

Is BNP emerging as a worthy opposition?



Mohammad Al-Masum Molla is deputy chief reporter at The Daily Star.

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Enforcing transport strikes to foil a mass event organised by the political opposition is an old strategy. When the BNP started holding protest rallies in the country, they faced the same hurdle. But this old trick seems to have failed or at least been ineffective in Mymensingh and Khulna, where the BNP held rallies recently. Despite the transport strikes backed by the ruling party in these two districts, tens of thousands of supporters and party members attended from adjacent districts. There were fears of arrest and harassment or attacks from Awami League supporters, and in some places, that fear rang true. Yet, BNP supporters came.

What made them defy the odds? What does the BNP want to achieve through such mass mobilisation? What message do they want to give to the Awami League? Answers to these questions are crucial to understanding the future course of Bangladesh politics.

Since it faced defeat in the 2008 election, BNP has waged movements mainly to push their own issues, such as reinstatement of the caretaker government system and the release of party chief Khaleda Zia from her jail sentence. They rarely highlighted issues that had any direct links to the people. Moreover, the party was blamed for the arson attacks that claimed many lives during their street demonstrations launched before the 2014 election. Those demonstrations drew massive criticism, from both inside and outside the country. In fact, their failure to address issues that affect people's lives is often seen as one of the serious strategic mistakes the party made in the past. This time,

however, the party took to the streets to voice grievances almost exclusively on issues such as price hikes and corruption. Through protests, the party is trying to correct their failure in not portraying themselves as a pro-people entity.

Judging by these turns of events, it seems, even if in appearance, that BNP has been able to emotionally drive its supporters to join street protests. Previously, whenever they launched a movement, there was a common belief that central leaders would be resting in their drawing rooms while the party followers came out on the streets. This time, however, BNP's central leaders were out on the street to lead the protests, and it paid off through massive gatherings.

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Despite obstacles, BNP's rally in Chattogram was attended by a huge number of supporters.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Their leaders and activists – more specifically, all the post-holders, including party chief Khaleda Zia – have been facing a number of cases and arrest warrants. The party has been alleging that around 600 political leaders and activists, members of civil society and labour leaders are victims of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh. They claim their backs are against the wall and they have no option but to wage a movement. At BNP's first divisional rally in Chattogram, Secretary-General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "It's a big and tough struggle for us, and we must win it. We have no alternative but to win this battle. We will either win or die."

The other reason is the eternal anti-incumbency in the country

that every political party that has ever been in power has had to deal with. Since democracy was restored in 1991, none of the political parties were able to stay in power for consecutive terms (until 2009). However, the ruling party has in office for the third consecutive term, and anti-AL sentiments have been raging through much of the population for the past years.

By organising such rallies and staging protests, BNP wants to send a few messages to the ruling Awami League. First, the party is more organised now than ever, no matter what state the party leadership is in, with Chairperson Khaleda Zia convicted on corruption charges and Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman in exile in London. Second, there is

a perception that the party cannot do anything by themselves, but with these programmes, they have shown they are indeed capable of holding rallies and protests on their own, without the help of their allies. The organisational strength of the party, which many believed had diminished over the years, was displayed by the presence of tens of thousands of party men in the rallies. Supporter turnout is merely an indicator of the party's popularity, which is just one of many prerequisites for winning an election.

In the last 14 years, BNP has tried two of the three known ways of putting pressure on their political rivals: waging violent street protests in 2014 and 2015, and peaceful tactical negotiations in 2018. None

of those worked. This time around, the party seems to have learnt from past mistakes and adopted the difficult yet definitive third path – engaging with the general public by highlighting pro-people issues, strategically reviving its grassroots workers, slowly building up a peaceful movement through mass rallies, and most importantly, making sure that its top leaders are out there leading from the front and directly connecting with the people. Again, this might be the most difficult and lengthy way of running a political movement, but it also gives the party a greater chance of remaining relevant to the people, and hence creating a serious headache for the ruling party.

Aedes-Manush Bhai-Bhai!



CHINTITO SINCE 1995

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed is an architect and a professor, a Commonwealth scholar and a fellow, Woodbadge scout leader, Baden Powell fellow, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

The annual meeting of the Nikhil Bangladesh Mosha (mosquito) Samity has been convened. This is the time of year when there is relief from stinging in other parts of the city because the two-winged gnats congregate in large numbers at a particular dump. Established under the Bengal Presidency of Governor Victor Bulwer-Lytton, the setting for this special centenary year was Demra. The purpose of the assembly was not only to take account of previous bites and stock of sites, but also to exercise their democratic right.

They were wary of freedom of expression, seeing the aftermath of Brexit, although it came about after the Britishers debated for months, learnt the pros and cons, and exercised their independent privilege, only to be overwhelmed by the cons. More recently, Liz Truss lasted less than the 60 days they took to elect her through several rounds of democratic roulette. Little Aedes, sitting on Mama's lap (they always travel as a family), said, "So many slogans: No bribe – no service; no blood – no job; frying an egg – visit the Hague. Why can't they have Aedes-Manush Bhai Bhai – insecticide bye-bye? I can hardly breathe!"

"Shhh," said Papa. "Wear your spray mask and learn how to. We cannot betray the pharmaceuticals; they are paying us handsomely. We have to breed and satiate our greed for blood. Actually, this year's slogan is 'Stop the aerosol.'" Little Aedes exclaimed, "But that's hypocrisy!" "What is not? Tell me, my son."

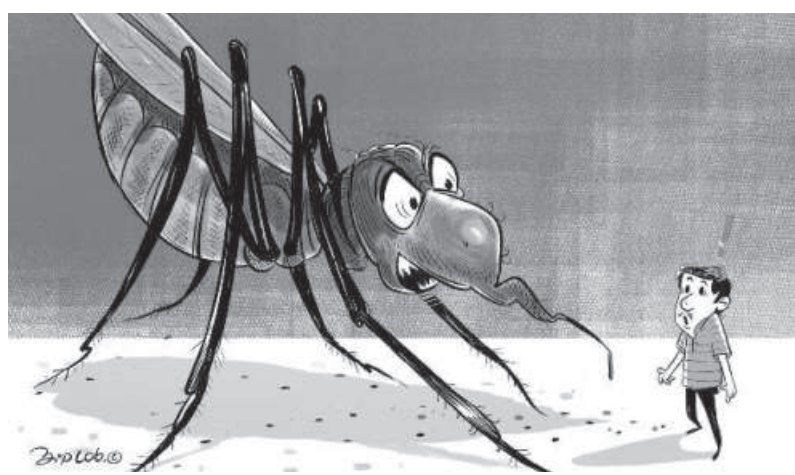
They had been gathering in hordes at the convention venue – flying in, hopping over, ride-sharing with humans, and by quick breeding. At one point, there was a drumroll. The wasteland fell into a murmured silence, broken moments later by the shrill of the trumpet. Then entered the delegation of celebrity Aedes mosquitoes.

There was reverence for the females among them, for only they bite the humans. They were fewer than expected. Begging excuse, albeit immodestly, the lady leader of the mission said that many in the force

were busy in the epidermis frontier (Clap).

This year, representatives of the municipality health and wealthy officers, killer pharmaceuticals, and the old tyre business association were also invited; small Culicidae flies were the gracious hosts.

The chairperson began by declaring his satisfaction with the city municipalities, "Because in their dengue panic, they were



VISUAL: BIPOB CHAKROBORTY

spraying ditches, drains and canals with insecticides, useless (sniggers) (Audience: clap), because we do not breed in wetlands, rivers and lakes."

Compliantly, the pharmaceutical rep raised his hand, covered in full sleeves, "We too are happy because we are selling more chlorine." The municipality health and wealthy officers were coaxed into speaking. "Medicine is bad for human and aquatic life, so we have been taught," sighed their superintendent. "But on the wealth side, the companies are making sure we use their product." He got a pat on his back from the pharma rep.

The agenda moved on. "We will not bite the politicians, no! Don't bite them, please (Loud cheer). Their unscientific rhetoric gives us free publicity, and longevity," said one speaker. "Sometimes we wonder whether they work for the companies or maybe the HR&W officers – definitely


not for their itching voters. "Our target should be researchers, scientists, and media people. Bite them. Don't let them work and discover the means of destroying our habitat. We shall take revenge. Sting!" The crowd roared.

"We are looking for New Territories to proliferate. We appeal to our politician friends and municipality allies to create dumping grounds, preferably within the city. We urge relevant businesses to leave behind some old tyres for ecological balance.


"Let there be no awareness programme at schools or on TV that preach against water-filled pots and pans, and ceramic containers. Do they know that we thrive indoors, in small, dark corners, behind curtains? By making a fuss about the outdoors, they are diverting the matter for politico-economic benefits.

"Tragic though the end may be, we can actually be eliminated, or in the least controlled, if only they would stop taking pictures of ineffective sprays. They are not informing, thank God, their fellow humans that dengue mosquitoes lay eggs on the walls of water containers, and hatch underwater. We shall not die alone. We shall take with us insecticide manufacturers, municipality officers, and all conspirators against our mighty kingdom of over three and a half thousand species.

"Some in the municipality and businesses have begged us not to go. They would be jobless, ruined, if we left for good. Each of us live only for a month anyway. But, because it takes only a few mosquitoes to cause a major dengue occurrence, our kind shall survive. So, for the sake of the corrupt few, the vast population of *Homo sapiens* shall suffer." Sting, sting, sting.



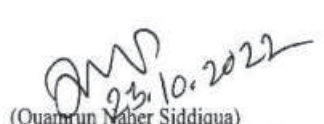
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Prime Minister's Office
National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)
Strengthening National Skills Development Authority Project
Biniyog Bhaban (10th Floor)
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www.nsd.gov.bd



Request for Expression of Interest (EOI)

1	Ministry/Division	Prime Minister's Office	
2	Agency	National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)	
3	Procuring Entity Name	Project Director, Strengthening National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)	
4	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka	
5	Expression of Interest for Selection of	Curriculum Expert (Time-based) (SD-4)	
6	EOI Reference No. and date	03.14.2692.879.14.044.22-403	Date: 23.10.2022
7	Procurement Method	Selection of Individual Consultants (SIC) of PPR-2008	
8	Budget and Source of Funds	GoB (Development)	

PARTICULAR INFORMATION				
Title of Service	Qualification	Experience	Brief Description of assignment	
9	Curriculum Expert (Package no. SD-4)	Minimum Bachelor degree in education or TVET or related field with CBT&A Level-IV or equivalent	1. At least 7 years' general experience with 5 years TVET / Skills related activities. 2. At least 5 years' specific experience in developing & reviewing & validating, Competency Standards (CS), Course Accreditation Documents (CAD), Curriculum, CBLMs and Assessment Tools in TVET / similar familiarity with international practice of the same. 3. Familiarity with ongoing issues in the national procedure on the relevant areas. 4. Multi-skilled in TVET will be an added advantage. 5. Good command / proven record in English and Bengali. 6. Highly efficient in using both desktop and laptop. 7. Experience in facilitating skills training programs as a trainer or assessor will be an added advantage	Please see the SRFA for details
10	Other Details	The place of work is Dhaka. The indicative date of commencement is 01.12.2022 and duration of assignment is 12 months. A copy of the Terms of references (ToR), Standard Request for Application (SRFA) will be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours and the website of National Skills Development Authority (www.nsd.gov.bd). The interested Applicants are requested to apply the position providing information indicating that they are qualified to perform the services (Complete CV with attested copies of educational, training and experience certificates as required for the position is mandatory). The applicant shall submit Expression of Interest (EOI) by 2.00 PM of 10-11-2022 , in sealed envelope, clearly marked " Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) for Curriculum Expert " to the undersigned by hand/courier service/Guaranteed express from post office. Any EOI received after the deadline will not be accepted. Any persuasion by the applicant will be treated as disqualification. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted for interview and negotiation.		
11	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all EOIs.			



(Quamrun Naiser Siddiqua)
Project Director (additional Charge) &
Member (Admin and Finance),
National Skills Development Authority

GD-1962