

Aguardian for the elected government

Children playing with things that may cause injury, if improperly used, need a full-time guardian overseeing things. Since we are a fledgling democracy, since the politicians have a long way to go to achieve democratic maturity, since their actions can cause immense human miseries and death, we need a guardian for the parliament overseeing both the ruling and the opposition parties. The jobs of the guardian would be similar to those of a referee in a football game. There should be some previously laid-out codes of conduct for the parliamentarians; the codes may change and evolve through a self-learning process. There would be yellow cards and red cards, depending on the severity and intention, if a member breaks such codes. All the parliamentarians, including the ministers and the prime minister would be treated the same under this system. The codes will evolve gradually, but the starters might be as follows:

1. We presuppose that all parliamentarians and their political parties are loyal to the state, so nobody can say in the parliament or in the public that so and so are against independence, so and so want to sell the country to outsiders. If someone has reasons for bringing allegations against some parliamentarian or his party, this should be taken to the judicial system. Until and unless the judicial system announces someone or some party to be anti-state, he or she, or the party will be assumed to be loyal, and everyone should respect that assumption. Of course, depending on the authenticity of the primary information and the severity of the case, the judiciary may temporarily suspend a parliamentarian till a full judgement is delivered.
2. Similarly we assume that all the parliamentarians are 'clean' and good persons. No parliamentarian can bring an allegation of crime or immoral behaviour against another parliamentarian or another party in his or her speeches. Again, as above, unless one is pulled out of the parliament by the judicial system, he or she remains an assumed 'clean' member, and everybody else should show the same mutual respect as before.
3. This obviously presupposes that we have an independent judiciary. Besides, the department of anti-corruption should be set up under the judiciary too.

Now the question comes who will be such guardians? In my opinion, the members of the caretaker government, which is responsible in shaping the subsequent parliament, should also be responsible for the guardianship throughout the term of the elected government. They should sit once every month, or on an urgent basis if need arises. In this matter of warning or disqualification of a parliamentarian, the decision of the guardians should be final and binding on everybody including the prime minister.

Dr K Siddique-e- Rabbani
Professor of Physics
Dhaka University

How neutral are caretaker govt actions?

It has gone beyond the passions of people like me, a former MNA, MP, Commandant of Palatana Freedom Fighters Training Camp and one of the founder members of BNP, to witness the apparently partisan activities of the caretaker government.

The caretaker government is supposed to discharge the sacred responsibility of holding the Jatiya Sangsad election in a neutral and nonpartisan way. But its course of action often smacks of some secret understanding with the BNP-led four-party alliance.

No sooner the oath was administered to the Chief Advisor of the caretaker government than 13 secretaries to the government were transferred. This came as a surprise to all and many questioned whether the change was pre-planned. Were they Awami League supporters? Then, what's about the ones put in their positions? Are they neutral, or alliance-minded? Then most of the DCs and SPs, the key persons for holding election, were transferred and those posts were filled up with new ones. Are those officials neutral and nonpartisan?

Was it not clear to the sane people/voters, not to speak of the liberation forces, freedom fighters and their associates, that weather it was deliberately done to malign the Awami League? It was later said that one hundred 'vulnerable spots' were selected for raid for recovery of arms and arrest of miscreants. Were not those spots of others than supporters of the 4- party alliance?

Most of the OCs and TNOs were also transferred. One wonders whether that was according to the list given by the 4- party alliance? Please recollect when Mr. Abdul Mannan Bhuiya, Secretary General of BNP, after meeting the Chief Advisor told the waiting newsmen, "aaro saththa naam diye ashlam badleer jonney" (I have given seven more names for transfer).

According to police officials, this produced an unsatisfactory result in the drive for recovery of illegal arms and arrest of criminals because the transferred officials had no clue to the dens of miscreants. Killings, mostly of Awami League, Jubo League and Chhatra League leaders/members have increased in number. Armed miscreants allegedly belonging to the alliance are now intimidating innocent voters to vote for alliance candidates.

Our well reputed Armed Forces have now been deployed to work in aid of the civil administration. I request the chiefs of the services and local commanders of our armed forces to work in accordance with the Code of MBML (Manual of Bangladesh Military Law); and take independent actions as per the four principles laid down for such actions "in aid of civil power"

Capt. (Retd) M Shujat Ali
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DU admission test

Dhaka University, the biggest and the so-called best university of the country has a business studies faculty known as C Unit which hosts admission test every year which is taken by thousands of students but only a few compared to the total number of candidates are qualified. So, we do get an idea about the tough competition and the quality of the students who qualify in that test. But the question is: "Is the question paper for that admission test in C Unit a standardised one?"

C Unit of DU is a business studies faculty and question papers for admission test should be so prepared in a way that assesses the standard of candidates taking the test. The questions should focus exclusively on English Language and Mathematics, whereas, the real story is that the question paper of C Unit's admission test includes materials from HSC in the following subjects: English Language and Literature, Bengali Language and Literature, Commerce and Banking, Economics and Commercial Geography and Accounting. This is a great problem for those students who have done their A Levels or have come from abroad having done their high school graduation from there who have no idea as to what is taught in HSC English Literature, let alone Bengali.

This cannot be a good system of selecting students in the C Unit. It is not right assessment. The test should focus on a common area of knowledge, which is indispensable for business studies. These common areas are English Language to test the candidate's command over English and mathematics, which is essential for business studies. Without knowledge on these two areas, it is very unlikely that a student will be able to study business studies. Little wonder, the entrance examination of DU's C Unit does not guarantee selection of quality candidates. In this regard, the IBA admission test is indeed a standard way of assessing students' aptitude. I do hope the authority concerned will reflect upon this matter.

M Naved Ferdous Iqbal
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Repression on minorities

I am writing with a heavy heart after reading several news items about repression on the country's minority communities, published in national dailies over the last one week. Such acts of barbarism unleashed by a section of communal forces have not only hurt the spirit of the liberation war and national unity, but also forced minorities to migrate from their homesteads. With the election nearing, armed cadres of different political parties are repressing the minorities through heinous acts such as toll collection. The Hindu community, in particular, is threatened at different parts of the country not to come out of their homes on the day of election. The caretaker government should take stern actions against the people who are repressing the minority communities ahead of the general election.

Gopal SenguptaMontreal, Quebec

Pledges before polls

A new day shall dawn on October 1, 2001 or the day after.

As many as 7,50,00,000 voters would cast their vote, select and elect 300 JS members from amongst 1933 contesting candidates. With a view to holding a free, fair, impartial, peaceful and successful general election and making its results acceptable to all concerned the following three demands of the people need to be fulfilled before October 1, 2001:

- 1) That all the contesting candidates would allow voters to cast their vote without fear or favour or obstruction of any sort.
- 2) That all the contesting candidates would solemnly and publicly declare that they would accept the results of the general election peacefully and blissfully.
- 3) That the Chief Adviser of the caretaker government may solemnly and publicly declare that he would not accept any offer for the office of the President of Bangladesh for next five years.

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Problems at Jahangirnagar University

It is over a month now that all academic activities of Jahangirnagar University has come to a total stop; and it is all for a single student who was involved in the rape incidents at the campus. The Vice Chancellor could have and, in our view, should have solved the problem by simply barring the said student from the ensuing examination. Now the VC's alibi is that the student has a court order and therefore he does not have any other option but to allow him to sit for the exam. But, what the university authority is not telling us is, a situation has been created for the student so that he could seek the help of the court.

The present VC came to office, at the backdrop of the failure of his predecessor to maintain the discipline in the university. But like his counterpart at the Dhaka University, he has also taken a policy of wait and see, although the two problems are not parallel. The problem at DU is more complex and deeper. Because of JU VC's policy, which is working in favour of a very few students belonging to a particular student organisation, the rest of the four thousand or so students have to pay dearly. Their academic sessions have certainly delayed at least for six months. The authorities seem to be unperturbed and oblivious to the loss and suffering of the common students.

We can only appeal to the Chancellor to step in.

A Concerned Guardian

Caretaker government

Once again we see Mr ASMS Kibria speak out irresponsibly on an issue that is very much settled at the moment. He said at the AMCHAM meeting that the Awami League Government will have to re-think the concept of the caretaker government when they return to power. Is it because this caretaker administration has taken some stern decisions which do suit his party? We have seen the ex-finance minister speak his mind a number of times in the past and each time he did the clouds darkened and a sense of apprehension prevailed. One may ask the people at the Stock Exchange.

I just want to state that the caretaker government is the best thing that has happened in our political system. I speak for the majority of Bangladeshis when I say that the people want the caretaker government over any other choices given to us. Every five years, the people of this country get to enjoy three blissful months of peace and harmony, which simply reflects the fact that this country is best governed without the politicians!

Farhan Quddus
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The insulted and the injured

This is with reference to Kuldip Nayar's post-editorial on the above subject published in The Daily Star on September 8, 2001. Our reverence for the renowned Indian columnist reaches greater heights when he says: "New Delhi would have served the country's cause better by allowing at Durban an open discussion on the caste system which continues to be a social stigma." It is hard to believe that the concept of superiority of man over man on the basis of birth still prevails in the largest democracy of the world. Nayar rightly says that "the end-product of caste and racism is the same: discrimination and degradation." It is horrifying to learn that the untouchables or dalits "would have to live in separate habitations, draw water from separate wells and get the worst chastisement if they ever dare to raise their head. They are hanged if they marry out of caste. Official figures show that one dalit woman is raped very six hours and one dalit killed every three days." This is, I am positive, not the teaching of Hinduism. Rather it is a man-made vested machination to oppress and subjugate the weaker segment of the society perpetually. I wonder how a considerable portion of the voters are looked down upon. It is high time the system is discouraged by the Hindus themselves. We fully echo the voice of Nayar when he demands, "There is also a need to include caste in the UN Human Rights Charter which talks about oppression emanating from race, religion language, gender but not caste". Nayar deserves our sincerest salutation for favouring a noble cause.

Asif Ali
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Survival of the unfittest

The coming general election on October 1 is planned to be the survival of the unfittest, judging from the Political Business Index (PBI), a new measuring unit which the politicians are chary of introducing officially, now, or after coming into power.

The Political Think Tanks are also hesitating to enforce the evaluation due to internal weakness, and politicisation of the private independent sector. Are the Stock Exchanges are sluggish due to huge trading in the Political Stock Exchange? Obviously the black figures are not available in black and white!

The Bangladeshi voters are ideally suited to the suckers. The majority of the electorate are have-nots, hence vulnerable to dubious propositions. The moral upholders of the society believe that a system of political pilgrimage may be introduced, to ensure the right type of cathartic effect. Our politicians are spirited enough, but the right spirit of politics is missing.

Az
Dhaka

America's new war

I would like to see this 'new war' of America not as the first in the 'clash of civilisations' as forewarned by Michael Huntington but the first step in understanding the most misunderstood religion, Islam. Mosques are being vandalised, kids cannot go to schools, slurs are being hurled at misplaced races or people throughout America. If the US wants to go for an eye for an eye without a visible enemy in sight, they will pit themselves against seven million adherents of a great faith in America, not to mention a billion more around the world. People in the US cannot afford to be ignorant of the people who they live with, share their stories with or maybe buy their groceries from. Terrorism or fundamentalism is not the legacy of Islam; it is everywhere. It is in Ireland, in Spain, in scores of countries in Latin America; nobody blames Christianity for that or pulls down churches. As long as the West and Islam continue to see each other as fundamentalist and non-progressive or amoral and decadent, we will be trenching ourselves in for a long siege of mistrust and hate.

One man cannot start a "crusade", unless the seeds of war already exist in the society. Hostile engagements without properly addressing the underlying grievances can cause fault lines that give birth to more terrorism and fundamentalism. Osama bin Laden or President George W Bush is merely actors of an unfolding drama, the story of which is rooted in our perceived notion of what is just. Even terrorists have a political agenda, no matter how hare-brained they seem. Has a drop of world assistance ever gone to Afghanistan in the last two decades after the US had fought its proxy war against the Soviets? Has the world done anything to take the walls around the refugee camps in Palestine and gave them something to look forward to other than making them pelting stones at tanks, if not expelling them from their own lands? You cannot make fish of one and flesh of another and ask why the terror has struck innocent lives 8,000 miles away. The Palestinian kid who was shot in his father's lap was innocent and America watched it on their TV like they do everyday with dire indifference, themselves forgetting that "anybody who comforts the terrorists will be regarded as the supporters of terrorism", as they have come to realise now.

There are many students and skilled workers in the United States who are going through different kinds of stress because they are becoming easy targets of hate, slur and discrimination. Most of the anger has unfortunately targeted the wrong people. Thanks to the general knowledge of geography and history on the part of the average guy on the street, they are making 20 per cent of US population targets who do not fit their own facial attributes. During the Pearl Harbour it was the 'Chinaman' who had been discriminated against and now everybody who does not look like a white is an Arab. Muslim women who wear *hijab* (veils) are not even going to be spared. This is where we have to work at. The common people of America, in their fit of rage, are going to alienate the support so far they have had from among themselves against the common threat of terrorism. Unless you want to police your own citizens, give up on perceived civil liberty or expel people by and large from certain countries of origin, you have to stop acting on your instincts. Patriotism is not probably the best advisor in dealing with a crisis that can only divide further but not unite.

There are talks about a global solution to terrorism. Will it be taken as a whole or just directed at isolating Muslims from partaking in the political process? Tightening the borders in and around Europe and finding stricter immigration regulations will not stop people from plying out of their war-ravaged countries and look for havens; history says so. Terrorism cannot be contained in their geopolitical area or origin, terrorism is a state of mind that stems out of deprivation and inequality. We will have to address those issues. How much money would be spent out of the 40 billion dollars from US taxpayers in gaining that kind of understanding? None. Moreover, what it is going to produce is more hatred and separation in an ever-widening rift of nations and people. What we are looking at is a vengeful America, sanctioning political assassinations, downplaying respect for international law and building up militarily for another crusade in the face of a prolonged economic slump - a political revivalism of the 1970s. I don't see how this government is able to isolate themselves from the consequences of low attrition wars it wants to wage, hoping to nab the terrorist networks without replacing them with an infrastructure of development in the very countries they seem to forget after their political objectives are achieved.

There are pressures on countries like Pakistan to take sides in the war of 'good vs. evil', the same country they had thrown sanctions at right after their purpose was served, getting US arms into Afghanistan to fight the Soviets. Pakistan cannot be expected to join wholeheartedly when they know they are being coerced into it and will be left to deal with backlashes from their conservative quarters as well as a hostile neighbour. Policies that serve nothing but short-term political expediencies and make wary friends will produce nothing but create Frankensteins like bin Laden to haunt back. There are talks of 'following the money' to choke out the supplies of terrorism. This might lead to choking the economies of other countries that have had traditionally long-lasting economic links on others. One cannot be made to suffer for crimes of someone else. If Islamic charitable organisations are told where their money should not be going, then the same rule should apply to thousands of organisations working in Africa or Asia, who are funded by churches all over the world, where conflicts most often than not spills over the boundaries of religion. It is a difficult task to draw objectives in this kind of war, let alone those that are just for all. The US has to be responsible of what it does today in order to shape the world for tomorrow. It is a world it should not hope to rule, but partake in its multifarious developments with a family of nations.

Shakib Ahsan
Budelsdorf, Germany

Stop war or perish

The political leaders of America, India, Pakistan and other major countries of the world are incapable of solving the structural divides, which exist both within and between their nations. These divides can, unfortunately, be traced back to many centuries.

Jihads and wars or the threat of them will continue to create the divide that they did in the past or as they are doing at present. The only hope for our civilisation is reconciliation and forgiveness, which we have forgotten and need to learn anew.

Bypassing the political leaders, the spiritual leaders of the world's great religions should meet and endeavour to heal these rifts that have been created for selfish ends. The leaders of religions that have as their basis the doctrines or teachings like "love your neighbour as yourself" and "love your enemies" should get together and discover afresh some common ground for reconciliation.

There cannot be a better time than this to remember Gandhi's words of 1942 which seem all the more relevant today: "What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?" Another great leader Dr Martin Luther King Junior said: "We must all learn to live together as brothers and sisters or we shall perish like fools."

Omar Luther King
Kench's Trace
Shillong, India

Terrorism

The terrorist attacks on USA's installations on 11 September 2001 should be an



Pak security forces guarding diplomatic enclave in Islamabad.



US warships in strategic waters. eye opener to the USA who must look into its own history of terrorism. USA's actions of past and present are well within the memory of this generation. The shooting down of an Iranian Jumbo jet with more than 350 passengers over the Atlantic, missile attacks on Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan, massacre of a whole Iraqi generation and killing of Palestinians are recent examples. Their military action in Nicaragua, adventurism in Vietnam and Korea are still fresh in the minds of older generation. The dropping of two atom bombs in Japan will not be forgotten by civilised society. They seem to have forgotten that every action has a far more serious reaction. It reminds me about sura "Feel" in the Holy Quran which describes how small birds destroyed a huge number elephants marching to invade Makkah. The USA should thank God that the so-called terrorists did not target their nuclear reactors or any other atomic establishment, which could have created a holocaust for the whole of North America. The USA must think twice before taking any revengeful action, because, who knows, the terrorists must have kept the nuclear option open.

Both the USA and Israel believe in counter terrorism which only enhances the problem instead of solving it. Terrorism should never be supported but investigated deeply to find out the root cause as to why a few people are compelled to undertake even suicidal attacks. Justice and fair play may combat the menace of terrorism. The elimination of one Osama bin Laden will create a hundred Osama Ladens if the basic problem is not tackled. A coordinated plan by a few dedicated persons can decapitate a big population both physically and economically. Hence, I would request the US government not to jump blindly to start the war and to reconsider their plans to show muscle power. Restraint and tactfulness will surely solve the problem of terrorism.

Mohammad Alauddin
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Reconciliation, the right way

The attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September is undoubtedly barbaric, killing thousands of innocent people. It is being condemned globally with few exceptions who are the direct victims of American double standard foreign policies. We pay our heartfelt sympathy to the relatives and friends of the victims and the citizens of America suffering the unprecedented carnage.

But there arises a big question? Why, so many attackers joined in suicidal operations. Apparently it appears as a terrorist activity but one has to be very rationale in finding out the motive of such gruesome operation conducted by obviously some dedicated people with a great mission. It cannot be mere an action of whimsical decision. It is a symbolic revenge of accumulative impact of so many crimes committed/being committed by America and its allies. The policies of militarism pursued by the US have resulted in millions of death globally. Hundreds of example are there where the action of America can be treated as heinous and condemnable.

We the people of Bangladesh condemn the carnage of the "Black Tuesday" which is against humanity. But it extremely surprises us when we see that the America and its allies have declares war against Afghanistan on the basis of mere suspicion. It is a clear violation of UN charter. But America is proceeding to attack its target. The US must take responsibility for the disastrous consequences of waging such war without having credible evidence against any particular person or any particular country. It may cause severe unintended cycle of worldwide terrorism.

It is observed that America takes very quick and whimsical decision to attack any country or kill leaders and people who decline to obey or execute their plans. The reaction of the US government towards the recent tragedy reminds us of many terrible past misdeeds which contributed to neither calming down of the situation nor prevent other dangers. It simply escalated misery of innocent civilians of the victim country. But the American administration did never pay their attention to the suffering of millions of innocent people including children and women.

How long such atrocity will continue? What the children of America can realise the old people in the administration have failed to do that. The children of US in a TV programme have rightly pointed out that the American oppression on other countries is the actual cause behind the recent massacre. The American administration and its allies should get a lesson from these children who have expressed their feeling. Let the people involved in American administration apply their conscience in taking decision before attacking any country and consider its impact. Revenge would not bring the right type of dividend for America. It is to be remembered that violence begets violence.

Md Shamsuzzoha
Mirpur, Dhaka

USA should consider all the aspects

From September 11, 2001 people all over the world seem to be in a stupor not knowing what is going to happen in the coming days.

America is preparing to attack Afghanistan to punish Osama bin Laden who is thought to be the main suspect behind the terrorist attack in New York and Washington. Britain, France and a few more countries are joining the force, and the operation has been named as 'Infinite Justice'. How could the operation be named in this fashion? Infinity could be only related to the supreme Creator and He is the One in whose hands lies the 'Infinite Justice', it could not be linked with anything else.

America is determined to punish the terrorists. We agree with it, terrorists must be punished if it is proved, and those persons only; not a whole country should suffer for it. Then there are other facts which USA should try to understand. Has America tried to understand how much despair, anguish, utter desolation and all sorts of emotions prompted those 18 hijackers to embark on a mission in which along with others they also died?

So, bringing Osama bin Laden to justice will not solve the problem, America should try to weed out the causes which act behind these terrorist activities and behave justly, only then terrorism will subside. Otherwise frustrated, deeply hurt, unjustly treated people may strike again. So the answer lies in treating every nation with impartiality, kindness and sympathy.

Nur Jaha n
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

War against terrorism

The US Administration has declared war against terrorism in view of the fact that terrorists have wrought widespread destruction recently in New York and Washington DC. The caretaker government of Bangladesh has agreed to allow US forces to use our ports, airports and other facilities for the purpose of fighting terrorism. In this context I am tempted to point out that terrorism is the main obstacle to our development since political parties in power did encourage or remained just indifferent to political terrorism, corruption, fund collection, murder, hijacking and so on. Under the blessings of political godfathers almost all sorts of terrorism have been practiced in the country since Bangladesh become independent. I am tempted to point out that it may not be difficult now to combat terrorism when there is no political party in power. Though all the political parties have maintained in their election manifesto to combat terrorism but none will follow it when voted to power.

Mahbubur Rahman
Dasani, Bagerhat