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Politics of power grabbing

Political debate is healthy for the exercise of democracy. But in the name of democracy and constitution, if any party somehow wants to grab power, then it is a crime. I want to appeal to the parties to have a look at the faces of the poor people of Bangladesh. Just see what Dr. Yunus is doing for his country. And compare what you are doing for it. In a democratic country, people have every right to know how and why the government is making important decisions. Remember, transparency is an important precondition for governance. Anything veiled will cost us dearly.

Anirban Das
Luton, London

When we go to Khaleda Zia or Sheikh Hasina with our problems, they tell us that there is no Bangla Bhai and no price hike. When the whole country grinds to a halt because of electricity shortage, they tell us everything is fine! We have democracy in our country, but they don't practice that in their parties and they deliberately destroy our democratic institutions. We have a constitution, but they don't obey it. We have over 140 million people, but they don't respect our opinion. We have elections, but they never accept the results. We have a parliament, but they don't attend it. So what are they for? Why do we keep voting for these people and keep requesting them and urging them to come and solve our problems when they have made it absolutely clear to us that they are not interested in our affairs?

By refusing to get involved with us and address our problems, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have inadvertently made themselves obsolete. All we have to do now is to finish the job the two ladies them-

selves have started. So let us forget them forever. And for heaven's sake, people, stop killing each other by taking sides with the two parties which are essentially two sides of the same coin. Just imagine how spectacular it would be if one day all the AL and BNP supporters unite together and say enough is enough.

Azad Miah
Oldham
UK

We are in a deep crisis now, which is threatening our parliamentary democracy. But to the best of my knowledge, the two major parties are doing nothing to save democracy. They don't see anything beyond their own interests.

Kazi Syful Islam
University of Dhaka

In these days of political turmoil, one of the most controversial issues is the existing voter list, which is just an update of the voter list prepared in 2001 during the AL period. Because of legal bindings, the Election Commission had no other alternative but to update the voter list of 2001 although as per NDI's findings there were 7.5 million duplicated names in the 2001 voter list. Naturally any update of the same would carry the said 7.5 million voters and exactly that has happened.

As per NDI's survey, there are 12.1 million excess voters in the updated voter list, which are mostly because of "change of address" as observed by NDI, although a section of the media and some political parties termed them as "fake voters" i.e. false voters. Even a section of the print media published the news entitled "12.2 million false voters in the new voter list". As



it appeared in the TV news, NDI's Resident Director clearly mentioned that they did not term the excess voters as "fake" or false, rather it might have happened due to change of address.

Further, it may be noted that in 1991, the number of voters was 62.18 million, which interestingly decreased to 56.72 million in 1996 and again increased to 74.95 million i.e. an increase of 18.23 million or 32% in 2001 compared to the 1996 voter list. It may be noted that the 2001 voter list was prepared during the AL period. But, none, not even the media raised

any question on the said abnormal increase in the number of voters in 2001, whereas now the AL-led political parties with the support of a section of the media have started to agitate over the issue.

AKM Fakhru Alam
Siddeswari Lane, Dhaka

As the stalemate created by the action of the departing BNP led 4-party alliance government and the reaction of the Awami League led 14-party alliance is beginning to be unknotted, it is time to congratulate the 10 advisors of the caretaker government who have done an outstanding job. Special thanks should go to the ones directly involved in the complex negotiation process. It would be also in order to say a big thank you to BNP leadership for their cooperation in easing the situation.

It is time for the two former prime ministers to shake hands and say, "Let's get the show on the road and may the best person win."

Dr Habibul Haque Khondker
Professor, Zayed University, UAE

Our democracy has been limping along for

quite a while. Our power hungry politicians have not been giving it a chance to make any progress. I have got a couple of proposals which might help the democracy to survive.

First of all, provide every voter with a ID card with photo and set up a computerised voter database. The computerised database is easily updatable and the ID and the database can be used for other purposes also.

Secondly, reduce the tenure of the government to four years because our politicians are not patient enough to wait for long to go to power.

I think these two steps could solve a lot of problems and our politicians and the civil society can think about these proposals.

Mainul Quadery
West Bakalia, Chittagong

There is a limit to peoples' endurance. The situation in the country has already gone beyond that limit. The Awami League led 14-party alliance saw to it. They are putting forward demands one after another and to us these seem unreasonable. Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina is saying it is the peoples' demand. May we ask who are these people that she is referring to?

In reality, the Awami League is losing support of the people with their constant agitation programmes. We abhor "Lagatar aborodh. desh achol kore debo."

Sheikh Hasina is making a grave mistake. By her activities she is losing peoples' support and they are beginning to think that in a free and fair election the Awami League has no chance so they are restoring to these agitation programmes. She is harming herself and her party with these unwise actions that will soon act like a



boomerang. If the general election is to be held on time, the Election Commission has no option but to declare an election schedule, it has nothing to do with the voter list. If Sheikh Hasina knows that people are with her then why is she afraid of participating in the election?

We urge the opposition political parties to shun this path of confrontation. It will only worsen their acceptability to the people and the country will fall apart.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

The title above is the title of the article written by US ambassador to Bangladesh Patricia A. Butenis. The article was published on 19 December 2006 on the editorial page of a daily newspaper.

It appears prima-facie the article is: well written; easy to understand; substantive plus balanced; and an eye re-opener for the people of Bangladesh and others in areas, as appropriate. It has, among other things, a sharp focus on contemporary election matters. It contains number of advices, either direct or indirect, for Bangladeshis to consider in relevant fields. The article is sufficiently futuristic - it apparently articulates the US position on the country's upcoming election and matters pertaining to that, per se. It has identified challenges, opportunities and ramifications associated with an overall progress and prosperity of Bangladesh and Bangladeshis in the contexts of economy, democracy, poverty, corruption, and other related things. It also appears the article has made an attempt to explore a common ground for a satisfactory resolution of current political dispute based on situational

analyses, for example. In short, the article gives, among other things, an impression, as well as indication to readers how much keen the US is, in helping Bangladesh to help it in areas mentioned therein. Well done - Butenis and your team. Congratulations!

In light of the above, one of the challenges now is: how could the content and the context of the article be instrumental in strengthening the partnership and cooperation between the US and Bangladesh and vice versa in pursuits of ensuring a free, fair, credible and acceptable (at least in a general terms) election in the country (= Bangladesh) and a more democratic, as well as result-oriented parliament thereafter, to mention a few.

It is expected Bangladeshis will be able to make a proper use of currently available opportunities in their effort towards assisting the government, political parties and others in election and related matters, enabling them (= the people of Bangladesh) to exercise, for example, their right to vote in a peaceful, informative and decisive manner. In that connection, it should be noted inter alia the empowerment of Bangladeshis, especially the common people of Bangladesh, would be critical to make the government, political parties and others accountable to them in a more solid, sustainable and result-oriented fashion. The good news is: Bangladeshis have been learning slowly but steadily from events and experiences and the development could, among other things, help them to become more active partners in the country's politics and development through the foreseeable future. Let us work for that to happen.

Dr. M. S. Haq, Dhaka



President's failure

The new twist of the never-ending controversial story has thrown us to greater uncertainty as our President and Chief Advisor to the Caretaker Government has failed to handle the situation effectively. The four advisors who resigned have gained much public respect. However, the president could not even pursue them to resign.

The names and contributions of these four advisors will be written in the history of Bangladesh in golden letters for their dignified behaviour.

However, what we are interested in is a quick solution to the on-going political impasse.

Md. Maidul Islam
University of Dhaka

DU campus and politics

I got admitted to DU in 2002-03 academic session and now it is 2006-07, but we are yet to complete our 3rd year final. During the last Ramadan we finished the exams of 7 courses out of 8 and there was an opportunity to appear in the last one, but due to the authorities' indifference our last exam was blocked by double blockades - one of the 14-party alliance and the other of their student wings.

Now we feel that we should have chosen private universities for pursuing higher education. Meanwhile, we are caught in severe session jams. Even then we see the ray of hope since we are optimistic.

M Alauddin Ansary, DU

Linguistic misappropriation!

The famous French footballer Zinedine Zidane is a Muslim of Algerian origin. What sort of a 'Muslim' is he, is not known. But his parents may have given him a Muslim name Zain ed Din (as the Arabs pronounce, or Zain uddin as we in this subcontinent pronounce), which in French has become Zinedine. Zidane came to

Bangladesh recently in connection with the opening of a Grameen enterprise. None of our news media is known to have mentioned anything about Zidane's real name.

Algeria was a French colony and is very much influenced by French culture. A great leader of Algeria, some decades back, was Boumediene. We never learnt his proper Muslim name, which may have been Bu' Muhieddin (short of Abu Muhieddin).

About six decades back, the name of the famous leader of Indonesia, Soekarno was spelled by some Bangla newspaper of the then East Pakistan as Shukrana, apparently trying to give him a Muslim sounding name. Some Bangla newspapers in West Bengal used to spell his name as Sukorno. Most Indonesian Muslims apparently do not care about names identifying themselves as Muslims.

While discussing about names and the spelling and pronouncing used concerning names, it may be mentioned that in recent years, in our country, the word 'Ahmad' is being spelled by many as Ahmed and even pronounced as such by some. The deviation is apparently an imitation of the Arabs.

The Arabs may pronounce some words in their way and we are not bound to pronounce Arabic words in the same manner as they do. The people of Feni in our country pronounce (between themselves) the name of their place as 'Henri' but while writing that word or while talking to outsiders, they neither write nor pronounce the word in that way.

The deviation in spelling or in pronouncing the world Ahmad as Ahmed is not justified exactly as in the case of Feni and Henri. In our country, we have different ways of pronouncing a particular Bangla word in our different localities. But the standard spelling and pronouncing remains the same. In case of Arabic words, Arabs may pronounce a particular word differently in their different localities. But for us, non-Arabs, Qur'anic pronunciation of Arabic words is the standard that we have to follow.

RD Qurshi, Uttara, Dhaka

Indian railway ticket

It is known to all that hundreds of people from Bangladesh go to India round the year for various kinds of medical treatment. Most of them go on tourist visa. I myself had to go to Chennai for treatment twice in the last three months. During the return journey every time I had bad experiences at Chennai Central Railway Station in procuring train tickets under Foreigner or Tourist quota.

Firstly, without checking the reservation schedule in computer they would say, 'There is no seat'. On request they would at best agree to give you 'Tatkal' (emergency) tickets which costs more than double the normal fare and without any discount for elderly persons which is allowed in India to all senior citizens irrespective of Indians or foreigners. If at all they agree to sell you a seat on normal fare they would never give you seat or berth as per your request.

The following conversation that I had in the 3rd week of last month with the lady at the reservation counter at Chennai Central Railway Station in course of collecting two tickets for myself and my wife may help understand the situation. We are nearly seventy and above sixty years old, respectively.

- If possible please give me two seats in the cabin side with two lower berths. Lady - (Pretending to look at the computer screen) No lower berth is visible on the screen. (After sometime) I can give you at best two seats with one lower and one upper berth in the passage side, not in the cabin side.

- You see, we are both elderly. It is hard for us to climb up. Besides, I am a surgery patient that should deserve your consideration.

Then the lady stood up and went inside the glass cabin to discuss with her male colleagues. She came back with the same message. - No, lower berths. You can wait for sometime if you like.

Half an hour passed. She went on doing this and that, but never looked up at us. When her male colleague was passing by she talked to him something in Tamil. The gentleman immediately

declared loudly, "What's the harm! Give them 'Tatkal' tickets." As soon as he went inside the glass cabin the lady hurriedly took out a printed ticket from the computer and gave me. Having a look at it I said, 'I couldn't afford this fare. Lady- OK then, I cancel this ticket.'

She threw away the ticket in the basket. After observing her attitude I could not but yield to her decision and asked to give me the tickets having one lower and one upper berth on the passage side. She did so with a disgusting face. After paying for the tickets I said politely,

- "Look respectable lady, on many occasions I've travelled by train from various railway stations of India like Howrah, Mumbai, Bangalore, New Delhi, Ajmer, Agra and some others. Nowhere did I find such a hassle in procuring tickets under foreigners' quota on showing passports."

She was angry and immediately shouted. "We know, we know what Howrah people and others do."

- "Yes, they do. But not to this extent."

Lady "OK, don't come here again for tickets. This counter is not for foreigners. This is only for tourists."

- "Sorry, I cannot avoid coming here again. Because we come here with a tourist visa."

Later when I discussed the matter with the hotel manager where I was staying, he said, 'Why do you go there to face such an odd situation? Pay me Rs. 200 extra for each person. I shall deliver you the tickets in your room with desired seats and berths.'

It can be mentioned that all hotels, travel agents and even telephone booths display board which read 'Railway tickets are sold here.' Can't the Indian High Commission kindly take up the matter with the Indian Railway, and Southern Railway in particular so that Bangladeshis do not have to face such harassment?

A sufferer
Dhaka
Disgraced flag
National Flag is such a symbol that

reflects our independence and our identity. It is our obligation to show due respect to the flag. Are we really showing this respect to our flag? Nowadays the flag is used here and there, especially, in the cinema hall. Normally, in a hall a particular show starts with showing the flag along with the National Anthem. Why is it shown and what is expected of us? Some months ago I went to Cineplex to watch a good (as experts say) Bangladeshi movie and heard someone was calling me 'antel' as I stood up to show my respect and obedience to our National Flag and Anthem. I was shocked. I looked behind and found more than 90% of the audience seated.

I request people to show respect to the National Flag in cinema halls or raise their voice to abolish this practice of showing the flag in halls.

AHM Ahsan
University of Bergen, Norway

Appeal to politicians

I would request all of our politicians to accept Dr. Yunus' proposal for peace. We should not miss this last opportunity. Our politics is stuck, we are losing international market for exporting readymade garments, our ports are not operating properly, we are lagging behind in production of electricity, our police/administration/EC are politicised, we are almost friendless in the international community, we are corrupt, our education sector is not functioning smoothly..... the list will continue.

We all are responsible for the present situation. If the BNP has failed to govern, then the AL has failed to effectively oppose, and vice versa. It is not possible to solve all the existing problems overnight.

This situation has not been created over a short period, rather a long time of not less than 15 years. So to solve all of these problems we have to work together for at least a couple of years. Dr. Yunus' proposal is the best way to solve our problems.

M. M. A. Sayeed Rusht
On e-mail

Dismal records

The BNP Jamaat alliance won the 2001 election with more than two-thirds majority of seats.

Soon after that the whole country especially the villages were turned into torture chambers of the BNP-Jamaat goons. The non-Muslims, BNP opponents were the soft targets. Looting, raping, plundering etc. were committed in idle abandon. The mayhem continued for quite sometime.

Consequently "the combine" and their student wings, youth wings drove away the opponents and established their 'Raj' in all spheres. The former ruling combine embarked upon wiping out influences of the opposition and the secular forces by resorting to all conceivable illegal and devious means.

Syndicates were formed for extortions. 'Commissionbazi' earned a new dimension. Fundamentalists were un-leashed to terrorise the people, and to establish and propagate their own brand of Islam. The destruction of the moral fibre and the basic principles on which Bangladesh was established was almost complete.

The Election Commission was thoroughly polluted by inducting questionable persons. A

grossly faulty voter list was drawn up. The BNP-Jamaat combine took all the preparations to rig the elections under the 'able' shelter of the EC, police and other law enforcing agencies.

Opposition activists and leaders were ruthlessly beaten up. Rulings of the High Court and Supreme Court were violated with impunity.

Against the backdrop of the above mentioned scenario the combined opposition started their 'Andolon'. They were driven to the walls. It is a do or die situation for them and for the right thinking secular minded 'pro-liberation' populace who form the majority in our country. The BNP-Jamaat combine tried to deceive and hoodwink the people till the end.

So, we witnessed fierce and violent demonstrations in the streets of Dhaka and all over the country.

We have not forgotten the people's uprisings of 1969, 1970-71, 1990. They were more violent. The BNP-Jamaat would not have conceded any ground if violence and force were not applied.

SN Mamoon
On e-mail

