

A Bold, Healthy Move

Jatiya Party has reaffirmed their decision to support Awami League to attain parliamentary majority and accordingly form the government. They have done it in a very convincing manner, laying at rest reports of difference in the party on the point.

This is one healthy thing to happen to our post-election situation swamped as it is with mean claims by defeated parties of large scale rigging. The JP support committed so early in the day cuts very decisively at the chances of horse-trading which could be a most normal thing for the party to indulge in the strategic situation they are now placed. In fact, the irrepressible Nazmul Huda has shouted out what the BNP had uppermost in their mind from day one of the countdown to AL power — June 13 that is — resisting by all means an AL takeover, if necessary by offering Prime Ministership to JP. The party has very curtly denied any possibility of a build-up on BNP's wish of roping in JP. What we appreciate in JP's bold action is its clear position taken so early in the game. Moreover, they have very wisely desisted from putting Ershad on the auction block or throwing their support to whoever promises to free the boss, though we cannot rule out the possibility of some hidden agenda, to come to light at a later stage.

AL on its part should not rush foolishly to reap the most from this windfall of a support. They have to weigh seriously the political pluses and minuses of accepting support from a party and persons who were accessories to autocracy and who are yet to abjure in public their deeds and their faith in eating out of the hands of one man and forcing the nation to do so. The JP support, however, speaks of a long journey they have made towards maturity as politicians which should mean an ability to appreciate that these are the times far changed from when Ershad imposed themselves on a traumatised and hapless nation. The nation has right now refused to give way to terror — anymore. There can now be no question of usurpation of all of state's powers by one individual or group or party.

We welcome the JP action as it, by supporting the majority party, helps make things cleaner in the augean stable of Bangladesh politics.

Provisional ADP

The caretaker government is bequeathing a development programme for the next fiscal year to the newly elected government. It has been a bold, visionary and forward-looking initiative on its part when only days are left for the new fiscal year to begin and for this government to hand over power to the elected government.

The caretaker government could decide to rest on the oars of its success in the principal mission of holding the elections and pass whatever little time is left of its tenure in a state of repose before the next government came in. And the temptation to do so was all the greater in a context where the external resource line-up was an unknown quantity and one had to make room for the economic philosophy and policy initiatives of a brand new government.

So, it is with some character and commitment that the caretaker government has prepared this provisional development budget. And in terms of directional thrusts on meeting the challenges of the economy it commends itself as a framework of suggestions by expert practitioners. The prioritisation of poverty alleviation and development of human resources and infrastructural facilities cannot have any detractors. The raising of government contribution to the ADP to 47 per cent hinges critically on efficient revenue collection which should be well within our power to materialise. But then it is the government borrowing from the banking system that must be kept on leash.

It has been cautious — we believe to a fault — that a "core ADP" of Tk 11,300 crore has been envisaged within the overall ADP worth Tk 12,500 crore to overcome resource constraints that might hit the fiscal year half-way through. Our hope is that the newly-elected government will be well-received in the corridors of donor governments and multilateral agencies soon after it is inducted so that it will be able to pool enough external resources for completing its priority projects.

Emerging Alliance

A geo-political alliance is taking shape between Moscow and Beijing. It is designed against perceived western interference in their traditional spheres of influence, so says an IPS report. Russia dreads the prospect of NATO's expansion into eastern and central Europe while China views with concern the obstacle that a sizeable presence of US troops in Asia could pose to the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland and to Beijing's eventual claim to the disputed territory in South China Sea waters.

Moscow has turned to Far East, it is said, after being chagrined at the western democracies not regarding Kremlin as an equal partner, so goes a surmise from Russia. On the other hand, a military analyst from Beijing says that China is keen on securing her borders with Russia in order that she can turn her attention to the South-East.

Closely on the heels of Clinton visits to South Korea and Japan in April Yeltsin made a trip to Beijing, his second since 1992. The harvest reaped in the bilateral relations between Moscow and Beijing was substantial enough: Russian-Chinese joint declaration on international policy cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region together with agreements on military aid and projects relating to energy, transport and communications sectors. They have also signed 'no-strike first' nuclear accords setting their bilateral relationship on a firm

Yeltsin remains the western favourite and if he wins the June 16 election he will be the toast of the G-7, to be sure. In the ultimate analysis, however, Russia may see the wisdom of maintaining a balance between its Western and Eastern policies.

Contradictions — Hallmark of United Front

Alok Verma writes from New Delhi

Simply because the survival of the party and the leadership would be of utmost importance for the chief ministers than sacrificing their government for the sake of the United Front at the Centre, it would remain fraught with the danger of falling under the burden of its own contradictions.

WITH the swearing in of Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda as Prime Minister of India, apparently the bunch of opportunists have at last succeeded in coming together to share the power at the Centre. However, coming to power has been described by most of the United Front leaders as the victory of the secularism and social justice but the fact remains that it was sheer lust of power. Had it been not so the United Front, which till the other day was so inimical to the Congress party and critical of its policies would have never sought the support to form the government at the Centre, knowing fully the complications involved. In fact, if the United Front had even iota of concern for issues like secularism and social justice, probably instead of piggyriding the back of Congress it would have allowed the Congress to piggyback its own back.

What cannot be denied is the fact that after the BJP it was the Congress which got the people's mandate. Therefore, the United Front should have offered the issue-based support to the Congress instead of deciding to form the government itself on the strength of loose federal parties. By doing so, not only the United Front would have been able to insulate itself from all the contradictions as being faced by it now but also compelled the Congress to agree on the reversal of some policies which according to the UF leaders were anti-people.

Thus, on one hand the UF would have found some reflection of its agenda in the Congress policies and on the other, also usurped the role of

the BJP as a sole opposition party (by extending issue-based support to the Congress).

Probably, having known the natural inclination of most of its leaders the United Front leadership knew that if it failed to stake claim for power it would not be able to keep its flock in tact. That in any case is still doubtful because there is no other commonality between them except the lust for power. This realisation was very much evident during the course of meeting of regional parties leaders K. Karunanidhi, Chandrababu Naidu, G.K. Moopanar and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta who despite the main constituents of the United Front seemed reluctant to join the government. After a long persuasion by Mr. V.P. Singh they agreed to join the government but under a new dispensation of Federal Front. Clearly the reluctance on the part of these leaders stems out of their apprehension which is also the apprehension of people, that how long such a government will be able to govern the country with contradictions.

All the parties like the DMK, TDP, Naidu, and the Amanila Congress and the Asom Gana Parishad have got the mandate of the people against the Congress and to provide good governance in any case would take a back seat compared to the state issues. Simply because the survival of the party and the leadership

parties, in fact, has no approbation of the people because at the time of elections there was neither any alliance of the National Front with these regional parties nor people voted in their favour in the Lok Sabha elections.

Therefore, it is unlikely that the failure of the coalition United Front government at the Centre will not cast its shadow on the credibility of the DMK-TMC, TDP Naidu and AGP governments in states. Besides, these regional parties have some fundamental differences on various political and economic issues with many United Front constituents. Such differences will always keep Prime Minister Deve Gowda on tenterhooks. He will have to tread very cautiously because giving rise to any acrimony would mean inviting trouble for himself. Demands such as for more central funds to Andhra Pradesh by Chandrababu Naidu or for fair deal in resolving the Cauvery water dispute by K. Karunanidhi. Even all is not well in Janata Dal at state level.

Regional satraps have ex-

pressed their indignation over the decision of the Janata Dal leaders for seeking support from the Congress in forming the government at the Centre. They have argued that they sought votes and fought elections criticising the anti-people and pro-rich policies of the Congress. Now in a volte-face the Janata Dal has no reservation in seeking Congress support.

Many state Janata Dal leaders are finding too embarrassing to face the Congress party in state assemblies where it is

the main opposition party.

Privately, these leaders have started admitting that the national leadership is in the grip of power brokers, who are more concerned of their political fortunes than of the party or the party workers. Gradually the dissension is going to be more acute and it has already reflected in the resignation of Delhi Janata Dal president, other office-bearers and hundreds of his supporters.

Besides the Janata Dal, even its constituents TDP Naidu in Andhra Pradesh and DMK-TMC in Tamil Nadu have found themselves in the same predicament. Similar is the dilemma the Congress has placed itself in especially in West Bengal where the animosity between the Left parties and the Congress is fierce. With such peculiar problems it seems unlikely that Congress will extend support to the United Front indefinitely or even the United Front coalition partners will be able to work in cohesion.

By assuming the mantle of prime ministership, Mr. Deve Gowda has indeed brought glory to his personal credentials, his state and native village but by no means his elevation is any indication of the victory for either the third force or the secular forces or the saviours of social justice. Even in his victory, in fact, Mr. Deve Gowda has been vanquished. Because the same set of leaders, who by suppressing

their desire, today have catapulted by Mr. Deve Gowda to reach the exalted position would not shy away in pulling the rug from under his feet. So his survival would largely depend on his dexterity in the balancing act for keeping power gridders in line.

Undoubtedly Mr. Deve Gowda, having known the inherent dangers, deserves to be profusely complimented. What still surprises is his optimism that he agreed to take the responsibility of leading those respectable politicians who attach more value to self-aggrandisement than the value-based politics, or who for their personal gains can throw morality to the wind and for majority of them politics is no commitment but a game of oneupmanship.

Therefore, for the survival and successful working of a loose conglomeration like the United Front it is imperative that they should have some ideological cohesion by agreeing to draw up a common minimum working agenda. Confronted with political uncertainty it is hoped that history will not repeat itself and the coalition unlike in the past will strive for achieving reasonable sustenance and success this time. No doubt that Mr. Deve Gowda carries an enormous burden of running the coalition government, he will hopefully steer India through one of the most critical phases and provide good governance. Let there be an end to factional politics and purposeful governance, is given a chance.

— MANDIRA
The writer is a television journalist.

Representative Democracy: Combating Collective Failure

by Asif Iqbal Siddiqi

ESSENTIALLY parliamentary democracy is to ensure that elected representatives of the people select a representative through a voting mechanism. His/her is given the power of representation of the people of that constituency. In the next step, the representatives of all constituencies together form the parliament. Thus, the parliament becomes the powerhouse of the nation. This now is the executive power or the government which is used in the management of public good. Virtually, democratic voting mechanism both in the constituency and the parliament is to consolidate people's opinion to produce a better decision (or to reach the social optimum). Now, let us look at the formation of our collectiveness in contrast to the ideal situation. It is often complained that our electoral process itself is faulty, and most of the elections were not free and fair. This issue has been over-accentuated over the last two years that elections should be conducted by an impartial, non-political caretaker government. But, it implies that thereby we can bring in some positive changes in a comparatively accelerated pace. To do this, we shall have to comprehend the drawbacks of the system first, then initiate the corrective changes.

Understanding Political Power as a Collective Good

The major setback of our system and democratic authorities is that, instead of creating favourable environment for people, it very often produced undesirable situations. Thus, can be perceived as a collective failure of people. Collective failure occurs in the market of a collective good. In fact, political power is a collective good in the power market of a country where democracy

is a process of accumulation and distribution of power. When people of a constituency select a representative through a voting mechanism. He/she is given the power of representation of the people of that constituency. In the next step, the representatives of all constituencies together form the parliament. Thus, the parliament becomes the powerhouse of the nation. This now is the executive power or the government which is used in the management of public good. Virtually, democratic voting mechanism both in the constituency and the parliament is to consolidate people's opinion to produce a better decision (or to reach the social optimum). Now, let us look at the formation of our collectiveness in contrast to the ideal situation. It is often complained that our electoral process itself is faulty, and most of the elections were not free and fair. This issue has been over-accentuated over the last two years that elections should be conducted by an impartial, non-political caretaker government. But, it implies that thereby we can bring in some positive changes in a comparatively accelerated pace. To do this, we shall have to comprehend the drawbacks of the system first, then initiate the corrective changes.

Market Imperfection and Collective Failure

Collective failure occurs in an imperfect market with incomplete/imperfect information and monopolistic practices. Our power market in fact is underdeveloped or disguised or informal in most of the places. Sufficient flow of perfect information is almost unnoticed. This insufficiency of course remains far below than is generally expected in a non-cooperative game structure, where political power market is analogous to a non-cooperative oligopolistic market. Our case is even worse. Voters to a large scale are not conscious and aware of their righteousness, because of illiteracy and communication gap between different levels of the power structure. From the electorate stand point the consequences of different policy changes of the government are not well perceived. For example, tax expenditure policy is one of the most important public decision which is reflected in the price variable of the traded commodities. Electorate, because of not having much knowledge about the incidence of taxation policy changes, often pays unusual prices. From the politician's stand point, may be this is one of the

reasons for what this important issue could be bypassed by the major political parties in their electoral manifestos.

Another transitory cycle of the same sort can be aited. Because of inability to use personal and community information people cannot get organised to fight for some collective interest. Once they are not organised politicians do not find them as important. The farmers in the recent past, by laying down their lives for fertiliser, hardly could achieve anything. From the politician's viewpoint, organising this group would have been an addition to their power. But somehow this communication gap was not patched up. Unfortunately, the opposition leaders at that time, in spite of dealing with a timely people's issue, were addressing some constitutional complexities which were going above the head of the general mass. When, because of strikes and turmoils a poor day labourer lost his very basic right to go for earning his bread, he never could realise how opposition leaders were fighting for his right only. Thus for the disability to use the timely and positional information on one hand people fail to be organised to further their self-interest in the form of peace and stability, and on the other hand politicians failed to conform more of votes and to accumulate more of power. The leaders remain widely unaware of their exact popularity which in turn may instigate them to adopt unfair means in the parliament.

Another class called political miscreants then evolved as a byproduct of this power-holding to suppress a few conscious voices where poverty and unemployment added simultaneously to the cause and effect of this evolution. Anyway, experience made people rich enough, though not enough to coordinate themselves; and, the power bargaining between political parties in late 80s allowed people to go and share a significant portion of the political power for the first time in 1990. We expected that the power market would be competitive gradually. But, the monopoly of the politicians and bureaucrats revived in a different form. The major political parties may have had it in unconscious mind that if they behaved indifferently at

the same time, readily people cannot create another political alliance to combat their anarchy. It produced a shameless political impasse. Law and order was pushed to the ground. Economic activities and normal life of the general mass faced a disaster. People once again observed themselves as helpless. Now, after another parliamentary election, another political authority, with more or less indifferent characteristics, will take over the executive power of the government. Anyway, we cannot ignore absolutely the improvement which is taking place though very slowly. So, let us hope for the best.

Conclusion

Schumpeter defined ideal democracy as an institutional arrangement which individuals endeavour to acquire political office through perfectly free competition for the voters of a broadly based electorate. Here, Becker emphasised that, indeed perfect competition is as necessary to an ideal political democracy as it is to an ideal free enterprise. But, the collective failure will continue to exist until and unless the median voters are well-coordinated to further their self-interest and accommodate themselves sufficiently in the power equation to create a pressure group, compel the representatives to represent the relevant constituency, not the relevant party where he/she belongs to. And this ultimately will evolve a more competitive and transparent power market.

To the Editor...

Sehgal's article

Sir, Reference to Sindh police vengeance in Karachi in Ikrar Sehgal's article in your esteemed daily of May 31 is nothing but a figment of writer's imagination and highly exaggerated. There is no doubt that in a democratic set-up, law enforcing authorities stand fully accountable to the people and police excesses if they do take place are thoroughly investigated. But to idealise stray examples to discredit a professional force is both unfair and wrong.

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is a process of accumulation and distribution of power. Perhaps the standards for qualification are not high enough. Please protect innocent young girls and women in your society from these criminal acts. Demand that the police force be supervised by honourable people.

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Why Sher-e-Bangla?

Sir, We like to draw your kind attention to a special supplement on election manifesto of 'Awami League' published in your daily on 9th June. In the supplement picture of four great Bengali leaders have been published. The respected leaders are Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haque, Mr Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy and Mouliana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. The slogan above the picture was that the symbol of the great Bengalees of the century is 'Boat.'

The history we know about the four great leaders does not include anywhere that Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haque was ever an Awami League party member, nor ever be utilized 'Boat' as his symbol any time during his political career. It is therefore beyond our rational understanding as to why his picture was published in the Awami League manifesto?

Najam Zulfiqar
C/o High Commission for
Pakistan
Dhaka

A curious citizen
Dhaka

Rape of Marzina

Sir, As a member of Amnesty International, I feel I have to write to you about the plight of many young girls who are brutally raped and tortured and many of whom under police custody. I implore the government to take a stand and stop this violation of human rights.

I would also like to bring to your attention the case of Marzina a 14-year-old girl who allegedly was raped by three

men, including two policemen, near the railway station at Chittagong. I understand these men have not yet been brought to justice. I feel this case should be brought out into the open. And all concerned brought to justice.

P. Walmsley
Austerheim
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Sidewalks — no man's land

Sir, Just the other day, after my return from abroad, I have to my utter surprise and disappointment discovered that most of the pavements in Motijheel Commercial Area as well as DIT Extn Ave have been rampantly encroached upon by the advertising agents with their 'bell signs' for rent. It's shocking that the City Corporation has thought it alright to rent out the sidewalks, meant for public use, for the second time (there are already some bell signs beside the main roads in some places) and allowed the pillars of bell signs to be erected almost on the centre of the sidewalks to much inconvenience of the pedestrians. One is bound to collide with the post or another walker in the rush hours.

This erection of bell signs on the middle of the sidewalks is the product of senseless decision of some irresponsible officials.

If you kindly observe many of the sidewalks in the city are already unusable for either lack of maintenance, or due to occupation by unauthorised vendors, push carts, garage parkings or homeless shelters. Now that those left unoccupied, to our good luck, are encroached by the City Corporation itself through unlawful allotments. I don't know whom to approach for redress.

In order to ensure safety and safe walking on the foot-

paths, the authority should clear those without any delay and specially no bell sign should be allowed to be erected in the middle of the footpaths. We, the tax payers, should be given some decent living standards by the city.

A F Rahman,
Dhaka

A historic election

Sir, Twelfth June is a red-letter day in the history of Bangladesh. Our sky which was over