

People's verdict

The election is over and people have chosen a new government. They have exercised their democratic rights and their decision is final. It is highly insulting to suggest foul play on the part of the caretaker government and the Election Commission by the Awami League.

The poll results have shown that people have opted for a change and have rejected the Awami League. As a political party of a democratic country, Sheikh Hasina and her leaders should be magnanimous enough to accept people's verdict with grace and dignity.

A student, on e-mail

The Awami League has been given a drubbing of a lifetime. They have been wiped out in the recent election. It is true that in Bangladesh we have to choose between two evils. But the positive side of this election is that people have made a point. They have made it clear that if they don't like a government, they will change it.

Hope the politicians would realise that they are expendable and can be brought or removed from power as per people's wish.

Another positive thing is this is the third general election in a row in Bangladesh. And each time the voting process is getting fairer (relatively), more secured and more organised. The caretaker government has worked hard. The presence of the armed forces has made people more secured to exercise their voting rights, especially women, who usually are scared to go to the polling stations. Could this be a tiniest step towards the right direction? Tough question to answer.

A concerned Bangladeshi

Toronto, Canada, on e-mail

The voters of Bangladesh have spoken their minds. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its allies have bagged more than two-thirds of the 300 parliamentary seats while the remainder was shared between the Bangladesh Awami League and other minor parties. Democracy has triumphed in Bangladesh!

After the recent barbaric terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon and killing of innocent victims on board a fourth aircraft which crashed in Pennsylvania, the cowardly racist reprisals against and harassment of South Asians in the US that are following in its wake, the declining US economy and the looming recession in one of the largest world economies, it feels as though there is good news that restores one's faith and makes one feel jubilant, full of hope as though a dark cloud has been cleared.

Democracy in my country has grown out of infancy and it has started to crawl on her own. A record 70 per cent of eligible voters seemed to have turned up to exercise and discharge their democratic rights and responsibilities as though they were the oppressed citizens of apartheid South Africa telling the whole world their franchise cannot be bought for money. There was also unprecedented number of young voters who were exalted to have the opportunity to elect their own legislators. Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim country in the world has embraced democracy and used it to say we are ready to hold our politicians to task if they fail to discharge their duty towards the people.

With this landslide two-thirds majority - a first in our part of the world - the new government given the political will can easily pave the way for better education, integrated infrastructure, healthcare, better law and order and of course the all important economy. Let us invest in our people and not pocket the money in the name of buying frigates and MiGs. Let us not simply move the destitute on and away from the sewer pipes of our city roads but try to find them a living, which gives them back their human dignity. Let us separate the judiciary from the executive and establish a truly independent broadcast media. Let us build many more industries and private enterprises so that we may join the ranks of Malaysia and Singapore and South Korea. Let us move forward as one nation.

Shabbir A Bashir

California, USA, on e-mail

I wonder why the Awami League is so surprised at their debacle. They only have to re-examine their policies and consider domestic terrorism, nepotism and plundering of the national resources over the past several years to understand why they were so soundly defeated. Did the party of Joyal Hazari, Dr. Iqbal and Haji Selim really expect to win?

Sheikh Hasina can indulge in all the tirade she wants, but people of Bangladesh have made one thing clear: Awami League does not deserve to represent their interests or the country even at the parliamentary level.

There is not doubt that to all who voted, this election has been the most free and fair in recent memory. International observers are also in agreement on this. Therefore, instead of engaging in further unrest to disrupt the tasks of the new government or the progress of the nation, Awami League should accept the verdict of the people.

Mojammal Hossain

Tokyo, Japan, on e-mail

Call for restraint

I was touched by Khaleda Zia's call for restraint. It is a part of our culture to show great exuberance and excitement even on small achievements. The achievement of Khaleda Zia's party is supreme by any standard and she could have justifiably called upon her millions of supporters to take out victory processions. By restraining from celebrating she has shown a high degree of wisdom and maturity, which often lack in our leaders.

Humility is one of the main qualities of great leaders. Instead of rejoicing their success, they reflect on the challenges of administering the conquered domain. By holding back from celebration, Khaleda Zia has acted like a great leader.

We hope, like a great leader, she would endeavour to administer her domain.

Yunus, on e-mail

Stop blaming others

There is a lesson to be learnt from the poll results and the Awami League should not miss it.

Before blaming the caretaker government and the CEC, Sheikh Hasina should ask herself what does it take to make millions of voters reject the Awami League.

Sheikh Hasina should ask herself which party is to be blamed for unleashing the reign of terror, for allowing a terrorist like Joyal Hazari to sit in parliament, how does the party which led Bangladesh to independence could become a den of criminals?

When the Awami League chief have reached an honest answer to these questions and acted accordingly to clean up the party, I am sure people will again turn to Awami League and vote for them.

Zeeshan Hasan, on e-mail

Reversal of fortune

We would all have felt very proud



as a nation if the Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina had congratulated Khaleda Zia after her victory, setting a unique example for the next generation. But unfortunately what is a norm in advanced nations, or even in other less advanced nations similar to us, seems to be an exception for her.

After the election results were announced, Sheikh Hasina became an object of pity, but after her refusal to accept the results on ludicrous grounds, she has become a laughing stock, whether she realises it or not.

Doesn't she realise that such decisive result shows how desperate the people were for a change? She should understand that a party can serve people not only by being in power, but also by being in the opposition. She should remember that Awami League has some very good workers who had been totally misled.

The next five years of hers, to use her own words, will not "pass off in the twinkling of an eye", but it might as well be a period of soul searching for her. Besides, after her five years of turbulent period in office, she does need some time to pause and reflect, to figure out what went wrong to cause her such devastation.

Wishing her better luck next time.

Lulu Ahmad

Dhanmandi, Dhaka, on e-mail

Voters win in the end

The Awami League lost this election solely of two reasons-- lawlessness and ignorance. They simply failed to contain terrorism that they had unleashed in the last three years of their rule. The party could have retained power on its own merits had they been able to deal with the wards of their party members. The disgraceful and unpardonable activities of the sons of Kamal Majumdar, Haji Mokbul, Hasnat Abdullah, Mofazzul Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Mosharrif Hossain and the warlordism of Joyal Hazari, Shamim Osman and

Akhteruzaman Babu brought about such a humiliating defeat. People of all walks of life voiced their concern over the deteriorating law and order situation. People in Feni were captives in their own homes because of Joyal Hazari's army. The residents of Uttara feared to come out after dark, due to Dipu Chowdhury's gang. Land and property in Narayanganj could be confiscated by Shamim Osman as and when he pleased.

The countless numbers of



murders, abductions, harassment by party members and their wards were simply ignored by the leaders and the culprits escaped justice because the ruling party felt they were above the law. But what the Awami League were most ignorant about was the power of the electorate and it was these electorates that brought the party down to its knees in one single day. Last Monday's electoral verdict was not one towards bringing BNP back to govern the country but rather ensuring that Awami League was unseated from power.

This is a lesson that BNP should also follow.

Farhan Quddus

Old DOHS, Dhaka, on e-mail

We have overcome!

Dhaka City took a festive look on our 8th National Assembly Election day. We were absolutely overwhelmed by the manner in which the citizens conducted them-

participation was 100 per cent.

It was also revealed from our survey that the overall physical facilities were satisfactory except in the case of polling booths which were aplenty and some of these were in almost in a nonfunctional situation. The addition of only one slot and a stamp in each booth could have increased the frequency of voting by about 50 per cent and our voters could have been saved from waiting for so long. We wish that were done.

This massive participation of people in the election process, we think was made possible only because of overall good management and incredible maintenance of law and order throughout the City. The presence of Army and BDR was everywhere and they conducted their designated election duties, both in and outside the centers, in a most professional manner. That helped a lot to create an atmosphere where the electorates could cast their votes in the most free and fair manner.

We have waited for so long and we were convinced that we shall overcome. This has happened only because our people have learned to act judiciously. Hats off to them.

Member, The Society for Nature and Heritage, Dhaka

Congratulations BNP

I would like to congratulate the BNP and its alliance on its spectacular victory. Viewing the results over the Internet in London, I held my breath in anticipation. Everyone wanted a change and the change was inevitable. The only fear was manipulation of the election process, but due to relentless efforts of the caretaker government and the Election Commission a free and fair election was conducted.

I hope that the Awami League chief will not pretend that she was blind and deaf to her surroundings because the people were not and they voted accordingly. The electorate opted for a change and their decision went in favour of the



their extremely positive attitude towards democratic practice, utmost patience and sense of discipline. In some centres of Ramna, Dhahmondi, Mohammadpur, Lalbagh, Motijheel, Tejgaon and Gulshan thanas we found them standing in queues for more than two hours and yet they had nothing to complain nor did they show any sign of fatigue or annoyance. Incredible indeed!

It appeared to us that the constituents were single-mindedly determined to elect parliamentarians of their own choice. Even rickshawpullers and day-to-day labourers were no exception. Their level of understanding of politics really took us in surprise, while talking to them. This is really an important observation as this

kind of democratic behaviour is a sign of maturity which is only found among the Western people.

From Our questionnaire survey it was revealed that participation rate of voters varied between 62 to 76 per cent from center to center within Dhaka 5,6,8 and 9 constituencies and the women participation was marginally less (2-3 per cent). The presence of minority voter was most satisfactory and in some booths their

newly elected government. I hope it will not let other electorate and me down.

R.H.

U.K, on e-mail

Looking at the politicians

The caretaker government brought into sharp focus the contrast between the caretaker regime and the earlier political regimes. The activities of the caretaker government have revealed the cracks and weaknesses of politicians who were elected to provide public service at official and formal levels.

One point is standing out: What has to be done (policy reforms and implementation thereof) should be carried out without delay and pushed forward wholly and fully. Political indecisiveness is a negative signal for the electorate.

For example, the demolition of cumulative illegal structures on unauthorised land, plots and spaces (slums, markets, footpaths, river banks); reorient the regulatory and prosecution services (police, municipal) to return to normal working schedules without fear or favour; apprehending the terrorists and seize illegal arms; smash rent and toll collecting cartels; using political clout to favour private business.

Political favouritism and nepotism have shaken up or overshadowed the basic virtues of the society. The visible and invisible damages will take a long time to smooth out (wasting time is against the national heritage). It is a lasting experience for the citizens of all age groups. Poor political culture has encouraged bad precedents, regime after regime, which are eroding national pride and the sense of patriotism. It is not the listing, by the leaders, of the achievements of a regime, but the overall improvement of the image of a party and of the leadership. Who run the systems? When famous names are stained, the individual leaders are ultimately responsible for failing to come to the expectation of the public.

A voter

Dhaka

Irresponsible

After the 8th parliamentary election it became clear that Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina does not care about the people of this country. Her allegation of poll rigging partially on the part of the caretaker government has proved to be baseless by many neutral organisations and poll observers.

Her decision of resorting to non-cooperation programme from 11th of October indicates that she does not respect people's verdict.

The Awami League chief is claiming that people have rejected the poll result. What she fails to understand is that the poll result is a message against misuse, nepotism, terrorism, and misuse of people's money and property. It is high time she realised that it is the people who are the sole authority to decide who would rule the country and serve them.

Dr. Mahboob Hossain

The University of Asia Pacific, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Lessons to be learnt

First of all, I would like to congratulate the people of Bangladesh for participating in one of the best held elections in the history of the country and for exercising their rights freely and fairly.

Before October 1, I thought that the influential candidates from both the parties would be able to

purchase votes from the unprivileged people, which in reality turned out to be absolutely wrong. During the election, people including deprived section applied their conscience, principles and the sense of right and wrong. I would again like to salute the Bangladeshi people for this immense act of responsibility.

The lesson to be learnt from the poll result by our former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina is that she should not have tried to sepa-



rate people into two different identities: people supporting Awami League as freedom fighters and others as anti-liberation forces (Rajakars).

As I was watching the news on TV on October 2, I saw that various people across the country were expressing their expectations of the future government. The overwhelming majority commented that they wanted a terrorism free society where rule of law will be equal for both the rich and the poor. I would highly recommend the leaders of the newly elected government to record these views. In fact these recordings should be recorded by all the politicians so that they may realize that people are not fools and they have expectations that need to be fulfilled, without which no party can win the voters hearts.

T. Rahman

Banani, Dhaka, on e-mail

Our warm congratulations to BNP

for getting people's mandate to rule for the next five years. We hope that BNP will take lesson from this election and learn that

maintain true neutrality in their future writings too. In a democracy people speak through their votes about once every four years or so. The rest of the time, it must be the news organisations who represent the views of people. Newspapers play a critical role in the checks and balance that make up a successful democratic system.

Therefore, a great service will be rendered to the Bangladesh nation if *The Daily Star* and other such news organisations can speak out with neutral voices as the new government rolls in. Our politicians have repeatedly disappointed us. Let our news agencies not do the same.

Didarul Islam

Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, U.S.A, on e-mail

A different scenario!

Let's imagine a different scenario. The Awami League has won a landslide victory in the 8th General Election while Begum Zia is in a denial mood saying we told you so, the CEC was an Awami League sympathiser, hence the poll was rigged; the commentators are busy analysing that they are not at all surprised at the results. After all, the Awami League government made Bangladesh self-sufficient in food, it tackled the flood of the century in 1998 with exceptional efficiency and superb leadership.

The pundits might also point to AL's foreign policy achievements which were astounding: from Water Treaty to CHT accord to the first ever visit to Bangladesh by the US president and the list goes on. I am sure the commentators would have also mentioned the high and sustained rate of economic growth, increase in literacy and a rekindling of the nationalist spirit, not to mention the trial of the

path ahead will be hard and

As an expatriate we get all the information through the media and according to the media the election in Bangladesh was held freely and fairly. It means that the people of Bangladesh have given their mandate and they have chosen BNP to serve the people and not rule them.

I would like to request Begum Zia to be tolerant and to respect people's mandate. She should not forget that nothing is more important and valuable than the people's love and respect.

A nation like Bangladesh can never achieve anything without strong political commitment. This is the basic requirement for Bangladesh. We hope and pray that all the politicians would be committed to build a new nation for our future generation.

Quazi Jihurul Islam

United Nations Mission in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo, on e-mail

The role of news media

Credit goes to the caretaker government for being successful in maintaining law and order during the voting. Credit goes to the people of Bangladesh for demonstrating their commitment to democratic processes. To some extent, credit also goes to all the major political parties for staying mostly within legal limits and for respecting the democratic process.

It may be prudent to be pragmatic and not be overly optimistic. The stage and the actors are all familiar. Is the playing going to be a repeat of the ones we saw in the past? I for one will not be surprised, though I will be disappointed, if the newly elected government resorts to corrupt and underhanded activities that was almost universally criticised during past regimes.

At this juncture I will find it interesting to see which voices are truly neutral. I get the impression that the editorial board of *The Daily Star* and its frequent editorial contributors are largely neutral. Let us hope that they are able to

confessed killers of Bangabandhu in a court of law.

Yet, at defeat the pundits are saying AL's failure to curb hooliganism and terrorism brought its failure. As Prof. Bodrudozza Chowdhury told BBC, it is terrorism and the terrorists that the voters rejected. Yet, I wonder why the same voters were utterly forgiving, when they returned Mr. Nasiruddin Pintu and Mr. Amanullah Aman amongst others. I am also interested in knowing what kind of terrorists Mrs. Motia Choudhury or Major (Rtd) Rafiqul Islam, the liberation war hero were. And what about the two retired Chiefs of Army Staff and the retired Navy Chief; were they also "terrorists"?

BNP and its alliance won the election because it had a superior election strategy. For which they deserve to be congratulated. I am waiting for the moment when Sheikh Hasina picks up the phone to say: "Congratulations, Mrs. Prime Minister, we look forward to cooperating with you in the 8th Parliament. May Allah help us improve the quality of life of the people of Bangladesh so that they can live in peace and dignity."

Dr. Habib Khondker, on e-mail

Our civil service

The Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) has been the victim of predatory politics for more than two decades. A good and established institution of public service has been irreparably damaged by adventurous political leaderships which invaded the scene from different directions, due to events which are passed off as circumstantial.

Quality was sacrificed before sentimentalism and we are all suffering today.

There had been hardly any change in the pattern of governance, in kind or degree, whether is in and out of the political system. There is a tug-of-war with the BCS officers and charges and counter charges are flying directly and tangentially. The 'civil' servants are caught between the devils and the deep sea.

The erosion of the BCS has not yet been documented for posterity to ponder upon. This documentation will indirectly reveal the political history of Bangladesh since independence.

It is not that bureaucracy succumbed due to internal or group weakness. It is the temptation factory which undid the whole system, built up so laboriously by the British in 200 years. How did the British keep the system clear? Colonialism!

The analysis of the separation and fall of bureaucracy in Dhaka would make interesting reading for the students of public administration and the social science. The nation has not yet found a gap or lull in the environment for some self-analysis. There are enough writers to take up this assignment. Where are the facilitators? Now that a new government has been elected, will the situation change? It has to, for the sake of the limping and divided nation, whose steel frame is in danger of warping under undue political pressures.

The nation is facing two main problems: tainted bureaucracy, and bad politics. The experienced bureaucrats need no tutorials, as they are carrying out the management, operation and maintenance work of running the government, hence know fully well what they are doing and what should be done.

A Mawaz

Dhaka

One-term MPs?

Now one-time once-use, disposable, cheap pistols are available in the local black market (smuggled) for only Tk 300 (September 11). Gunmanship is being democratised in a subtle way, erasing the economic barrier.

How about one-time MPs for a five-year slot during a period of ten years? It means that a winning candidate can be an MP for five years only and then he has to wait for five years to contest again (alternate term).

There is no bar on a losing candidate to contest again during the next term. This way the small fry can contest against the big fish, and the latter can be tamed away from naughty ideas, helping to build up political transparency.

This procedure will also build up a reserve list of capable MPs who can be selected in future by the people when needed. It is democratic in principle in the sense that it offers a fair playing field to the aspiring politicians to become MPs, for public evaluation.

There will be no shortage of experienced politicians (outside the US), and the standard of the parliament would not be affected much, as enough experienced MPs would be available to form the cabinet and opposition.

If we can have a non-political neutral caretaker government, then why not one-term MPs?

AZ

Dhaka