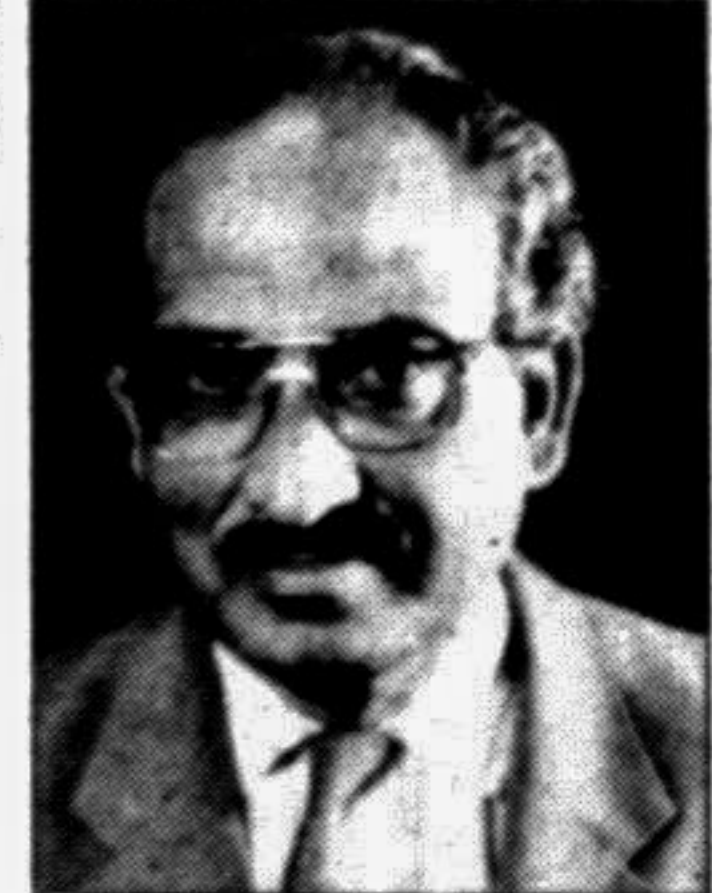


The Proposition is: Should the Next General Elections be Held under a Caretaker Government?

M Saifur Rahman, Finance Minister and Member, Standing Committee, Bangladesh Nationalist Party gives his arguments against the proposition.

Interviewed by Inam Ahmed



Shahabuddin's caretaker government, people's right to voting is negated this way.

THERE is no precedence so far for election to be held under a caretaker government where a legally elected government is already in power.

The question of such a government comes only if there is a situation following a revolution, or end of an autocratic rule.

But in our case at the moment a duly elected government with full legitimacy is in power and such legitimacy has been acknowledged as such in the election by people from all over the world.

A person who genuinely believes in democracy will believe in democratic process for changing a government.

lected governments will have to surrender power to non-elected persons three months prior to election.

There is a saying that when money talks, politicians listen. If it is felt by political parties in Bangladesh that this sort of contributory money influence should be eliminated or at least reduced from political processes...

strengthening the election process.

We can start with identity cards for voters to prevent fake voting and we have already committed funds for doing so.

In fact, in my mind, sometimes the financial contribution from the business com-

munity or raising of subscription from unidentified sources for financing political electoral process or day to day political activities is found to be corrupting the democratic process.

There is a saying that when money talks, politicians listen.

who would not get more than five per cent of the votes.

I think it will be worthwhile for the nation to spend Tk 250 crore over five years to nurse democracy and to bring about a healthy political process.

and think of such possibilities. Several legal provisions could be provided to punish politicians and parties who violate this procedure.

I could think of many other alternatives to strengthen the neutrality of electoral process by changing the public representation act of 1972.

By demanding a caretaker government, the opposition is discarding democracy and the electoral process by selection process.

through the appellate process. If every time a political party candidate is defeated in an election, and the party concerned resorts to extra legal process in mitigating its complaints.

Then how the by-elections will be held? Under caretaker government? Who will hold local government elections.

Shahabuddin's caretaker government. But Justice Shahabuddin's choice was universally accepted following the end of autocracy through our struggle.

Nowhere am I aware of an example of a caretaker government which is entrusted with the task of holding election by replacing an elected government.

I am convinced my party will not agree to such a proposition. For our party to bring a Bill for neutral government is to ask for committing political suicide.

Tomorrow Moudud Ahmed, MP, Jatiya Party's Parliamentary Leader and Member of Presidium, advances his arguments for holding the next general elections under a caretaker government.

Can Anything be Done to Prevent Such Tragedies?

We deeply mourn the death of nearly 800 or so Hajis who have been trampled to death due to a stampede, which was reportedly caused by some over-anxious pilgrims trying to push closer to a spot from where the act of symbolic stoning of the devil was to take place.

It will never perhaps be clear what triggered this tragedy. In all probability, the cause was a trifle — a desire to push ahead of others, or to jostle for a vantage point to perform the rituals of Haj.

It is not for the first time that tragedy struck the Haj pilgrims. In 1990, a fall of some people from an overhead bridge led to a panic run, resulting in the death of about 1,500 pilgrims.

The question before us is, what can be done to prevent such events from recurring in the future. The number of pilgrims are likely to rise in the future with Muslims from all over the world coming in ever larger numbers for this Holy Event.

Field briefing of a step-by-step process of Haj and raising the general awareness among the pilgrims as to what causes dangerous crowd behaviour are the surest way of reducing the possibility of recurrence of such tragic events during the Haj.

IJO and US Withdrawal

At the 21st session of the International Jute Council (IJC) and the Committee on Projects (COP) of the International Jute Organisation (IJO) which ended in Dhaka in mid-May, two topics claimed prominence.

The good news was about the major advance made by Bangladesh in diversifying the use of jute. This concerns utilising green jute to produce pulp for making paper.

At the moment, IJO has as its members, 28 countries. Only 5 of them are jute producing and exporting countries. All the rest are importing countries.

Budget constraints had reportedly been mentioned as a ground for the US decision to leave IJO. This hardly is a convincing reason.

More potent is the argument that the United States was pulling out of IJO in pursuance of a general policy of gradual withdrawal from international commodity agreements.

IJO hardly answers to such descriptions of a commodity agreement. All that it has been doing is promoting research for reducing the cost and improving the quality of jute, strengthening and developing markets for goods made from the fibre and for product diversification.

One redeeming feature of the IJC session is that the other member-countries have reiterated their commitment to IJO and asked the secretariate to start preparatory work for renegotiation of the current international jute agreement.

The IJC session regretted the US decision to withdraw from IJO and requested the United States to reconsider the matter.

IRAQ faces yet further economic strain and mounting deaths with the failure of its leaders to secure the removal of United Nations trade sanctions.

Baghdad claims it has carried out conditions on weapons destruction and Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz received some sympathy from several Security Council members during his most recent visit to the UN.

In addition, the chairman of the UN weapons inspection team monitoring Iraq, Rolf Ekeus, said on President Saddam Hussein's 57th birthday (28 April) that "the atmosphere has changed, Iraq is trying to be of assistance."

But Aziz returned to his beleaguered country to tell the population of 18 million that no respite is in sight.

Sanctions specifically exclude medicines, but deputy Health Minister Dr Showki Marcus says that in practice the economic embargo all but prevents medical imports.

Iraq Red Crescent officials, who once readily provided statistics to reporters, today refuse interviews. They re-

Failing Health is the Diagnosis for Iraq

Barbara Nimri Aziz writes from Baghdad

Baghdad marked President Saddam Hussein's 57th birthday on 28 April without the usual celebrations, as people struggled to make ends meet in the fourth year of UN-sponsored economic sanctions.

Four years of sanctions

Infographic showing UN Security Council resolutions on Iraq from 1990 to 1994, including economic embargo, oil sales restrictions, and renewed sanctions.

ply "Go to the hospitals; see for yourself."

Their professional despair is magnified by direct personal experience.

unnecessarily.

"My sister had a caesarean without anaesthesia." "Our father had no medicine for his hypertension."

now traumatic conditions were once routinely relieved by easily accessible drugs, they say.

Such anecdotes reflect widespread difficulties on a scale which may be even greater than revealed by the government.

In January, the Ministry of Health released a report on deteriorating health conditions and the rising death toll, particularly among children.

But a UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) office in the Middle East privately estimates that malnutrition and disease have killed up to a million — not 330,000 — children since 1990.

Medical shortages and the spread of disease are aggravated by food shortages. Prices are so high — 10,000 per cent of 1990 levels — that many families now go hungry.

"Government rations — for sugar flour, tea, oil — meet 70 per cent of a family's needs," said an official.

But the UN will not take responsibility for the mounting deaths. For example, it disclaims a recent report that directly links the rising death toll to sanctions.

The report, prepared by Dr Eric Hoskins, a respected Canadian doctor, was commissioned by UNICEF to document the health conditions of children in Iraq.

So it is necessary to go back to a 1991 study by a Harvard University team which documented rising mortality and disease among children.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts.

"Questionable Trade"

Sir, In the editorial titled "Questionable Trade" published in the issue dated 11 May, 1994 you got your arithmetic wrong.

A few months back the government announced that action would be taken against traders resorting to adulteration and cheating in weight.

Now that poor consumers have been fraudulently compelled to part with no less than 100 crore taka would the

government dare take actions? Or are dishonest traders and immoral industrialists too powerful a combine for the government to tackle?

Khalid Hasan Siddheswari, Dhaka

Loadshedding

Sir, I would like to talk about the "power failure" situation of old Dhaka especially in Lalbagh area.

The point is why is this loadshedding only in the area from Lalbagh to Nawabganj? The answer is that overloading is greater in this area.

due to the nearly 2000 'illegal' electric connections used by small factories located in such a small area.

How can a society advance that cannot restrict such illegal acts and where trusted officers/employees are involved allegedly in such crimes?

So may I request the government and the high electric supply authorities to make a survey because not only the factory owners but also the electricians who encourage them are blamable in the eyes

not only of the public but also of the government.

Faranuddin Lalbagh, Dhaka

All about cricket

Sir, It is almost half a century since we first started playing cricket. Yet, for all our efforts, it is at its nadir as ever.

Even in Dhaka, we don't have a permanent ground for playing cricket leave alone the district headquarters.

into an all-purpose arena. As a result, it has become slow and soggy.

Under this circumstance, we cannot expect our chaps to do well let alone earn any laurel.

The rebuff, if at all, in the ICC tournament had exposed the potentials and weaknesses of our young cricketers they did their best.

For filling the present lacuna, we need to know that many fairly developed cricket-

world's denial of these facts "a human rights violation."

Domestic agricultural production has increased in the last three years but still falls far short of providing all the nation's needs.

"What we want," says officials, "is to sell our oil and buy what we need — pharmaceuticals, milk, grain or machinery — on the open market."

In 1991 the UN authorised oil sales worth \$1.6 billion, partly to pay for UN operations in the country.

Some Arab observers suggest that oil politics rather than UN resolutions lie behind the unyielding sanctions policy.

The price of oil is low, down to \$12 a barrel from \$20 in 1989," points out political scientist Omar Ali.

As a result, he suggests, major producers such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have an interest in keeping Iraq out of the picture.

BARBARA NIMRI AZIZ is a writer and broadcaster on Middle Eastern affairs.

ing countries are inducting foreign nationals into their teams. For instance, England cricket team comprises men also of Caribbean, South African and Pakistani origin.

BBC Dhaka programme

Sir, I do agree with the views (letter) of Mr Haroon Huq about BBC Dhaka programme published in your daily on 19 May '94.

Kamal Mahmood Magh Bazar, Dhaka