

An open letter to the *president*

Sir, I hope you will find a bit of your precious time to read this humble letter. Since I took my Master degree in soil science in the year 1975, we never met. But I still remember you as an excellent teacher who was popular with the students for his mild and gentle manner.

After leaving the university I kept reading your name in the media first as president of the Dhaka University teachers association when you got prominence as a leading figure during anti-Ershad movement. Then you were appointed as chairman of the Public Service Commission. As your former student I was proud of your achievements and I thought certainly one day you would crown your career by being a VC of Dhaka University at an appropriate time.

But you surprised me by being the president of the country instead and more surprise was in store for me when you took additional responsibility as caretaker chief under extraordinary circumstances. I was really worried with this additional burden due to your deteriorating health condition. But nobody is to blame for this as you took your own decision to enter into the murky world of Bangladesh politics.

Sir, to tell you the truth, my confidence and pride in you began to evaporate as I could not buy your argument of being the CA bypassing the constitutional provision of appointing one from the eminent citizens. You can say many things but this nation failed to see a single visible effort from you to that end. Still I thought you would be able to pull this nation out of destruction through your culture, intelligence and experience. But honestly speaking, can you say you are in the right track to accomplish that?

Let me give you an example. You assured your advisers that all would accept the newly appointed two election commissioners. But it appeared in the newspapers that one of them actively sought BNP nomination for this election. It appears you have not done proper homework for this important task considering how tough it is to remove an election commissioner once he is appointed. Is not it appalling and unfortunate, sir? Could not you assign some of the advisers to short list the would be election commissioners and remain out of controversy?

Again, have you forgotten that yours is not a political but a caretaker non-political government? I say so because the other day you called Attorney General and secretary to the election commission in the mid-night in the Bangabhaban and the next day election schedule was announced hurriedly to pre-empt the writ petition submitted with the Supreme Court thereby creating another controversy. It is incomprehensible that two major decisions were announced and your advisers were saying publicly that they were not aware of any of those. Why there are so many gaps between you and the advisers when you are supposed to work in unison? Certainly heavens would not have fallen if the election schedules were announced a few days later.

It seems you are hell bent upon remaining in controversy after controversy and as an adoring ex-student, nothing is more painful than this. Sir, I think at your age, you are mature and intelligent enough to understand that those (if any) who are using you (seemingly) as a pawn to play dirty politics to grab power are not your friends.

Sir, till the announcement of election schedules and appointment of the controversial election commissioner, general people were frustrated with the negative politics of the Awami League but believe me sir, now people on the street are saying, 'we equally have a bad President'. If AL is being obstinate, it is also because you are giving them chance to be that.

Sir, you look Presidential but you must act Presidential also. Let people remember you not as a follower but as a leader. Please wake up to the reality; onus is on you to deliver something extra-ordinary to this nation. You just cannot fail to do it. Regards.

ATM Murshid Alam
Uttara, Dhaka

The most relaxed chief executive

It's seems that the honourable President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed is now the most relaxed President or chief executive in the world! There have been long debate from many corners whether our political parties have any commitment to the nation and are able to understand the people's mind, but at this moment people are surprised to see that their honourable President is seemingly inactive where he was supposed to act as quick as possible. Now the people doesn't have any confusion that the honourable President and Chief Adviser is showing that he is the most relaxed President or chief executive in the World! When the nation has been passing such a critical time, when every common people is anxious about the situation. No one knows what is going to happen next but the present activities and behaviour of the President or Chief Adviser do not show that he is at all concerned about the reality.

The four-member committee of Advisers met the President last Thursday morning with their proposal to find out a way to get out from the present political problem with a solution acceptable to all parties. The committee members had done their work as quickly as possible after discussion with the major political parties and furnished their report. They were trying to meet the President to have his decision to move further immediately but the President didn't have time for them until the next regular cabinet meeting scheduled for Monday. None have clear idea why the honourable President and Chief Adviser have been taking time unnecessarily. Many peoples along with political parties were expressing their doubt whether the election could take place within the stipulated time if the things went in this fashion.

And now that there's some light at the end of the tunnel people are now asking whether the president have any ability to inspire the nation further?

Mohsin
Lalmatia, Dhaka



While we have been looking on in dismay at the events leading up to our election, another election has taken place on the other side of the world. President George Bush and his Republican Party have received a resounding slap from the American electorate who gave over the control of Congress to the Democrats. It was heartening to see that he and his advisers are sitting with members of both parties to see whether "a fresh perspective" might influence a change in the course of the unpopular war in Iraq. President Bush has another two years as President and he is still arguably the most powerful man in the world, yet he sees that the will of the American people must be respected.

Contrast this with our situation here, with a governing party that has stepped down from power and its members are still referring to the Awami League as the Opposition. It seems as though they are still in power, and there is a suspicion that they may be right.

The entire nation of Bangladesh, the people, the educators, the print media, lawyers and many representatives of foreign nations were demanding that the Chief Election Commissioner resign. Yet that retired Justice of the Supreme Court, who has been exposed as a liar by a Member of the Caretaker Government, blithely continued to remain in office oblivious of the firestorm exploding around him. What could he be thinking? What was his motive? What did he hope to accom-

plish? These are the questions answers to which frighten us.

Ultimately perhaps he felt democracy was not just about garnering votes, it was also about bending to the will of the people.

Syed Hamde Ali
The Nawab Palace, Bogra

Our political system needs major shift in terms of leadership -- their accountability while exercising power and ruling the country. It has been proved by the historical data that so many leaders ruled the country and set so many bad examples of anarchy and failures and finally walked out without being accountable to any one. Simply because in politics you are free to exercise your power without any fear of giving reasons of your failure.

The most important fact finding mission should aim at the ultimate motive of politicians. Unless we can determine their driving force, we cannot have good governance in our country. To begin with this shift, it is necessary to have an independent judiciary system, strong and fair law and order and government agencies that will remain out of reach of political influence. If we can take all our political leaders in a confession room and ask them of their motive behind practicing politics, I can sure most of them would come out with ill motives. In a way we are at fault knowingly or unknowingly as we selected and elected these leaders to rule our country.

Our system does not encourage

educated and dedicated people to come and serve the country. The reason is very simple. New leadership requires blessings from godfathers and support of muscle power and black money. This traditional entry into politics must be uprooted by the new generation of leadership who truly want a change in the country and ready to work hard for the people and the country.

I believe in the long run it's the people of our country who will redefine politics and its practice. It is not possible to have this change by a magical touch. Rather this new system and its frame must be built on good faith and dedication of honest people over the years to come.

Mohammad Jamal, Ontario, Canada

We have perhaps proved without doubt that democracy is not suiting us much.

We have a bunch of childish politicians who are at each other's throat all the time. They have strong differences in every matter and they resort to abusive language and violent activities to settle those differences on the streets, in the parliament or even in the court. I have not seen a single politician in the country whom I can respect from my heart.

I think it is time we gave up democracy for the time being and found some alternative.

Politics has split the people into two groups -- BNP and AL. Either you are with us or with them.

While our politicians are so bad we

cannot blame them entirely. I see hundreds of thousands of passionate supporters attending the rallies and cheering their harangue, even killing the opponents with medieval brutality. Why? Are all these to protect democracy?

Well, one difference between the last 15 years of democracy and the military rule before it is that we have now a free press and a huge group of "freestyle" journalists who are also split along the time. While political leaders and their activists settle their disputes in the streets, journalists and columnists use their desks and forms to do the same.

Dr Yunus is probably the only hopeful gentleman in the country. But he is from a different planet. In the current context of our country, it would be extremely naive if we believe that our childish politicians will solve everything.

I think we should take a break, reflect on our mistakes, and let the politicians get matured or wait for a new breed of politicians that believe in democratic values.

Khairul Hasan, Surrey, UK

The proposal of 'coalition government' by Prof. Yunus is obviously innovative though most of our political leaders have called it 'impractical' and 'impossible'. I do not know whether his idea of coalition government is a sign of losing his faith on our President-cum-CA who he praised some days ago referring his oath taking as a good and opportune step. Some BNP leaders

have commented on thinking about the proposal after the election (but is there any possibility to get an acceptable election soon?).

The idea Prof. Yunus has presented is not really possible to be practiced now as these two parties are at daggers drawn relation. So we the common citizens don't think that they will really be agreed to sign a peace accord or anything else at present.

We must admit that the appointment of wrong (and controversial) persons in the very important posts of Election Commissioners has created this situation. Moreover, constitution has set the limits of advisers to the caretaker government which has made them really helpless to reform Election Commission as they have a very few constitutional opportunity to interfere in the EC's activities. As luck would have it, our advisers already have proved themselves as very sincere persons as they are still doing good job in this critical period in their own patriotic interest out of agenda. I wish if these advisers can be appointed to the post of Election Commissioners. Since the advisers have already been able to gain public faith, it would not be a very exotic idea to appoint them as new Election Commissioners instead of the controversial ones.

Yes obviously it will be unconstitutional but I think a democratic country cannot run in this way -- as it is running now.

Md. Maidul Islam
University of Dhaka



It's all about blockade

If I have got it right, then actually there are two questions that everyone is asking:

1. Was the blockade necessary?
2. Who was to blame?

Looking separately into these two questions, one may find two answers and there is a good chance that they may not be the right one. However, I must say that these questions are interrelated and while answering these we have to keep that in mind. I would like to add one further question and may be the most important one --

is the caretaker government (in reality, the chief adviser) doing its duty impartially? If the answer is negative still there is a chance that one may argue, we should give them a little more time, then my question is how much more? Has the chief adviser (please be cautious, not the advisory council) shown an iota of impartiality so far? Almost a month has gone by, if not something significant has been gained so far, what more you can expect in less than 50 days?

Now lets look at the problem from

another angle. Let's say, there was, and will be no blockade. What would happen then? The thing is, without the blockade, Aziz would still be here, and there would not be any talk of reconstituting the EC. The caretaker government has already given the impression that it will only listen if a blockade is enforced. The election schedule has been announced. Two utterly disputed persons have been appointed as election commissioners and as observed so far except BNP-Jamaat, no party will join the election if held under them. The advisory council is completely helpless and nothing is coming out of anywhere. Still no blockade and there will be an election. Besides, if the other political parties join it, there is every possibility of election engineering. What will happen then? After the election is over and once they have the result, you cannot support blockade then because the popular saying will be "let's give them five more years, its democratic" and like that. So...what is the result?

You cannot accept a political deadlock

a few months later if you deny excepting it now. There is no point in passing three months peacefully while being afraid of a hell after the election is over.

I liked one comment made by adviser Akbar Ali Khan, "The nation loses more money due to political instability than it does due to corruption". There is no point in just pushing for economic growth where your political structure is declining. Without ensuring a strong, effective and acceptable political structure, you can never sustain the economic growth.

If you ask me, who is to blame for this current scenario I must say it's Chief Adviser Professor Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed. Just look at the newspapers and you will see why. The advisory council is again showing its discomfort but it does not look like that the chief adviser is feeling the heat.

I have my MSS exam to attend and I know I am falling behind but I am sorry, I have to support this blockade programme!

A reader, On e-mail



Some confusion

Is Dr Yunus is seeing only half of the whole? Certainly the answer is yes. Because, he could not see and mention about the unconstitutional steps taken by the President, i.e. without exhausting all the options given in the constitution for appointing Chief of Caretaker Govt., he himself became the Chief of Caretaker Govt. breaking the condition of a non-partisan, neutral person! Although he is constitutionally obligated for facilitating to form not only neutral Caretaker Govt. and neutral Election Commission, he made the first one pro-BNP-Jamaat taking unilateral decisions ignoring other advisors' opinions and by promoting his partisan former information secretary to the position of 11th adviser which is also breach of the constitutional Act regarding Caretaker Government's structure and characteristics.

Similarly the President appointed two partisan commissioners to the Election Commission, which was previously filled by the past Govt. with their loyal pro-BNP-Jamat people totally ignoring the national demand of changing the partisan EC for conducting a free fair election! He did not take any step to eliminate more than one crore false voters' names from the voter list and correct it but acted promptly to announce the election schedule!

While calling for a peace deal, Dr Yunus did not mention of this breach of constitution by President or did not say anything about partisan administrators for foiling free, fair election! He only called 14-party alliance to stop their blockade. Good, but people were really confused to see the Nobel laureate to be so.

Neelufar Nuzhat
Chameli Bagh, Dhaka

Power-hungry politicians

I am the unluckiest person,

because I have no Aladdin's lamp. Had I got it then definitely I would have asked the Genii of to deport politicians of both camps to north and south poles respectively, thereby saving us as well as our beloved country from the power hungry political leaders. Not only the politicians but also we are to be blamed for this situation. Why again and again we elect them to go to power? Bangladesh is not their property. Bangladesh belongs to 140 million people of the country. We should not run after them.

Time has come for us now to think for the development and welfare of our beloved country and its people.

Iqbal Ahmed
New Eskaton, Dhaka

When the drama will end?

Are we having so much critical problem solution of which is impossible? I think, it is not so. The only problem is the lack of positive mentality for development o our country. No political parties are thinking of the welfare of our motherland. Politicians want only their good days to prevail in future ignoring the greater interest of the country. The people who are living by hand to mouth are in severe crisis. One third of our population is in such bad condition and they are suffering more for this recurring political disturbance. Small and medium enterprises and ports are in a dire state.

We want to elect honest candidates. But now the process is in a full scale drama. This drama costs sufferings of 14 crore general people. We want to see the end of this drama. Will our political parties be conscious of the greater interest of this country? We all are waiting for such blissful moment.

Kohinur Akter
Dhaka University