

## Uncertainty persists

Don't put further pressure on the people

WE are happy to note that the meeting of the President/Chief Advisor with the 4-member advisors' team scheduled for tomorrow was held yesterday and they have met twice. We are not aware of the outcome till going to press but would hope that a way out of the impasse has been found.

The third deadline of the 14-party alliance for meeting its 11-point demand expires today amid great political uncertainty that leaves people in total confusion and the fear of being dragged into an unending political turmoil. President/Chief Advisor to the caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmed has to take a clear view of the situation and act decisively. The political stalemate has to be broken before announcing the election schedule.

What must not be overlooked is that the international community is looking at us to live up to our own standard of free and fair elections that we had set up ourselves in the last three elections. But doubts have already been expressed by the EU Parliament, asking the government to reconstitute the Election Commission. So the international community is echoing the national demand as well. And the government should bear in mind that the country is being discredited for the mess that it has landed in, due to the EC's dismal performance and the resultant loss of its credibility.

It is a matter of great discomfiture that the 14-party alliance has announced that it would enforce another countrywide blockade from tomorrow if its demands are not met. Enforcing a blockade is certainly an extreme measure that will put further strain on the economy that had to absorb quite a few shocks in the recent times and will also badly disrupt the lives of citizens. The need of the hour is a peaceful resolution of the crisis, but the political parties seem to be quite unwilling to budge an inch from their respective positions.

The four-party alliance, in its bid to undermine the political rivals, should not put forward suggestions that will further deepen the crisis. The alliance leaders are expected to show as good an understanding of the present crisis as of the constitution, which they are suddenly adhering to so enthusiastically.

People are greatly perturbed by the way the parties are fighting for supremacy in the political arena and are fed up with the politics of threats and counter-threats. The political leadership on both sides of the divide has to make sincere efforts to put an end to the ordeal.

## Forcing ex party men to return to the fold

Our politics gone awry!

IT was a disgusting act by a gang of BNP stalwarts trying to force an ex party man, who had joined another party, to return its fold. Does one need a better example of the depth our politics has sunk into?

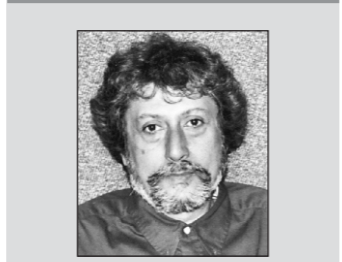
Such an act of gangsterism deserves the condemnation of all who hold high the values of democracy. Regrettably, but not surprisingly, the action demonstrates once again the undemocratic culture of the BNP. But such behaviour is not the exclusive preserve of the party. And forcing members of another party to join ones own is not a new phenomenon. In the past, persuasion of all sorts had been employed including the threat of force, as we saw in the case of BNP party member SA Khaleque of Mirpur, who was literally kidnapped on the orders of the AL, the then party in power, to make him join the AL.

We had hoped that the BNP would not emulate the behaviour of the party it had beaten in the election so decisively. But, not only was it replicated, BNP has taken such practice to a new level in which its method of winning over ex party men has crossed all limits of civilised conduct.

This is not the first of example of intimidation that one saw the BNP use against members of the party who chose to leave it. Its culture of intolerance, which refuses to brook any dissent was demonstrated very recently too when its hoodlums ransacked and set afire houses and other properties of almost all those BNP members who broke away from it and joined the newly formed LDP. And the less we say the better about the way Mr. Badruddoza, an ex president, and Maj. Mannan was treated. The latter had to suffer tremendous monetary losses after his factories where destroyed by the BNP hoodlums when, earlier this year, he chose to break away from the BNP. Sadly, the culprits have not been brought to book.

We call upon the BNP to desist from such undemocratic practice that does nothing to enhance its democratic credentials. Democracy thrives essentially on tolerance and recognising others' right to their opinion, which one may not necessarily agree with. Dissent cannot be won over by force but by the strength of logic and morality. Regrettably, it seems that both have taken leave of our political parties.

## The bald and the balderdash



SHAHEEN WAHID

### SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

And now common people are reacting in strange and hilarious ways to express their anger at him. According to newspaper reports, in some places people have decided not to name their new-born sons Aziz. In the city, grocery shop owners have decided not to sell goods to him. The funniest of all is, in his own village people have decided not to allow him to be buried there, of course after his demise. Now, isn't that a bit far-fetched plan? That's a long way to go, folks! This Mr Aziz of yours is not going to get off our back so soon.

**B**ENITO Mussolini, the Italian dictator of the WWII era was short, burly, bald, and stubborn, all at the same time. Not a good combination really. Mussolini took wrong decisions and put his country into an abyss of problems. At the end of his "romancing with power" he was hung upside down on a roadside fence for the people to spit on him. Other dictators in history also met similar fate after they were stripped of power. From head to beheaded, that is.

Someone in Bangladesh uncannily reminds us of Mussolini and his short and bald countenance and his stubborn stance. Thank God this man does not hold the supreme power of the state!

From Baridhara to Bariakanda, people are asking one another the following questions: If CEC Aziz is holding an executive post then why the president of the country cannot remove him following all the legal procedures? Do we want an elec-

tion on a pre-fixed date with a flawed voter list or do we want to see the voter list corrected first and then have the election at a later date if required? Why the 14-party alliance is not pressing for correction of the flawed voter list instead of pressing for the removal of the chief election commissioner? What if the forces lurking in the Windy Castle put up someone bolder (if not balder) and stubborn than Aziz? Remember what happened in the case of appointing the chief adviser?

Political analysts argue that the present political problems have evolved centering on the Election Commission, therefore, the caretaker government's first and foremost job is to resolve the contentious issues. The chief adviser of the caretaker government could very well form a separate committee on day one to look into the flaws in the voter list and then sit with the major political parties to seek

suggestions as to how best the list could be updated to pave the way for a free and fair election.

Mind you -- it's free and fair election -- not just an election by hook or by crook. But it seems the crooks are very much active to negate all the attempts of the saner sections in society to have that. Unless the president (not the CA) wants a free and free election, there will not be any free and fair election. It is he who will have to bypass the CA, pick up the red hot phone, connect CEC Aziz and holler mightily: "Goooooo..." That's all that is required to be done now. Well, will the president do it? And if not, why not? Isn't he supposed to remain above everything, until he actually goes above(?)?

The flippant side Respected readers, if you have been scanning all the pages of all the newspapers in the country then you must have been highly amused, despite the bloodshed, by

the reports on chief election commissioner MA Aziz. We had mentioned months back that he was a never-ending source of news, a pain in the rear of us all, but a delight for the reporters and a God-sent relief for the news editors. Because, reporters only have to go near the Election Commission (EC) office at Agargaon and they would have a bucket-full of news, and news editors would have to relax and wait for anything on him to reach their tables. That would be the lead story.

No human being in Bangladesh has generated so much of discussion and discourse, and disgust, we may add, among the people in such a short time. The veritable disgust surged from within at the nonchalant attitude of the person, especially during the violence-ridden days. His behaviour often reminded people of the Roman Emperor Nero, who is reputed to have been playing on his flute while Rome



burnt. CEC Aziz's hand did not shake while perfecting the knot of his tie, when a man's head was being crushed on the roads by a police van.

And now common people are reacting in strange and hilarious ways to express their anger at him. According to newspaper reports, in some places people have decided not to name their new-born sons Aziz. In the city, grocery shop owners have decided not to sell goods to him. The funniest of all is, in his own village people have decided not to allow him to be buried there, of course after his demise. Now, isn't that a bit far-

etched plan? That's a long way to go, folks! This Mr Aziz of yours is not going to get off our back so soon.

Remember that Sinbad story where the old spirit refuses to get off the back of Sinbad? Even HM Ershad has termed him utterly shameless (Bishwa Behala). In his defence, some BNP leaders in a district town have announced that they would supply grocery and other essentials to Aziz's house free of cost for a month. We fail to understand how and when this profound love affair had developed.

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## Doctrine of necessity



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

### GOING DEEPER

Should the laws of the country put a limit on the presidential power to sack the CEC and election commissioners, then he may by ordinance/administrative order lawfully reconstitute the election commission by: (a) separating the EC office from the Prime Minister's Office; (b) increasing the number of election commissioners so that the present coterie running the election commission becomes a decided minority; (c) remove party loyalists who had been placed at district, upazila, and thana levels to influence election results; (d) remove magisterial powers given to law enforcement authorities; and (e) any other matter deemed necessary for holding a free and fair election.

**N**CESSITY, wrote Plato, is the mother of all invention. Marx saw necessity and freedom as the real movement of history in which the proletariat would bring about transformation of society of necessity into a society of freedom by negating necessity. German born philosopher Hannah Arendt who was passionately wedded to freedom saw society in the grip of necessity, and freedom being contingent on the satisfaction of necessity.

In Bangladesh, the necessity of the moment is not the satisfaction of material needs, however much their satisfaction may be of utmost urgency, it is the need for a free and fair general election to elect the next government. We in Bangladesh today are faced with the shameless obstinacy of the chief election commissioner and his deputies, reflected in their refusal to resign their posts on the plea that these are the Constitutional posts appointed to for a fixed term of office.

Meanwhile, the country is literally asphyxiated by their refusal, because it is the conclusion of the great majority of the people that no free and fair election can be held unless the entire Election Commission is reconstituted. In the dialogue between the major political parties and the four advisors of the CTG, all but the immediate past

governing party demanded immediate removal of the CEC and his deputies.

The 14-party combine have, in anticipation of a positive decision from the CTG on the question of the reconstitution of the election commission, suspended the country-wide blockade program for a few days. The public frustration over the CEC has reached the point that Dhaka Metropolitan Shop Owners Association has resolved not to sell daily necessities to the household of the CEC unless he resigns immediately, to pray to God that He may give sense to the CEC to resign, and has even appealed to the wife of the CEC that she may be able to convince her husband to resign from his post. The farce has gone on too long.

Our desperate search for the doctrine of necessity, which in the past has been used to legitimize martial laws both in Bangladesh and in Pakistan, is to remove the constraint put by the constitution that the election commissioner cannot be removed without going through a lengthy process of removal by the Supreme Judicial Council.

At the risk of prejudging the

judgment of the Supreme Judicial Council, one can safely predict that should such a council is called by the honourable president to remove these unwanted persons, their litany of wrongdoing holds strong grounds for immediate removal. But we simply do not have the luxury of time because the elections have to be held within specified period from the date of dissolution of the last parliament. Do we then have a way out? Perhaps.

Under article 93(1) of the constitution, the honourable president has the power to make ordinances when the parliament is not in session or it has been dissolved. This power is exercised not as an executive power but as a legislative power because the body competent to legislate has ceased to exist at this moment of time.

Should the laws of the country put a limit on the presidential power to sack the CEC and election commissioners, then he may by ordinance/administrative order lawfully reconstitute the election commission by: (a) separating the EC office from the Prime Minister's Office; (b) increasing the number of election commissioners so that the present coterie running the election com-

mission becomes a decided minority; (c) remove party loyalists who had been placed at district, upazila, and thana levels to influence election results; (d) remove magisterial powers given to law enforcement authorities; and (e) any other matter deemed necessary for holding a free and fair election.

Because of time constraint, he may, unless it becomes absolutely necessary, declare in the ordinance to hold the election, say after two or three months, so that more than one crore alleged fake voters can be removed from the voter list and a fresh voter list, acceptable to all, can be prepared. Measures also have to be taken that minority voters who constitute about ten percent of the population are not disenfranchised which has been their lot on several occasions. If limitation on promulgation of an ordinance provides that an ordinance cannot alter or repeal any provision of the constitution, the honourable president may, should he so wish, consult the Supreme Court and eminent jurists on this question. Unless such measures are taken urgently our politico-economic condition may suffer irreparably and internal distur-

bances may become uncontrollable.

It has been said that more often than not states have failed due to leadership decisions and leadership failures result in ungovernability and consequent criminality that cannot be held in check by regular law enforcement authority. It is, therefore, essential that urgent measures be taken so that unwelcome forces do not get the chance to capture state power. What we want is that we should be able to cast our vote without fear and that the votes will be counted so that a government can be formed which has been truly chosen by the people.

Only a few days back the American voters disenchanted with President Bush's Iraq policy booted the Republicans out and gave the Democrats control of both houses of the Congress. Voters of some former East European countries have displaced their rulers and have chosen their leaders through free and fair election. In Latin America, despite opposition of Bush administration, Daniel Ortega has again been voted president of Nicaragua and Lula has been reelected president of Brazil. These are examples of democracy in practice that we want to emulate.

It is not too much to ask that the government that will be elected should earn legitimacy both at home and abroad. Such legitimacy should have both the elements of tradition, where authority is accepted on the basis of what had happened in the past, and also have the element of legal-rational authority, where legitimacy is based on rationally created rules. This cannot be expected if elections are held with a flawed voter list and are not participated in by all major political parties.

President Bush's advocacy for democratization of the broader

Middle East presupposes that democracy deficit exists in many Muslim countries. Indeed, historian Bernard Lewis once opined that democracy is a peculiar form of system used by the West to conduct public affairs that may or may not be suitable for other countries. Underlying message in the observation is that the Islamic world does not agree with Francis Fukuyama's argument that liberal democracy may constitute the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government."

In addition there is widespread belief in the Western world that Islam's current crisis is due to its failure to thrive and connect to the global mainstream due to Muslim world's long period of backwardness and comparative powerlessness.

Bangladesh was beginning to be recognized as one of the few Muslim countries practicing democracy and as a moderate Islamic nation in the post 9/11 world. If Bangladeshis are denied the opportunity to hold a free and fair election due to the greed for power of a few kleptocrats, then we may be strengthening the argument given by those who believe for one reason or the other that the Muslim world is neither fit for the doctrine of communitarian values (where interest of the society takes precedence over interest of the individual) nor for democracy as it is understood globally.

Our endeavor should be to eliminate such misconceptions by holding steadfast with the spirit of the liberation war in our struggle for a free and fair election

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## A bit of serenity



ANM NURUL HAQUE

### BY THE NUMBERS

Despite being a least developed country (LDC) in the economic parameter, Bangladesh has steadily improved life expectancy, education and standard of living and had moved into the category of medium developed countries in the HDI from 2003. Bangladesh was one of the lowest in the world in terms of access to proper sanitation in its rural areas some 10 years ago and now has targeted to achieve nationwide sanitation coverage by 2010.

**W**HEN a piece of good news or a bit of serenity has become a yearning for the nation, UNDP in its report released on November 9, said that Bangladesh has outshined Asia's emerging giants in a few fields, with especially impressive gains in water and sanitation sectors.

The Human Development Report (HDR) 2006 of the UNDP entitled: "Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis," substantiated its observations through a comparison with the situation prevailing in India.

Bangladesh has been ranked 137th among the world's medium developed countries in the UNDP's human development index (HDI), covering 177 countries. This

year's HDI developed by the UNDP, has pushed Bangladesh two step up from its ranking last year. The HDR argues that development is ultimately a process of enlarging people's choices, not just raising national incomes.

"India may outperform Bangladesh as a high-grown globalization success story, but the tables are turned when the benchmark for success shifts to sanitation. [D]espite an average income some 60 percent higher, India has a lower rate of sanitation coverage. Similar gaps between wealth and coverage are observed for water," the report said.

Across much of the developing world, unclean water is an immeasurably greater threat to human

health than violent conflict, said the HDR-2006. Each year 1.8 million children die from diarrhea that could be prevented with a glass of clean water and a toilet, 443 million school days are lost to water-related illnesses, and almost 50 percent of all people in developing countries are suffering at any given time from health problem caused by a lack of water and sanitation, the reporter revealed.

Every year since 1990, the UNDP has commissioned the HDR by an independent team of experts to explore major issues of global concern. The concept of human development looks beyond per capita income, human resource development, and basic needs as a measure of human progress and

also assesses such factors as human freedom, dignity, and human agency.

Despite being a least developed country (LDC) in the economic parameter, Bangladesh has steadily improved life expectancy, education and standard of living and had moved into the category of medium developed countries in the HDI from 2003. Bangladesh was one of the lowest in the world in terms of access to proper sanitation in its rural areas some 10 years ago and now has targeted to achieve nationwide sanitation coverage by 2010.

Whatever the achievements of Bangladesh in education, water, and sanitation could be possible

because of the strong role played by the local level government agencies and the policy support extended to the NGOs. UN agencies, Unicef and WHO also deserve appreciation for providing vital program support that have been extended to the government and the NGOs. ADB also initiated a technical assistance program for the WASA in the capital and will be providing a million dollars worth of funds.

Though our health sector saw gradual and significant rise in budgetary allocation over the last five years, the state of the public health service is still miserable. This is due to inefficiency and limitless greed of the healthcare professionals working in the public hospitals. The experts at a consultation meeting held recently identified lack of accountability; rampant corruption and frequent shift in policy that have made a mess in the national healthcare system. Medicare has gone beyond the reach of the common people as the government has raised the rates of services provided in the public hospitals. But the government must ensure minimum healthcare to the common people of the country.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) containing the road map for development and poverty reduction has set a seven-point strategic agenda with employment topping the list. The other agenda include nutrition, maternal health, quality education, sanitation and safe water, criminal justice and local governance. The PRSP showed a projection of expenses in some of its programs, such as, \$12.12 billion for primary education and \$343.8 million for sanitation program.

The PRSP, first of its kind in Bangladesh, have given emphasis on water and sanitation, which are important ingredients to resolve health problems. Sanitation is the prevention of the sporadic outbreak of diseases dangerous for public health. In the backdrop of this situation greater responsibility lies in formulating a fully integrated action plan to cover effectively the field of water supply and sanitation.

But all pervading corruption and narrow politics are major impediments to our economic growth and poverty reduction. Most of the people of this country live in abject poverty and are deprived of their basic needs due to widespread corruption. According to an estimate, about 75 percent of Tk 2000

billion of foreign aid and grants received since independence for poverty reduction has been siphoned off. The economists have made it crystal clear that poverty reduction is simply impossible without political will and curbing corruption.

Bangladesh is a country globally known for negatives like poverty, corruption, violence, and natural calamities. But these are not all about the country. There are some positives that discerning eyes cannot fail to see. Bangladesh has made positive strides in education, life expectancy and rural development. Literacy rates have increased remarkably though the quality of education is yet to be improved. From a major food deficit state in 1972, we have attained almost self-sufficiency in food production.

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BSS) in a recent survey underscores that the number of people living under the poverty line has been decreased substantially in the present and the last decade. The NGOs have given impetus to women's emancipation and they are now playing a vital role in generating additional income for their families.

Introduction of micro-credit by Grameen Bank and new ideas by Prof Muhammad Yunus have changed the face of rural Bangladesh. Micro-credit is one such means that has benefited millions of poor, not alone in Bangladesh but also in many other countries. Bangladeshis today feel proud of Prof Yunus as he has brought for them the rare laurel from the international community.

The nation has now been caught in the mousetrap of nasty politics and indubitably needs a qualitative change in its leadership. The failed leadership and their vying for power have frustrated the nation much too much. I was tempted to write this piece expressing some impressive gains of the country just to provide a bit of serenity to the panic-stricken minds of my esteemed readers in the ongoing political stalemate. Not to be a pessimist, let us hope that the country will soon overcome all the political odds and adversities and will shine in a greater glory.

Anm Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.