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Country heading towards disaster

The reason that I have chosen this topic is the current situation of our country. Bangladesh is heading towards more destruction and disaster. I would not completely blame the politicians for this. I am not saying that they are innocent but they are the roots of this evil. It is the people of this country that are encouraging them to spread violence. I mean, why do the people support such rallies where they put their lives on the line? By the way, what do they get in return? They (politicians) should come up with alternate options; which would include less violence and more serious talk. They should rather concentrate more on the development of the country than on personal power and pride. I don't think that these politicians know the amount of loss that the people face due to strikes and blockade of roads. The whole business sector suffers, students face problems in their studies and I being one of the students am facing various difficulties. Therefore, I hope that the elections will somehow pass quietly and that we will live in peace.

Abde Manaf
Purana Paltan, Dhaka

Like many Bangladeshis at home and abroad, I am deeply concerned about the recent political violence engulfing the country. I am taking the opportunity to express my viewpoints, and suggest reform proposals to the caretaker government and future governments of Bangladesh. Political violence and the culture of corruption are the two evils in our society retarding economic growth and progress. Bangladesh was achieved at the cost of many lives and inhuman suffering. It is frustrating to see a nation which was born out of one of the bloodiest independence struggles moving in the direction of political turmoil. One of the most important ways to end political violence is the institutionalisation of democracy. An orderly process of transfer of power through free and fair election is the fundamental element in the institutionalisation of democracy. Bangladesh needs to establish a process of instituting a caretaker government acceptable to major parties so that prob-

lems do not arise at the end of five-year term of the government. The role of media and the independence of judiciary must be maintained to institutionalise democracy. Anyone interfering with the justice system should be prosecuted for obstruction of justice. However, each institution must be accountable for its responsibilities. Even the judges should be accountable, and should be prosecuted for bribery and other types of unethical behaviour. All government business deals should be subject to media scrutiny. Media should pursue responsible journalism exposing corruption, rather than carrying on propaganda in favour of their parties. The media should be made accountable so that they do not resort to false stories. Political and religious tolerance is essential for institutionalising democracy. As emphasized in Islam, we need to be compassionate towards the minorities so that they are not deprived of their rights and equal opportunities. One of the ways to end political violence is to bring order in academic institutions, which have become the hotbeds of political infighting disrupting the education system, the backbone of a nation. College admission and seats in the dormitories in all academic institutions should be based on merit. There must be a time limit on the number of years a student can live in a dorm so that a student cannot become a professional student. I must admit that the students in Bangladesh played a crucial role in the independence movement. However, it does not justify students resorting to violence for pursuing their political goals. Any student involved in any kind of disorderly conduct should be subject to criminal charges and be expelled from the institution. The faculty members though entitled to their ideology and partisan affiliation should not be guided by these factors. Merit system should be established in the recruitment of students and award of degrees, rather than partisan biases. The vice-chancellor should be appointed on the basis of merit principles from a pool of candidates, rather than political connections.

All the promotions in the government must be based on merit. Nepotism should

be made a criminal offence. There should be rewards for honest officers so that they get incentives. Under the present system, the honest officers have become an endangered species.

Haroon A. Khan, Ph. D.
Professor, Political Science
Henderson State University
Arkadelphia, Arkansas, USA

It is really unfortunate that we are passing through great anxiety over how the country will move towards a fair and peaceful election.

Both the major parties are criticising each other on the question of neutrality of the caretaker government. I am sure the President and Chief Advisor is a very learned man who is showing diligence in keeping pace with the thousands of demands of the political parties and has been trying his best to have a free and fair election respecting the constitution.

But the Awami League has put forward a long list of demands. Do you think the Awami League in a similar position would have met the demands ignoring the demands of other opposition parties? The President and CA is in a dilemma as to how to keep the both parties happy.

We want peace and prosperity and a secured country but the political parties are fighting each other for grabbing power at any cost.

Please allow the CA and caretaker government to work relentlessly to have a peaceful election.

We want complete elimination of corruption and a country where people could live without fear and strain and stress. I would request all the parties, particularly Awami League, BNP and JP, to show restraint as you have had already glimpse of power and ruled the country. Allow this interim government to run the show for three months with one mandate-- a free and fair and acceptable election.

Rahim Khulna

To ensure a free and fair election, the caretaker government should have a neutral administration. The Election Commission

should be reorganised and black money and muscle power should be curbed. The political parties over the last 25 years used black money and muscle power in election and prevented the chance of electing honest and dedicated leaders as members of parliament. The civil administration has been politicised over the last five years. With this administration, conducting a free and fair election is not possible. The officers who were made OSD (officer on special duty), officers of 1973 batch, officers who were given forced retirement during 2001-2006, members of the civil society and cultural personalities

can help neutralise the administration to some extent. The previous BNP government had made a record number of OSDs and terminated jobs of a good number of brilliant officers during the last five years. The police were politicised and the chain of command was broken.

Though politicisation of administration is not new in Bangladesh during the last 35 years, it was really bad time for bureaucracy during the last five years.

Taswar Ahmed
Kallyanpur, Mirpur, Dhaka

It is indeed difficult to understand as to why the president and caretaker government chief has been dragging the country into a morass of instability and uncertainty. Politics, constitution or rules and regulations must be honoured, but that doesn't mean that these have got to be maintained at the expense of people's demands and aspirations.

The reform of the Election Commission (EC) has long been overdue, but even after the ascension to power as Chief Adviser, he has not done anything in this respect. Chief Election Commissioner Justice M. A. Aziz may have vast experience of solving critical cases, but his management tactic is fraught with flaws. He couldn't refute all the allegations brought against him through logical and acceptable explanations.

The purge of the administration to iron out the wrinkles that have been created due to previous government's partial recruitment and posting is obviously worth considering. But with utter surprise, we have

noticed that the Chief Adviser hasn't yet reshuffled the administration.

Sulav Chowdhury
Secretary
BKMEA

Now the entire country is passing through a great crisis. But we the common people are not ready to sacrifice our interest, country's interest or even the development process. The so-called patriots of the country are playing foul with the lives of the peace loving people.

Why is the caretaker government not taking any initiative to solve the impasse? We don't want it to continue anymore. We humbly request both the major political parties to come to a solution.

K Hasan
Lawyer
Jalalabad area, Sylhet

I have been and still am a very proud NRB living in Abu Dhabi but for the utterly disgusting breed of politicians who seem only to thrive on the misery of 150 million while themselves riding in glossy 4-wheelers and living in posh houses (they are shedding tears for the poor millions- what an irony?)

Shame on these guys. The media (especially the TV channels) has never raised these issues. You guys will talk about the so-called dialogue or the constitutional provisions for the caretaker govt as if these were the panacea to all the problems we have. I am absolutely shocked to see that our media is so irresponsible that they don't ever ask themselves who has authorised these hoodlums (politicians) to play with the lives of the people causing deaths and untold suffering to the teeming millions. You should be highlighting the criminalisation of these two parties, their total indulgence with impunity not seen anywhere except probably in Somalia.

If the media cannot bring out the inconsistencies of these 4-wheel riders and residents of posh areas, then God bless this hapless nation. It will soon be destined for oblivion.

Ahmad Kamal, Abu Dhabi

The president, who is also the chief adviser

to the caretaker government, so far has failed to prove himself neutral as expected by the nation.

The Awami League led 14-party combine conditionally accepted him and gave him time till Nov 3 to prove neutrality, later which was extended for another 7 days. But it seems that the president is not interested to meet the demands. Without taking effective measures to ensure a level playing field for all parties, he is creating fresh debates. The latest one is about the form of government. In a meeting with government officials at Bangabhaban he claimed himself as the head of a presidential form of government, thus he ignored the mass uprising of 1990 and humiliated those who laid down their lives to establish parliamentary democracy. We all know that with both the offices of president and prime minister and in addition, with 11 ministries under his jurisdiction, probably he is the most powerful man in the history of Bangladesh. Even though he is not permitted to act or speak anything contradictory to the constitution. He became president under the parliamentary form of government. After that no change has been made to the constitution to support his claim. Now he got the supreme power not as the president but as the caretaker chief. But from the very beginning he made a mess of the two different jobs. As the chief adviser he should go to the PMO, but he is working at Bangabhaban and at the advisory committee meetings staff members of the PMO are absent but surprisingly the president's personal staff members are present there. As newspapers reported this, the president was critical about it, that means the president and his staff are above all criticism and probably above the law.

If he continues to behave in such a way it will seriously hamper his prime job of conducting a free and fair election.

Sufian Sylhet

Think neutrally

I was really astonished to read the letter titled "Tragic indeed" by Mr. Tarek, published in "The Daily Star" on November 12, 2006. I think he has "seasonal tears" and he has hoped Bangladesh would walk his way. Mr Tarek, faces never carry the marks of terrorism. Had it been so, law-enforcing authorities won't have to find out the evidences for identifying the terrorists. We should never support any killing. You have said you were wordless. Where were your such feelings when a SUST student was shot by police on the university campus, when the JMB cadres attacked the courts and we lost some valuable lives?

You are anxious about our talent! This Jamaat killed the intellectuals in 1971. Mr. Tarek, think neutrally, not politically.

Golam Rosul Maruf
University of Dhaka

Menon's comment

In some newspapers, I have read Mr. Rashed Khan Menon's comment on Dr. Yunus forming a political party to pursue decent candidates for parliament. Mr. Menon's question about Dr. Yunus' experience with people is laughable, yet pathetic.

It will be God's ultimate gift to Bangladesh if a person like Dr. Yunus joins politics in pursuit of people's interest.

Iqbal Mahmood, Ph.D., P.E.
Associate Engineer, Murrieta, CA

Manpower export to Malaysia

The fate of the poor people will never change. Who are the people that will pay the hefty amount of Tk. 180,000, if not more, just to come over to Malaysia to earn a living? It's a sad story; these people are coming to Malaysia without knowing that recovering the money they are paying may take up to five years, if not more. Then why are they coming? Simple answer, they are day-dreaming. Government agents and NGOs should discourage these poor people to go overseas. Simple economic theories do not support the move.

A large sum of capital is moving out of the country through HUNDI and it is the similar case when money is being sent from overseas. It's all in the black market...I failed to understand how the poor people or the government are being benefited? The poor are becoming poorer and the rich richer.

A worker should be able to come to Malaysia by spending a maximum of Tk. 70,000. They should have a proper contract document endorsed by the ministry, not BAIRA. Point to note. We must make an effort to bring up this issue during the caretaker government's tenure.

Sheikh Monirul Islam
Kuala Lumpur

Eid and extravagance

Myriad programmes were telecast on all the Bangladeshi channels on the occasion of the Muslims' most important festival, Eid-ul-Fitr. In the midst of all the monotonous dramas and music programmes, there was one show in particular that caught my attention. It was based on the idea of turning certain dreams of four underprivileged children into reality. They were given new clothes, met with their favourite celebrities, ate food items they never imagined to have munched and so forth.

The show got me pondering. During Ramadan, people from all walks of life throng malls and small markets alike to purchase new attires. The more affluent even refurbish their homes with new furniture, paint and what not, to accommodate the whims of family members or just to add freshness to life. The month of Ramadan is the most profitable for clothes and textile businesses in the Muslim countries. Why, the purchases of an individual on clothes alone can run into four to five figure sums!

Eid is now a euphemism for an occasion for the wealthy to be extravagant and reach the pinnacle of vanity. However, Eid is supposed to be the time of merriment and delight for all, be it a millionaire living in Banani or a refugee living in a Mohammadpur camp. What we seem to disregard is that more than 35% of Bangladesh's population live on less than \$2 a day. Shouldn't the less fortunate also be able to

enjoy Eid, or is it a time reserved only for the elite?

Tamara M Haque
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

'Puthee' recitation

Puthee Path (Recitation) is a very popular form of our traditional folk performance. Everywhere it is known as "Puthee Path". A man continuously reciting lyrical verses with a certain melody is a common sight in Bangladesh.

Generally, it is arranged in open places in the village for two or three hours in the evening. People start gathering at the place from the very evening and they stay until the end of the Puthee recitation. Puthee Path has been performed for both ritual and non-ritual purposes. In the matter of occasional ritual performance Hindus perform it. In different parts of Bangladesh the Puthee is recited under different names, like "Padma Puran Gan", "Manasar Gan", "Bisho Harir Gan". These are common issues of "Manasa" cult. Historical events like "Karbalar Puthee", "Imam Hasaner Puthee", "Gazi-Kalur Kischu" etc. are included as non-ritualistic performance. Some times burning issues of the current world are included in it.

The audience may find a familiar but different sphere, which does not exist in their real lives. That is why Puthee is still a very popular form in our cultural heritage.

Alim Al Razi
Theatre activist and Researcher

Police atrocities



Just now (13 Nov, 1400Hrs) I got furious to see the video clips of ATN Bangla news. How could the police treat the people like animals? How did those uncouth policemen dare to assault people in that manner? I feel crying. Am I paying tax for this type of a police force? What is the caretaker government doing? The President/Chief Adviser is showing signs of failure to run the state. I want along with all the Bangladeshis that those policemen, beating humans like dogs, should be immediately discharged from service and punished accordingly. Not only them but also their officer in charge at that spot should be punished accordingly. Otherwise, they will do it again and again.

They have done it with the people, they have beaten the journalists inhumanly in front of the whole world and they will be repeating this. I am going to post the video clips on the net. This much I can do for our people. I would request the media to be more vocal in these matters. I appreciate their role at this moment. But they can do it more efficiently for the betterment of the country.

May Allah give us a nice, peaceful and happy country.

Tareq Bin Ali
Rupnagar, Mirpur, Dhaka