



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

It remains to be seen whether BNP can revive their lost momentum and give the ruling party a run for their money.

# Did BNP make the wrong call?



THE STREET VIEW

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MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Last December, BNP managed to create a strong momentum with successive divisional rallies, defying obstacles from the ruling party cadres and law enforcement agencies. But it lost that momentum when it tried to hold a rally in Dhaka. Since then, the party – which has been out of office for more than 16 years – has been trying to regain that thrust. This time around, BNP held a series of programmes around Dhaka and got some traction thanks to its supporters, leading up to its grand rally of July 28. The party was also able to hold the rally at its preferred venue, in front of its Nayapaltan headquarters. Tens of thousands of BNP workers joined in, defying myriad odds and obstacles. It turned out to be a mammoth rally and, encouraged by the turnout, BNP announced sit-in programmes at five entry points of the capital the very next day, presumably to cut off Dhaka from the rest of the country for several hours between 11am and 4pm. But the sit-in failed in the face of the ruling party’s strong presence on the street and the aggressive attitude of the police. And again, BNP lost its momentum.

Since then, a few questions have been circulating in political circles: why did BNP go for such a programme? What did it achieve? And what will the party do now that the national election is just a few months away?

After the announcement of BNP’s one-point demand – resignation of the ruling government for a caretaker government to oversee elections – movement on July 12, the party took only 16 days to announce the sit-in demos. Coordination among the party fronts and associate bodies, which requires time, is imperative to make such ambitious programmes successful, but there seems to have been a lack of coordination among BNP leaders in this regard. Even some of the party’s senior leaders were in the

dark about these programmes till they were announced. The decision of a sit-in demo of such a scale, without much time on its hands, indicates that BNP was in a hurry.

There is no denying that the party has a strategy in place to achieve its goal of the next election being held under a nonpartisan, election-time government. But it seems that the plan may not be as well thought out as BNP supporters would like. The party’s leadership felt charged up

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seeing the large-scale turnout in the rally, but they underestimated the government’s strength and strategic abilities. This explains why BNP couldn’t succeed entirely in its programme, and now seems to have backtracked from its tough stance. After the sit-in, the party announced demos in districts and cities across Bangladesh, which is a deviation from its Dhaka-centric plans. The

lack of coordination and confidence in terms of holding large rallies and showdown-like programmes can demoralise grassroots BNP supporters, who are paying a high price for the erroneous judgement calls of the party’s top brass.

For the longest time, BNP has argued that the government and law enforcement agencies are obstructing their peaceful rallies, and the events which unfolded on July 29 has once again lent credence to their claims. The attack by ruling party men, in the presence of the law enforcement agencies, has laid bare just how “democratic” the government will be in the lead up to the elections. Of course, some BNP men did engage in violent activities during the sit-ins, but the previous programmes of BNP were largely peaceful, despite instigations. Either way, BNP knows that any violence from its own party will eventually work against itself. And this time, the party is being careful as it was accused of conducting arson attacks in 2013 and trying to sabotage the January 5, 2014 election.

Back in 2013, the party did not come up with alternative strategies when they saw that the blockades were not working. At least this time around, they have backtracked from their plans and proposed an alternative when they realised that the sit-in had failed. This could be interpreted as the party being more mature and wiser in its current decisions.

BNP’s real loss in all this was giving the upper hand to the ruling party. There was no doubt that the ruling party felt pressure, especially after the composed and largely organised grand rally. But the following day, when ruling party cadres were able to easily disperse the BNP demonstrators, it worked like a morale-boosting tonic for the former. They felt more confident about being on the streets and not giving anything away to the BNP. This was essential for the Awami League at a time when it seemed to be under pressure from different directions to hold a free and fair election. Now it remains to be seen whether BNP can once again revive their momentum and give the ruling party a run for their money.

# Our ‘I hate politics’ generation



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ABU AFSARUL HAIDER

“I hate politics and I do not want to enter politics” seems to be the general tone of the well-educated, young, and intelligent minds of the country today. Even Obaidul Quader, general secretary of Awami League, recently said, “We have not been able to make politics interesting,” and that, “No educated, honest person wants to do politics. But they should. Otherwise, politics will lack character.” So, what is so wrong with today’s politics?

Politics in Bangladesh boasts a glorious past. It has a proud history of struggle and supreme sacrifices made for national causes, including the Language Movement in 1952, the Mass Uprising of 1969, and the Liberation War in 1971. In those days, the most well-educated, honest, and socially conscious people with high moral values were involved in politics. But unfortunately, over the passage of time, things have changed. Nowadays, for some people, politics is a hereditary calling; for others, it is just a business, a means to acquire wealth through the preferential allocation of contracts once they are in office. Various media reports of recent years have suggested that more than 61 percent of lawmakers in the present parliament are from the business community. This makes me wonder, who is running the country? Is it politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, or others?

Good political leadership requires a mixture of knowledge, honesty, integrity, empathy, and the ability to communicate effectively. We expect our leaders to speak on key issues of economic development, health, education, etc. But, save for a few exceptions, our politicians are usually seen criticising and abusing each other using offensive language and flimsy arguments. The decency and decorum once considered inseparable from the public offices have been thrown to the wind. These so-called leaders stoop to any level to achieve their personal political aims or the interests of their parties. As such we also do not see any healthy debates or discussions on the issue that touch citizens’ lives directly.

There is no denying the fact that political standards in Bangladesh are deteriorating to abysmal levels. Given the current political climate, the concept of political reconciliation, tolerance, honesty,

human dignity, and of respecting the values of others seems lost in our politics. Today’s politics is mainly driven by two things: power and money. Money wins elections, and the winners enjoy power. It is natural to assume that a candidate who spends lavishly on elections will only focus on recouping his/her investment or simply “return favours” to those who funded him/her. This practice has tremendously weakened formal accountability mechanisms and put governance in a crisis.

Bangladesh also suffers from widespread corruption, with political leaders accused of taking bribes, embezzling funds, and engaging in other corrupt activities. According to the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, Bangladesh ranked at 147 out of 180 countries.

Moreover, there are often allegations that many of these young people are engaged in illegal money-making activities including extortion and land-grabbing. In exchange, they are used as musclemen to subdue political parties’ opponents.

A study conducted by the World Economic Forum in January 2020 revealed a shocking statistic: 82 percent of young people aged between 15 and 29 years say they have no intention of living in Bangladesh and would rather migrate. Undoubtedly, it is the utter failure of our political leadership that it has created a sense of disillusionment and disengagement among young people. They have lost faith in our politics and in the politicians.

But what the youth must realise is that politics is not bad in itself; it is the people in the business that make it seem so. For Bangladesh to progress, we need good leaders. And if young and talented people remain reluctant to participate in politics, the nation will soon have to face the dire consequences of a leadership crisis. At present, the total population of Bangladesh stands at around 169.8 million, and 45.9 million of them are young people aged between 15 and 29 years. Their voices must be heard because the future of this nation lies

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Once upon a time, the most brilliant and socially conscious students used to feel proud being involved in student politics. When the need arose, they did not hesitate to participate in matters of national importance. But now, movements are mostly dictated by non-students who are used as political fodder by their senior paymasters. Partisan politics and greed for power and money have polluted our student politics, which is currently nothing but an extension of national politics.

in their hands. It is high time to take effective initiatives to break the vicious trend of the youth’s disinterest in politics, or else there will be further deterioration in the country’s political scenario. Political parties and leaders must work together to create a more positive, inclusive, and responsive political system that values and supports young people, so that they can play an important role in the development of our country and the growth of our economy.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Inform against  
6 Clinton  
nickname  
11 Draw out  
12 Shylock's  
crime  
13 Cavalry posts  
14 First odd  
prime  
15 Brooklyn team  
17 Concludes  
18 Neighbor  
20 Pale tan  
22 Workout unit  
23 Solar event  
26 Espresso  
order  
28 Door sign  
29 Desdemona's  
husband  
31 That woman  
32 Move slowly

33 Stock holders  
34 Derivative  
chuckles  
36 Bike part  
38 Some swords  
40 Sun-dried  
brick  
43 Rodeo rope  
44 Characteristic  
45 Nervous  
46 Marshy grass

DOWN

1 Field worker  
2 Bustle  
3 Apply  
increased  
pressure  
4 Quartet  
doubled  
5 High home  
6 Except  
7 Herald

8 Speed  
9 Raised  
10 Ensign's okays  
16 Brief time  
18 Singer Guthrie  
19 Trounce  
21 Jazz singer  
Laine  
23 Sinuous fish  
24 Glimpsed  
25 Goes astray  
27 Serving  
collections  
30 Trip part  
33 Mission man  
34 Vengeful  
goddess  
35 As neat as —  
37 Puts away  
39 Put into  
words  
41 Sizable  
42 Riviera season

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8-19

SUNDAY'S ANSWERS

T A P S S C H E M E  
H I R T L O O T E R  
O D O R I M L A T E  
R E F O R M E D  
E V E T I C K S  
E S S E X S T O N E  
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B E S E T S E R A S