

Selecting the new ministers

Cabinet's performance determined party fortunes in '91 and '96

GOVERNMENT is about governance and not about rewarding the loyalists. The new prime minister must remember that it was mainly the performance of the ministers in the '91 and '96 cabinet that influenced the voters in the elections. Just recall how many cabinet ministers got thrown out on both the occasions. Khaleda Zia, therefore, must be extremely careful in selecting the men and women who will lead her government in the days to come. Selection of new BNP ministers should be based on competence, efficiency, knowledge and experience and not just on who worked how much for the party. Leaders expect to be rewarded for their service to the party. There are many who have worked hard and have suffered the excesses committed by the former government. These people will now naturally expect to be rewarded. There are those who have given resources and money and would like a chance to get it all back. There will also be pressure to divide up the cabinet into regions and internal party groupings.

These are the realities of politics and we are not naïve enough to expect that all those factors will not operate on Khaleda Zia also. While taking them in, we must introduce new factors in selecting the persons who will run our government. Modern day government is fundamentally a management task. Ministers must be good managers. Without micromanaging they must know every aspect of their ministry's work. They must be team players and be able to inspire their respective bureaucratic staff to perform better. It is not enough just to be hard taskmasters or strict disciplinarians. They must also be able to translate for their respective ministry the vision that will emanate collectively from the whole cabinet led by the Prime Minister. But above all, and this is the crux, they must remain honest and efficient. This is the second time that people taught the high and the mighty a lesson.

Finally we believe that the younger leaders should be given proportionately higher ministerial berths. Yes, there is a value of experience that we need and must respect. But in the modern world experience can be as much a burden as it can be an asset. Experienced people tend to do things in accordance with what they have learnt in the past and not according to how it is done now. Change and ability to adopt to it is a big factor in modern life. We do not always take this into account in managing our affairs. The average age of ministers in democracies around the world is going down. It should also be ours.

As we had said earlier, a government is about governance. Ability to deliver should be a fundamental criterion of judging how the cabinet is performing. In fact Begum Zia should develop a system of performance evaluation of her ministers which should be strictly observed in ensuring whether she should or should not continue with him or her. In the past we noticed that portfolios were distributed in a most random manner which necessarily impacted on the work of that ministry. The care that is taken in selecting a finance minister should also apply in the case of all others.

Political considerations will always be there in running a government. But it cannot and must not be the only consideration. Honesty and efficiency must become major factors in our future government otherwise our quality of governance will never improve. We urge our future Prime Minister to be very careful in selecting her new cabinet because, and we repeat, it is on the performance of that critical group of her colleagues that the future of her party will depend. This is the biggest and the most relevant lesson from the election just held.

Election 2001: An analysis

NAZIM KAMRAN CHOUDHURY

In most cases the number of seats won does not reflect the amount of popular votes won. Old European parliamentary systems, as well as new democracies such as South Africa and Thailand, have adopted changes in the form of party lists that give weightage to votes won, to the number of seats won. This in fact, means that political parties get seats in parliament that reflect popular will in the form of votes won in the election. This is not the case in India or Bangladesh. In India the political parties have tried to resolve the problem by making electoral alliances. The idea is to narrow the division of votes among parties of similar ideas and programmes. This has worked remarkably well in the recent few general elections, particularly against the Congress Party, who in spite of actually increasing their popular vote in the last election, saw their seats in parliament fall drastically.

The BNP was created from forces opposed to the Awami League, while the JP was created from breaking the BNP support base. The JP has always been opposed to the AL. It is on this historical note that lies the political division of Bangladesh. As we again see from the results of the '91 and '96 elections, over 60 per cent of the voters did not vote for the Awami

In 1996, the BNP lost 13.39 per cent vote share to 39.79 per cent, while the AL increased their votes to 46.53 per cent and won 7 of the 8 Dhaka seats. The JP also increased their vote bank to 7.75 per cent. The JP remained virtually constant at around 3 per cent while the rest accounted for 3.12 per cent. The difference between the AL and BNP was about 6.7 per cent. For the BNP to win in 2001 they had to cover that, and to do that, they had to get the JP and JP votes. This microscopic picture was true for the rest of the country as well. Hence the formation of the BNP-led electoral alliance.

League. It is the division of this 60 per cent, constituency to constituency, that will determine how many seats the AL will get or how many others will get. It is this theory that has given birth to the present opposition alliance.

—The author in an article published in The Daily Star on 13th April 2001.

The results to the 8th Jatiya Sangsad elections are in. We can now see how the theory behind the BNP led alliance worked. The Awami League is claiming that the elections were rigged. They cannot believe that they lost over 80 seats. Sheikh Hasina's contention is that her government has worked for the people and that the people turned out in record numbers to register their support to her party. She is absolutely right. In 1996, about 37 per cent of the votes cast went in favour of AL. This time around, AL got over 40 per cent of the votes cast. This is a record achievement for any party. Unfortunately for them, the BNP and their allies got a little more of the votes cast, but

more importantly, the alliance votes stayed in one basket. The result in the number of seats won reflects this, and the theory behind it worked to the last digit.

There is a saying that you cannot be half pregnant. Either you are or you are not. It seems that electoral theories behave similarly. In my article of April 2001, I had based my predictions solely on results and voting patterns of the 1991 and 1996 elections. In the summary, I

had predicted that the BNP alliance would win over 200 seats. At that time, to the best of my knowledge, neither AL nor any one else challenged or contradicted the theory. Perhaps they thought it was merely the ramblings of someone who has been too long under the sun on the golf course. But a comparison of the predictions and the actual results are uncanny. I would like to reproduce them below.

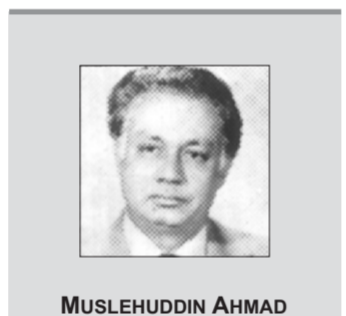
It was not a case of me being right

PREDICTION IN THE ARTICLE		ACTUAL RESULT	
1. In Rajshahi Division, BNP and JP alliance would get about 50 of the 72 seats.		49 seats	
2. In Khulna Division, the Alliance would get about 30 of the 37 seats.		29 seats of 36 declared	
3. In Barisal Division, the Alliance would get about 15 of the 23 seats.		17 seats of 22 declared	
4. In Sylhet Division, the Alliance would get about 8-9 of the 19 seats.		9 seats of 17 declared	
5. In Dhaka City, the Alliance would get all 8 seats.		8 seats	
6. In Dhaka Division, the 30 seats that had swung to AL in 1996 would return to BNP.		29 seats returned	
7. In Dhaka and Chittagong Divisions, the Alliance would get about 100 of the 149 seats.		102 seats of 138 declared	
8. Jatiya Party (Manju) would get only one seat (Pirojpur-2)		Only Pirojpur-2	

DHAKA CITY ELECTION 1991, 1996 AND 2001

ID.	Constituency	AL			BNP			JP			JI			OTHERS			Difference 96	Difference 01	JP/JI/Others	JP/JI/Others	
		% OF VOTE			% OF VOTE			% OF VOTE			% OF VOTE			AL/BNP	BNP/AL	96					01
		1991	1996	2001	1991	1996	2001	1991	1996	2001	1991	1996	2001								
183	Dhaka 4	35.82	47.11	42.34	51.46	37.31	52.05	3.37	8.38	5.20	5.24	3.37	-	6.27	3.83	0.35	9.80	9.71	15.58	5.55	
184	Dhaka 5	33.14	47.48	42.62	51.46	39.21	54.04	2.87	8.80	2.96	-	2.64	-	12.53	1.87	0.38	8.27	11.42	13.31	3.34	
185	Dhaka 6	31.31	45.26	41.46	55.96	41.36	55.38	1.88	8.13	2.46	8.18	3.02	-	2.73	2.23	0.70	3.90	13.92	13.38	3.16	
186	Dhaka 7	38.56	43.84	43.23	54.59	45.03	54.44	1.46	6.86	1.36	1.70	1.80	-	3.69	2.47	0.70	(1.19)	11.21	11.13	2.06	
187	Dhaka 8	36.17	49.42	47.64	55.66	37.15	48.23	1.44	8.93	2.90	2.45	2.22	-	4.28	2.28	1.23	12.27	0.59	13.43	4.13	
188	Dhaka 9	31.78	44.29	41.28	60.36	39.92	55.04	1.97	4.60	2.69	2.70	2.96	-	3.19	8.23	0.99	4.37	13.76	15.79	3.68	
189	Dhaka 10	37.69	47.24	41.80	58.32	40.50	54.80	-	7.07	2.57	-	3.17	-	3.99	2.04	0.83	6.74	13.00	12.28	3.40	
190	Dhaka 11	39.78	47.60	43.62	41.82	37.82	51.96	5.60	9.23	3.63	6.90	3.37	-	5.90	2.04	0.79	9.78	8.34	14.64	4.42	
Average		35.53	46.53	43.00	53.70	39.79	53.24	2.32	7.75	2.97	3.40	2.82	-	5.32	3.12	0.75	6.74	10.24	13.69	3.72	

Arafat-Peres meeting under US pressure



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

YASSER Arafat and Shimon Peres performed photo hand shake on 29 September with glum faces; they did not even look at each other though they are friends even under M-E definition. They, however, met under heavy pressure from the US. The meeting appeared necessary as the US was trying to take most of the Arab countries on board for global coalition against terrorism following the monstrous terrorist attacks on WTC and Pentagon. The meeting took place in the backdrop of these major unfortunate events in the US apart from what has been happening in Israel and Palestinian territories.

The effort to have a meeting between Arafat and Peres has been going on for some time. But Ariel Sharon postponed this meeting several times saying the meeting could not take place while the Palestinian attacks were continuing. He, unfortunately, totally forgot that these attacks were the results of his belligerent policies towards the Palestinians. There was however, substantial reduction in the violence while Peres was pushing for the meeting. When Sharon postponed the meeting last week Peres was very annoyed; he even did not attend a cabinet meeting. Not only Sharon, other right wing members of the Israeli cabinet were also against Peres's meeting with Arafat. Later, it was the heavy pressure from the US that led

to the meeting. As the preparations were already done, the meeting produced an agreement after both Arafat and Peres agreed to move forward step by step into the Tenet and Mitchell plans. But within hours of conclusion of the meeting, violence took place in the occupied areas in both Gaza and West Bank. Indeed, Israeli forces entered the Palestinian controlled area with tanks and fired on the Palestinians killing a teenager. This continued into the Intefada Anniversary day and

violence imposed earlier on the Palestinian territories. This sort of half-hearted piece meal moves would have no major effect on the violence. Israel will have to unilaterally move ahead with the withdrawal of forces from the critical areas. And if the Israeli forces are out of the scene, there could be less irritation and that may lead to reduction of violence. Along with this Israelis will have to lift the long blockade allowing Palestinians to move about and carry on with their normal work. Palestinians will also have to be al-

lowed to go to Israel for work. This will, of course, have to be done through proper checking which Israelis always do so that suspected people do not enter into Israeli territories for suicide bombing. The prison environment created by Israel in Gaza and West Bank will have to end for any reduction in the level of violence. And for some form of longer calm in the area, Israel will have to implement Mitchell plan without further delay and without waiting for pro-forma implementation of all the steps suggested in the plan. The causes are to be removed quickly, otherwise there is no chance of any reduction in violence. Sharon's 48-hour notice will not work. Sharon has been responsible for the deaths of over 800 people in the area. Through more than two-thirds are Palestinians, Israel itself lost about 170.

It has become an urgent need to

ing terrorism, will have to abandon its present policy of undue military, diplomatic and economic support to Israel. Most unfortunate though, such undue support to Israel may continue to hurt America. Let the US work decisively as President Clinton made an effort, to settle all problems in the Middle East including Iraq, then Osama bin Laden would have practically none to support him and carry on such ghastly attacks on innocent civilians.

The US should watch how its best friend the UK - among alliance member reacts on Israeli actions. Two important incidents took place very recently. One was the reported by *The Guardian* comment by a 'British Foreign office source' which created diplomatic storm as the comment depicted Ariel Sharon as 'the cancer at the centre of the Middle East crisis.' Though British Foreign Office said we 'totally dissociate our-

selves from these attributed remarks,' this created serious diplomatic tension between the UK and Israel. *Jerusalem Post* also mentioned that 'The Guardian, frequently antagonistic toward Israel, has persistently singled out Israel for blame in describing the hatred of America that led to the last week's devastation.' The other interesting note that Israel correspondent Derek Brown put in the *Guardian* that 'contrary to the laudatory view which is peddled too often, the Arab and Islamic worlds are not teeming

country as well. Hence the formation of the BNP-led electoral alliance. There was speculation that HM Ershad may be lured away from the alliance at the last moment. The opposition wisdom was that if Ershad deserted at the last moment, he would not be able to take all of his party with him, particularly in areas outside greater Rangpur. It was in the Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet Divisions that the JP vote was most important as it was in these areas that the AL and BNP was neck to neck. The opposition expectation paid off.

This time, in Dhaka City, the AL lost about 3.5 per cent vote to end at about 43 per cent. To this 3.5 per cent was added JI's about 3 per cent, JP's 5 per cent and 2.32 per cent from others to take BNP to around 53 per cent (their 1991 tally) and all 8 City seats. This, by and large, is the story throughout the country. It is a story of a theory and arithmetic. It is not a story of a stolen election. The Awami League may take pride in the fact that the voters have not rejected them. On the contrary, they have been rewarded with a larger share of the votes. If they are patient, next time around, the voters may be even more generous.

Nazim Kamran Choudhury is a political analyst and researcher.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

The root of terror is Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and Israel's terror practices to grab more land to build more settlements. Unfortunate thing is that when Israelis themselves complain of shortage of land, it imports Jews from abroad to make it a state for only Jewish people. Such an attitude followed by heavy handed measures like military strikes is bound to create violent response - whether the world calls it a terrorism, it makes no difference to the Palestinians.

clashes erupted in several areas of the occupied territories. *Ha'arav* News paper reported nine Palestinian deaths and eleven Israeli wounded since Arafat and Peres met, but the latest position is that Palestinian death toll rose to more than a dozen since Arafat-Peres meeting. Indeed, the violence flared up despite the agreement between Arafat and Peres. Now as per reports Israeli Security cabinet met and decided to give 48 hours to Arafat to stop violence, otherwise Israel would give green signal to Israeli forces to take appropriate measures against Palestinians. Next 48 hours will decide whether further meeting should at all take place. May be America will have to intervene again and ask Israel to continue the talks and take necessary steps that could lead to reduction of violence.

Latest reports show that Israelis have started easing some restric-

tioned to go to Israel for work. This will, of course, have to be done through proper checking which Israelis always do so that suspected people do not enter into Israeli territories for suicide bombing. The prison environment created by Israel in Gaza and West Bank will have to end for any reduction in the level of violence. And for some form of longer calm in the area, Israel will have to implement Mitchell plan without further delay and without waiting for pro-forma implementation of all the steps suggested in the plan. The causes are to be removed quickly, otherwise there is no chance of any reduction in violence. Sharon's 48-hour notice will not work. Sharon has been responsible for the deaths of over 800 people in the area. Through more than two-thirds are Palestinians, Israel itself lost about 170.

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selves from these attributed remarks,' this created serious diplomatic tension between the UK and Israel. *Jerusalem Post* also mentioned that 'The Guardian, frequently antagonistic toward Israel, has persistently singled out Israel for blame in describing the hatred of America that led to the last week's devastation.' The other interesting note that Israel correspondent Derek Brown put in the *Guardian* that 'contrary to the laudatory view which is peddled too often, the Arab and Islamic worlds are not teeming

with crazed fanatics seeking holy martyrdom... They feel sullied and threatened by the startling success of Israel in colonizing part of their region, and they bitterly resent America's decisive role in that process. That is why they danced in the streets of occupied east Jerusalem... These remarks are to be noted with all seriousness by the US Administration as it has to fight terrorism through global coalition. The behaviour of Ariel Sharon in terms of dealing with the Palestinians and indeed with Arabs has always been under a big question mark. Not only this, any one making any remark that has the element of support for the Palestinian and Arab cause irks Ariel Sharon instantly. Something again happened with the Foreign Office of the UK. This time it was the reported remark of British Foreign Secretary Jack

Straw in an Iranian newspaper which appeared to have 'blamed Israel for terrorism because of its treatment of Palestinians.' He was quoted to have said, 'One of the factors that helps breed terror is the anger that many people in the region feel at events over the years in the Palestinian territories.'

Indeed, Jack Straw's alleged remark was very mild. The root of terror is Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and Israel's terror practices to grab more land to build more settlements. Unfortunate thing is that when Israelis themselves complain of shortage of land, it imports Jews from abroad to make it a state for only Jewish people. Such an attitude followed by heavy handed measures like military strikes is bound to create violent response - whether the world calls it a terrorism, it makes no difference to the Palestinians. The Palestinians are fighting Israel's occupation and its terror practices. Time has come to clearly define terrorism before going for military actions against any one. Fighting occupation is no terrorism. Suicide bombing that kills innocent civilians is. The west has also to change its term - Islamic terrorists which is generally used by many. Waco (Texas) mass murder, Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the US Federal building in Oklahoma, mass killings of children in some schools in the USA, ETA's (Spain) repeated bombings and killings, recent killing of as many as 14 Parliamentarians in Switzerland, age old terrorism in Northern Ireland etc were not done by anyone belonging to Islam. Then why blame Islam while talking about terrorism? Islam is totally against terrorism and condemns terrorism in all its forms. The recent visit by President Bush to the mosque was appropriate and timely. His statement should change the attitude of those who have wrong notion about Islam.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Ambassador.

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

Celebrating victory

It's quite natural that winners would celebrate the victory. The inspired supporters would come out in streets, indulge in shouting slogans, splashing coloured water and other merry making acts. But it is not desirable that they shout to disturb others, stain passersby's clothes with their coloured water and inflict injury, mental or physical, on the defeated. And these often occur, even unintentionally, in such outburst of exuberance. So the need for restraint.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Marketing dairy and poultry products

In Bangladesh, the poultry and dairy farms are being developed at a reasonably fast rate, because a well-planned base has been established. But, more eggs produce higher prices! Now eggs are being retailed in Dhaka at Tk 14 per half (four), whereas it should be around Tk 10. Smuggling of poor quality eggs from India is rampant (DS report September 9). Who made the borders porous, if the government is aware of it?

There is a marked price difference between the market prices in Dhaka and other parts of the country, due to poor storage, distribution and marketing facilities starting right from the production centres in the villages (one main chain). This chain has many weaknesses, but the agriculture department is not very forthcoming in informing the public about the remedial measure taken by the government as a facilitator.

The main problem in underdeveloped countries is always the marketing side (from the rural areas, as the village businesspersons have no control of the transport and other facilities). This results in some monopolistic tendencies by a few private wholesalers and distributors at different levels. The government-

monitored cooperative societies have been more or less ineffective, due to malpractice, lack of technical know-how, shortage of funds and disinterest in laying a good foundation for the system to work during the take-off period. One reason is the weakness of the government department in planning the marketing side and act as a facilitator to the private marketing chains.

More investment and entrepreneurs have to be attracted to these high growth sectors in the rural development side. The public agricultural marketing extension service cannot make its presence felt. Perhaps the training of the officials is not enough. Funding is not the problem, as the capital cost can be recovered when a product is sold at a nominal profit for a period of time.

Abd Dhaka

Namaz timings

It is commendable that you print 'prayer timings', mostly on the first page of every issue, quoting the Islamic Foundation as your source of information. As our country falls under several longitudes, and as your paper is published from Dhaka, I suggest that you alter your heading to 'Namaz timing in and around Dhaka'. The azaan and the jamaat timing

that you print are those of Baitul Mukarram mosque, within which complex the head office of the Islamic Foundation is located, but the other mosques in Dhaka seldom follow a fixed time in chanting the azaan. As such, I further suggest that instead of two subheads 'Azaan' and 'Jamaat', you print the time of commencement of namaaz of each wakt, as is done by various other newspapers.

Quazi Arifur Rahman Wari, Dhaka

Sugar and newsprint industries

The previous regime cannot evade the major responsibility of not taking enough measures to save the sugar and newsprint industries in Bangladesh. The problems of the sugar industry were described in the DS report (September 20).

In the media, there have been repeated assertions that the borders were deliberately kept porous, which encouraged smuggling of cheap and low quality goods from Bangladesh, while the latter is very strict with legal imports from Bangladesh, creating a disparity of 1:100.

Now that a new government has been elected, it is hoped that they will take necessary measures to

save our sugar and newsprint industries.

A citizen Dhaka

Extend CTG duration

It has become clear to the millions of voters that the neutral, non-political caretaker government can work better on its mandate if its duration is extended from the current three months to a minimum of six months, if not longer. A referendum will indicate which way the wind is blowing. People have to get used to the idea of holding referendum, when the political leaders seem far away from arriving at national consensus.

The reasons are clear from the poor performance of the past two elected political regimes during the last ten years. The building up of the foundation of a democratic political culture, in a country twice truncated, is a dedicated task, in which the other leaders of the society, besides the politicians, have to help the politicians during this interim gap of CTG.

The political parties need a reappraisal period for stock-taking and self-analysis and firming up of the internal operating system within the political parties; to allow more elbow room for democratic practices, so long charismatic leader-

ship does not fade away. Too many icons spoil the broth.

The bug in our politics is misuse and overuse of power during the tenure of political governance, and the clustering effect of the mid-level leaders. This results in nepotism and politicisation, distancing the need for political consensus on core national issues. The second regime (1996-2001) could not improve the record, due to long gap of 21 years in governance. Also, the debased system attracts undesirable candidates, because politics looks like a profitable business, wherein the investment return appears to be feasible. Where is the investment return on the people?

The caretaker government has openly demonstrated to the public what it can do within three months from the administrative and governance point of view: transparency in decisions and actions. It is not a super-human effort, having to work with the same (dependable) civil service, because the objective was one, and it was clear: public interest, and nothing else (no political strings attached).

The question is how to arrange a referendum, for making the idea acceptable to the players. **Abul M Ahmad Dhaka**