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A politician speaks

Thank you all for the inspiring messages of concern, good wishes and solidarity which applies, I believe, to a much greater extent to all those who almost on a daily basis exhibit extraordinary courage, unrelenting resolve and unwavering commitment to bring about a real and qualitative change for the better to the lives of ordinary people in Bangladesh.

Citizens of Bangladesh certainly deserve far and much better - it is our responsibility and duty to ensure that this much needed change comes about, hopefully, sooner rather than later and it benefits the people at large and not just a privileged few.

After all, change is the most unchangeable aspect of life and I firmly believe in our case also it is a question of when rather than if. We simply cannot afford to lose heart and if hope dies, then all else will.

We thus must soldier on, unite and fight, just as we have done in all the glorious victories and achievements of the past.

Your messages are yet again a powerful testimony to the fact that there are people, at home and abroad, who do care deeply and passionately about what we leave behind as a legacy not just to our children but also to the child who will be born tomorrow somewhere in Bangladesh.

My personal discomfort and sufferings over the past few years have been, understandably, a cause of even greater pain to my family, friends and well-wishers but the more I encounter these trials and reflect on them, the more I am convinced I am indeed on the right path and track.

A friend of mine from Australia wrote me a mail a few days back in which he expressed his concern about my safety and asked me to slow down and take a break as he felt I "was using up my nine lives in great haste".

If that be so and in the process, the departure of the current embodiment and axis of evil that has gripped

Bangladesh is hastened, I feel we all will have taken an important step forward in ensuring, in practice as well as reality, the Bangladesh we believe in and more importantly, the Bangladesh that the people expect, are entitled to and so richly deserve.

As I once again go through a phase of rehab, rest and reflection, my family joins me in thanking you all for your thoughts and good wishes.

Saber Chowdhury
Political Secretary to Sheikh Hasina & Organising Secretary, AL



Power crisis

The ruling duo of BNP and Jamaat is definitely playing a cruel game with the people whom they duped into voting for them in the last election. The present outrageous load-shedding and mismanagement has exceeded all limits of tolerance. In the last month of their rule, the government approved multiple

projects and commissioning of new power stations to appease the voters. Even hoodwinking has got limits. All these years they were sitting on the projects and could not take important decisions. They are so apathetic and oblivious of the country and peoples' needs! In their 'mis-rule' BNP-Jamaat has added

only a limping 80MW Tongi power station which has tripped more than 75 times after becoming operative! The shortfall is around 2,000MW. BNP-Jamaat is leaving a very unpleasant and heavy task for the next government. They are pushing the country into 'Aiyame Jaheliyat' (age of darkness)

both metaphorically and practically. Load-shedding and electricity deficit will continue to affect our industrial, official and domestic lives for at least five more years, even if the next government is sincere. The next government should prioritise and decide on the power plants with capacity for generation of at least

3,000MW within three months, and act quickly.

The BNP-Jamaat coalition deserves to be thrown into the gutters for their inefficiency, sky-high corruption and anti-people activities.

SNM, Dhaka

One candidate, five parliamentary seats

Our constitution allows a candidate to run for up to five parliamentary seats. While the tradition is a long-standing one, its merit is seldom scrutinised. Why do we have this provision? How does this provision help? What drawbacks are there in having this provision? These issues warrant further discussion.

First, when one candidate wins from multiple constituencies, by-elections become a necessity. Granted that elections are expensive, why have a second round by-election unless absolutely warranted (e.g., unexpected death of an MP)? Since by-elections occur after the regular election, by-elections simply add to the expenses incurred during the regular election. This additional expense is incurred because candidates are allowed to simultaneously run for five parliamentary seats. While the candidate running for multiple seats effectively increases his/her chances of securing a parliamentary seat, the additional expenses of a by-election are borne partly by the public. Thus, the provision to run

for up to five parliamentary seats enables candidates to benefit partly at the public's expense.

Second, does by-election pose undue hardship for a certain class of candidates? Compared to the financial strength of a candidate running simultaneously for multiple seats, the financial strengths of candidates competing against them are usually drastically less. These candidates tend to not only lose in the election, but also become financially worse off by by-election time. A fresh candidate didn't have to spend money for the regular election and stands on a higher ground compared to his/her competitors (who competed and lost in the regular election). Such unevenness is artificial because the fresh candidate is literally tag-teaming the opponents.

Third, when a candidate wins in multiple constituencies, he/she keeps one constituency and relinquishes the others. During the by-election, voters must vote for a different person who runs in place of the multi-seat winning candidate. In this circumstance, it is normal for voters to be confused about their true representative.

Fourth, the problem of a "regu-

lar-election-following by-election" becomes further complicated as voters in that constituency already know of the ruling party. It is plausible that voters who earlier voted for the candidate who did not represent the ruling party will now vote for the candidate who represents the ruling party (i.e., to make their vote 'count'). This possibility can further reduce the opposition party's number of parliamentary seats.

Lastly, although such has never been the case, it is hypothetically possible to have two of our major opposition parties to win exactly equal number of seats. If both parties have candidates winning from multiple seats, the government cannot be formed till by-elections take place. Such a delay can put the country in a limbo.

In light of the above mentioned drawbacks of allowing candidates to run in up to five constituencies, some possible reforms ought to be discussed in the parliament. Clearly, it is too late to discuss such a sensitive issue at the moment. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the next government will carefully evaluate the merits and drawbacks of the multi-

constituency election provision.
Sultanul Islam Proshan
Dr. Noushi Rahman
Pace University, New York

The holy month

People have started performing their religious rituals maintaining the sanctity of the holy month of Ramadan. But they are already in the unholy grip of the malicious business syndicates that are holding the nation hostage in many ways.

Prices of essentials that include the most common items of foods along with some more are already spiralling high. People are stumbling at almost every turn of their life, as there are problems that are already prevalent in the society: acute electricity shortage, price hike and the cumulative crisis in the political arena.

With the general elections in sight, the month of holy Ramadan will be a tougher time. We earnestly urge all the political parties not to take measures that might taint the sanctity of this month.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Political impasse

The possibility of any solution to the

present political impasse appears very remote to me. This impasse, which is not the doing of the people, is hurting them and damaging the economy of the country. The politicians by their irresponsible acts have stymied our path of prosperity. I am not at all optimistic about any dialogue between the two antagonistic political parties and even less hopeful of any satisfactory resolution to the present political crisis, as they are more interested to score points over their adversaries, rather than solving the problems. Both the parties want to be in a position of strength when they sit for negotiations. But in a democratic system and in a dialogue there has to be give and take. They are both keen to be in a position of strength and are very rigid on their respective positions. This does not augur well for any successful negotiation for resolving their problems. The present politics of confrontation is too deep rooted to be resolved through a couple of meetings between the antagonistic political parties. They might at best find a short-term solution to the present crisis but this will mean that the main problem is deferred to be

surfaced at a later date with more fury and vengeance. This is not desirable.

The most important thing is that neither of the parties is interested to solve the problems that they have between themselves. It has to be done by a neutral caretaker government. So I recommend that the term for the next caretaker government be extended to 12 to 24 months so that they can carry out reforms and give acceptable shape to the democratic institutions of the country, besides presenting the country with a new constitution that will suit the temperament of our people and help democracy flourish. I personally feel the US system of governance suits a developing country best, as it was originally designed for a newly independent country. It has helped them to become a major world power in just over one hundred years.

Who knows what is in store for us but there is nothing like trying and trying wholeheartedly.

Salahuddin Ayubi
On e-mail

Pope's comments

Pope Benedict should have apologised for his speech, which

offended our religious sentiment. His comments undermined a major religion. This not only made him controversial but also created tension in the Muslim world. The Pope needs to remember two things: First, he is the highest religious leader of Christians who is supposed to have respect for all prophets, especially the one treated as the best human being that the world has ever produced. Second, the relations between the Muslims and the western world are bound to be strained by such comments.

Md. Hamidur Rahman Khan
East West University

Role of a copy editor

I must thank you for not publishing everything that I wrote in my letter on our political leaders. The copy editor edited it and the abridged published version teaches me much in an appreciable manner. I have learned that I cannot express all my instinctive impulses in the civilised public domain. I conceive the idea that an editor sometimes has to maintain an optimum equilibrium among the multi-optional social

and political dynamics. On the other hand, it also does not mean that copyediting has to constrain the reasonable degree of individual freedom in all aspects. But we, the readers as well as contributors, may maintain a self-guideline on how far we can go.

Murshed
Germany

Traffic jam in Gulshan

The residential area Gulshan has become a busy commercial hub of the city; it has gradually lost its residential "characteristics". As a result, a huge number of multinational and national corporate houses have set up their multi-storied office complex in Gulshan. Most of the offices are on the Gulshan Avenue and most of them have no parking space. This is a problem that nobody seems to bother about. Is anybody listening?

S.M.A. Rakib
Uttara, Dhaka

Military takeover in Thailand

In Thailand, military intervention in politics is not something new. It has been happening for a long time.

A strong democratic institution is not available in Thailand. So it provides an opportunity for the army to grab power. There is absence of strong political parties which makes democracy an untenable proposition in the country.

Mortuza
University of Dhaka



The sighting of the new moon has been creating confusion & uncertainties resulting in inconveniences, controversies & troubles for the Muslims at large. Even this year at the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, it was announced so belatedly at 7: 15 on Saturday evening that some people had already left for the Tarabi prayers in the mosques. Some sections of people even disregarded the announcement & started fasting a day earlier than the rest. Now even some political parties are blaming others for the confusion. So why can't a mechanism be developed that can rid us of this problem for good, to the satisfaction of all concerned. There is a general perception that the new moon has to be sighted by someone & has to be corroborated by others. But in this modern day and age, isn't this somewhat out-dated? The last few days had been fully overcast over the whole of Bangladesh when the moon was supposed to rise, so how could anyone see the thin sliver of the moon? It was practically impossible. Can't we depend on the almanacs? After all, the early Arab Muslims were very good in astronomy & they were the ones who refined this art into an exact science. Obviously, our Moon Sighting Committee depended on calculations when it announced on Saturday that the first day of Ramadan would be Monday without sighting the moon.

Around the world there are countries where they started Ramadan 2 or 3 days earlier. In one country, Iraq for example, a section of people started the fasting one day while another section a day later. Even in our small country there are pockets of small areas where the people are doing the same. The countries on the west of us and also on the east had started their Ramadan earlier. We may be the last country to officially start the holy month. Isn't it ridiculous that 30th Shaban or 1st Ramadan is on different days in different countries & even in the same country? I am afraid it will be the same situation regarding the day of Eid-ul-Fitr also & subsequently the beginning of other Islamic months. Can't our Ulemas get together, or better still, can't the OIC or some leading Islamic university arrange some modalities to sight the moon or base the sighting of the moon on calculations far ahead of the actual happening? A foolproof, universally recognised & accepted procedure will be in keeping with the modern-day advances, realities & circumstances. This will stop the absurd & troublesome situation prevailing in the Muslim world in this very important matter.

After all, Islam is a justly balanced, sober & practical religion and if we keep pace with the modern times, I believe it will not be against religious conventions & edicts.

Sayed A. Chaudhury
Gulshan, Dhaka

