

The Proposition is: Should the Next General Elections be Held under a Caretaker Government?

A Grand Housing Plan

Housing in the private sector has so far remained more a disoriented effort rather than a coordinated policy thrust.

It is good news that the government has found merits in the plan and is intent on extending the necessary co-operation for the successful implementation of the same.

The beauty of the proposed plan is that it will not impose quite a big burden on the intended beneficiaries. Initially 115,000 flats will be built in the city.

If everything proceeds according to the plan and it is allowed to complete its full circle, we have reasons to be optimistic about the solution of the present housing crisis in the city.

The high rates of house rent have their adverse impacts on society and service situation. Such arbitrarily raised rates contribute to the escalation of living costs and even to the spread of corruption for obvious reasons.

Here public money will not be used exactly in the manner it is done in case of a bridge, a highway or buildings or complexes.

Turning to Jute

The profile of our export trade during the first seven months of the current fiscal year shows that the export earning fell short of the target by 6.63 per cent.

How much of the short-fall has occurred due to an under-performance on our part and what proportion of this is ascribable to the international market adversity are obviously very pertinent questions.

This fact is corroborated by what transpired at the 7-day meeting of the IJO council and project committee which concluded in the city on Sunday.

Market-wise, the whole of the African continent is worth exploring by us. Jute-based textiles should have a good prospect in Latin America.

Our real chance to make a sizable dent in the world market is offered by the BCIC's plan to produce pulp with jute for the manufacture of cost-effective paper.

Suranjit Sengupta of the Ganotantri Party (GP) believes that all the national level elections — not the next general elections only — should be held under a non-partisan care-taker government.

Explaining his position on the concept, the GP leader said that the holding of free and fair elections was one of the fundamental preconditions of democracy.

The political parties, especially those 'born out of cantonments', seemed to have developed a tendency to influence the elections to stay in power by any means including rigging of votes, terrorism against political opponents, using black money, media coup and, above all, using the administrative machinery in their favour, the GP leader said.

'No one can expect the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to hold a neutral general elections, and it was proved in the by-elections in the Magura-2 constituency.'

When requested to put forward his views on another government proposal for enacting laws in parliament prohibiting the government to transfer officials three months ahead of the elections, the GP leader said, 'we find it important to enact laws with a view to strengthening the EC and making the government abstain from giving postings of the officials ahead of the elections, but these measures are not alternative to the holding of elections under the caretaker government.'

The constitutional provision for the caretaker government would help change the country's present electoral culture plagued with immorality, nepotism, greed for power and opportunism, Sengupta felt.

The GP leader, in this connection told The Daily Star that he did not believe in a temporary arrangement for the

Suranjit Sengupta, leader of Ganotantri Party and Member of Parliament makes out his case in favour of the proposition

Interviewed by Nurul Kabir

About the recent government proposal for strengthening, both legally and organisationally, the Election Commission (EC) to ensure fair pollings, Suranjit Sengupta said, 'It would not help in the holding of a neutral elections. Why?'

Explaining the reasons for such apprehension, the GP leader argued that the public servants of the country had de-

veloped a tendency to serve the government — and not the State. 'Most of the bureaucrats confuse between the State and the government', Sengupta observed, 'as a result, the government officials' service, during elections, goes definitely in favour of the government headed by any political party.'

When requested to put forward his views on another government proposal for enacting laws in parliament prohibiting the government to transfer officials three months ahead of the elections, the GP leader said, 'we find it important to enact laws with a view to strengthening the EC and making the government abstain from giving postings of the officials ahead of the elections, but these measures are not alternative to the holding of elections under the caretaker government.'

The constitutional provision for the caretaker government would help change the country's present electoral culture plagued with immorality, nepotism, greed for power and opportunism, Sengupta felt.

The GP leader, in this connection told The Daily Star that he did not believe in a temporary arrangement for the

Drafting Committee of Bangladesh Constitution in 1972, observed. Refuting arguments put forward by the BNP leaders that there is no example in the world of the constitutional provision for holding elections under a care-taker government, Sengupta said, each nation has its own unique way of developing democratic institutions and Bangladesh is not an exception.

Unlike many politicians, Suranjit Sengupta has been struggling for the provision for holding elections under care-taker government since 1991.

12th Amendment to the Constitution, seeking a switch-over to the parliamentary system of governance. But again I failed to convince my colleagues in parliament', Sengupta regretted.

Commenting on the AL's present seriousness on the issue, Sengupta's comment was, 'better late than never'. Suranjit, analysing the ruling party's attitude towards the care-taker government, said that the BNP leaders had been reacting against the issue as if introduction of the system would amount to their defeat by the Opposition. But it is not correct. Because if the constitutional amendment seeking national level elections under a care-taker government is adopted, it is the old corrupt system which will be defeated — the remnant of autocracy which will be defeated by an improved democracy, and not the BNP, Sengupta observed.

He also said the BNP could take credit for introducing an improved system of polling and thus contribute to the further development of democracy in Bangladesh. Suranjit, however, felt that there exists a communication gap between the ruling party

and the Opposition on the question of the concept of the care-taker government. Referring to the Prime Minister's observation that a care-taker government, comprising of nominated members, could not be an alternative to a government elected by the people, Sengupta said, 'we did not propose the care-taker government as an alternative to the elected government'. The elected government would run the country for five years, while the care-taker government would conduct the general elections only', Sengupta said. The exact timing of the two is a matter for discussion.

Effective dialogue on the issue would remove the gap between the ruling party and the opposition, the GP leader felt.

But Sengupta, while giving an outline of the care-taker government, favoured granting all constitutional powers of an elected government to the interim cabinet.

'Otherwise, the nation might be faced with a problem of constitutional discontinuity. With the resignation of the elected premier, the deputy premier, nominated by all, would take over as premier and form the cabinet on principles set unitedly by the ruling party and the opposition. My concept of the caretaker government is against affecting the institution of the head of the state. Because, the head of the state — president — has to be there to conduct oath of the head of the government i.e. the prime minister of the caretaker government.'



the constitution to avert the possible discontinuation of constitutional process', he said. According to Sengupta's formula, the elected prime minister would handover power to the deputy prime minister nominated on the basis of consensus reached by the parties concerned.

With the resignation of the elected premier, the deputy premier, nominated by all, would take over as premier and form his or her cabinet on principles set unitedly by the ruling party and the opposition, GP leader explained.

Sengupta also felt that his concept of the care-taker government was against affecting the institution of the head of the state — the President — has to be there to conduct oath of the head of the government i.e. the prime minister of the care-taker government.

Notably, no member of the interim cabinet, including its head, would be eligible for taking part in the general elections, Sengupta asserted.

According to his proposal, the head of the care-taker government would take over power three months ahead of the elections, conduct the polling with the help of the election commission and hand over power to the leader of the house elected during the first session of the new parliament emerging through the general elections.

Asserting the demand for the care taker government once again, Suranjit Sengupta told The Daily Star that the BNP should immediately accept the proposition. 'Begum Zia must understand the whole nation, even her long-time political partner Jamaat-e-Islami, has rallied round the demand', Sengupta said and added that the BNP's hesitation to meet the demand would eventually further isolate the party from the people.

Tomorrow Barrister Nazmul Huda, Vice-Chairman of Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Minister for Information and Broadcasting argues against the proposition.

Imaginary Conversation, with the Minister for Education

In our present day culture, we have no conversation. Perhaps conversation is something alien to our nature. Even in our drawing rooms, a promising conversation soon turns into a high-pitched medley of words, with every body speaking and no body listening. Being very much a part of the society, my competence to pronounce on this national characteristics may be questioned. Please do not take it as a final judgement, only a passing observation, supported by my experience in our sitting rooms, and the nation's experience of the way the nation's leaders talk in their drawing room, the Sangsad.

I wish I could have a real conversation with someone who shares my interest in education. Could it be our education minister? Would I be too presumptuous? Or, will he have the time? What is happening to our education, and what his government has on the agenda in respect of education, and in order of priorities? I would like to hear him particularly about higher education because I have heard him making an inspired speech on this topic. The occasion was some kind of a formal inauguration of one of the private universities. It was obvious that the honorable minister saw great prospects for higher education in the fact that private universities had made their appearance at long last. He, as far as I remember, made no secret of his hopes that these will succeed where the existing universities have failed.

The unease I felt that morning over our minister's warmth of feeling toward the new and his despair about the old is a matter that will not detain me now. Perhaps, on some other

occasion, I am sorry that I cannot build up a framework for an imaginary conversation on this topic, higher education, with the minister on the other side of the table. What I fear is that my questions or my concerns may not be his questions or his concerns. So my intended conversation may not, after all, turn into a real dialogue. We might even be talking at cross purposes. With all these misgivings in my mind, I am proposing a framework for a possible dialogue. I am, in my imagination, face to face with our minister. He has graciously asked me to come with my questions and has kindly promised to answer them, at least to ponder over them, and to respond at a place and time that would suit him. I have felt very very obliged.

So here we are. I begin by saying, after the formal greetings, of course, that I come to talk, to discuss, to learn from him, and not to hurl questions only, though, in a meeting such as this, he must expect a few questions, too.

I start by mentioning a report, a heart-warming news, from Sylhet: Shah Jalal University is running strictly on schedule. It is the only university that has known no session-jam.

find out how this has been made possible. Sylhet is not a place without politics. Sylhet is very much in the news on the Sylhet division issue. Has the university been able to keep clear of this movement? Have they found an immunity against politics, or a politics sans hatred?

The news, for me, betokens a harmonious relationship existing between different groups of students, between teachers and students, between different groups of teachers, between students and administration, may be also a situation in which

embarrassing for the minister. The Cadet Colleges are, to the best of my knowledge, financed by Education Ministry, and administered by the Ministry of Defence, under a special arrangement. Similar allegations and similar desertions, though not common, have happened in the past. I ask the Minister whether he has followed the news. And if he considers that it is a news without much significance — the college authorities are quite competent to deal with the matter — then, arising out of this, what did he think about elitist education at public cost gen-

erally, and about cadet colleges in particular? I don't expect the minister to come out with a clear statement on this two-pronged question, immediately. The desertion issue may be of minor concern, but the other one — elitism in education — is more central. I allow the minister the privilege of silence, and pass on to my next concern: the striking students of the five new medical colleges.

According to newspaper reports, minister sahib, the students of the five medical colleges went on strike because they have come to discover that the colleges they have been admitted to lacked almost every thing they needed for a proper prosecution of their studies: books, teachers, class rooms, hostel accommodation, laboratories, hospitals, etc. In fact they had been admitted without the minimum preparations having been made that go with the concept of a medical college.

I will not bother you with the reforms suggested — both in administrative setup and course content — regarding medical education in the two Education Commission Reports, especially of the latest one (1988), but may I ask you how the establishment of five new medical colleges got priority and so much so that students were admitted without waiting for adequate preparations made for their reception and proper academic care? And how do I explain this fact that in the well-considered 14-point Recommendations in this field, establishment of new medical colleges does not figure at all? Is it blindness on the part of the Education Commission, (BMA too could be included in this strange-to-explain oversight) or is it playing politics for political gain?

I do not get — in this imaginary conversation — ready answers or responses from the minister, and I console myself that perhaps he is making mental notes, to be used for a future question hour in the Sangsad.

groups are non-existent, though this is difficult to visualise. At any rate the Sylhet case is worth examining, if only to find out a formula for peace for most of our colleges and universities, afflicted by dissension and feud, plagued by bloody clashes and closures, and finally ending up with session-jams.

The minister agrees to my suggestion, rather vaguely. Apparently he is on his guard, and will not commit himself on a sensitive issue. He knows perhaps that I have held the government — and the political parties — largely responsible for our troubles on the campus. And he doesn't quite believe that I wish him well, as much as I wish our educational system well.

I know that the other news from Sylhet — about forty students from Sylhet Cadet College having fled in fright and protest against the Principal's alleged harsh dealings with students — could be slightly

has appointed De Klerk as his Vice President. Rarely in the history of the world we find personalities like Nelson Mandela and De Klerk who work so close shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart for the welfare of the people and the country at large.

People all over the world cannot forget the acts of abnegation of Mandela and Klerk. Both new President Nelson Mandela and former President De Klerk have urged South Africans of all races to forget the past and join in building a united country. We congratulate both President Nelson Mandela and Vice President De Klerk on their monumental

achievement and wish them more success in future. O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Meanwhile when I searched for the publisher's name of the book, I discovered to my utter astonishment that the book has been published from Calcutta, India. It is really a matter of great regret that Bangladesh being the only country with Bangla as its state language has to import even Bangla alphabet books from abroad.

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

Bangla alphabet books

Sir, Recently I was asked by my mother to purchase some books of Bangla Barnamala (alphabet) which she would distribute to some slum children. Accordingly, I bought some books and had a look through one of the copies of the book. I was greatly surprised to find some really hard examples in it. I don't know whether the little children could understand such examples!

Do not let the JS down

Sir, I always read your marvelous editorials along with the objective column 'The Third View' as I have a penchant and voracious appetite for current topic and also good English. You have rightly diagnosed 'The Third View, May 5) the Bermuda triangle of AL-BNP-people. BNP took off with advantages but with all its bluster it lost control of the reins of governance. The other party letting JS down in invincible because of BNP's dogma. 1972-75 era is not forgotten by voters who also know that for AL, power is all that matters. But both BNP and AL believe people are fools. AL

A new era for South Africa

Sir, Over centuries the white minority ruled in South Africa and the black majority suffered. They fought and shed the blood of each other. But today it is a dawn of a new era. Forget and forgive and build the country anew is the theme for the millions. It is indeed thrilling to see the bud of a great revolution burgeon in South Africa.

After 350 years of colonial rule and following the country's first all-race election, South Africa's white President De Klerk has handed over power to its black President Nelson Mandela, and Mandela

Do not let the JS down

Sir, I always read your marvelous editorials along with the objective column 'The Third View' as I have a penchant and voracious appetite for current topic and also good English. You have rightly diagnosed 'The Third View, May 5) the Bermuda triangle of AL-BNP-people. BNP took off with advantages but with all its bluster it lost control of the reins of governance. The other party letting JS down in invincible because of BNP's dogma. 1972-75 era is not forgotten by voters who also know that for AL, power is all that matters. But both BNP and AL believe people are fools. AL

Do not let the JS down