as a number of reporters from both TV and print media in Bangladesh who report back to their news outlets every day. There are also a number of Bangladeshi experts who attend these programmes as part of other institutions, including UN agencies.

Hence, Bangladesh is certainly recognised in the UNFCCC talks as an important country both due to its actions at home as well as its negotiators and other representatives at the COPs.

One of the perennial misconceptions of what Bangladesh achieves by attending and participating in these annual meetings, is perpetuated by the need to ask what Bangladesh got out of the meeting. This is often the first question asked by every journalist to the head of the delegation after each meeting. The misconception is that Bangladesh is not attending these events to get something for itself but rather for the vulnerable countries as a whole and in that capacity I must rate Bangladesh's negotiators and other participants at the COPs as second to none!

The writer is Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh. Email: Saleemul.huq@iied.org

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Curse of using polythene bags

We all know that polythene is not bio-degradable and stays back in the soil or water where it is disposed. Yet it is a common practice to throw polythene bags away into drains, ponds, rivers and even open manholes, thereby blocking the sewerage system.

It's high time that the material was totally banned and replaced by jute or other bio-degradable bags. Stringent measures must be taken to not only ban its commercial use, but also its manufacture and sales. Government should encourage the media to spread greater awareness about the dangers of polythene use and disposal.

Its unfortunate that such measures require the intervention of the Prime Minister, who can't possibly manage the time to look into these matters. The concerned authorities should undertake the responsibility of preventing the environmental damages caused by polythene bags.

Siraj Islam  
Padma Oil Ltd.

### Why this savagery on minority communities?

Bangladesh has been a non-sectarian country since its inception. However, this is not reflected in the recent incidents of the attack on the Hindu community in Nasirnagar and Brahmanbaria, as well as the online posts hurting Muslim sentiments on Facebook. Now, the indigenous Santal community is facing oppression from land grabbers. It raises the question of what we should do for them. As citizens of a secular country, it is our wish and duty to remove such racist and discriminatory practices from our society, and remain close with our fellow civilians irrespective of their race or religion.

Akib Sumon  
Bangladesh Agricultural University