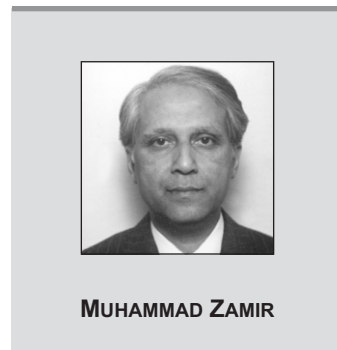


Iraq: Election is just the first step



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

Politics of confrontation

It can only spread violence and not stem it

WITH the Awami League calling yet another hartal on February 14 and 15, and the ruling coalition's decision to meet head-on any challenge by the opposition, the country's political situation remains as volatile and chaotic as it has been since the January 27 assassination of SAMS Kibria.

The government and the opposition are locked in a battle for supremacy which seems to have no place for our collective interests or welfare.

As we had seen after the 21st August incident, so we are seeing now that the ruling alliance is blaming the AL for killing its own leaders.

The agitational programmes of the opposition and the counter programmes of the ruling alliance have made sure that politics will continue to be a dangerous proposition, insofar as the people are concerned.

Civil society members felt the nation's pulse accurately when they concluded in a recent seminar that democracy is 'fighting for its life' under the prevailing circumstances.

Indiscriminate felling of trees

Environment ministry must act

YET again trees have been felled, this time at the Chittagong Medical College Hospital compound in the name of cleaning the area of unwanted foliage.

These days there seems to be an impression among many in the administration that trees can be cut as soon as they grow tall.

We would like to take the opportunity to urge the Ministry of Environment to do something about such unabashed damages being done to our surroundings.

The more frustrating thing is that felling of trees has been continuing even though there are laws in this regard with provisions for harsh punishments.

The complete indifference that we have been showing to this process of denudation demonstrates our insensitivity and greed more than our concern for a potential environmental disaster that such activities can bring about.

A general election has been held in Iraq despite a continuing campaign of intimidation and deadly violence.

It may be recalled that last year, the US did not initially want elections. They were afraid that the Shias would get the upper hand and there might be another Iran.

The Arab press, particularly in the surrounding countries, have interpreted the election as part of an exit strategy for the US and other Occu-

pying forces. They have watched with anxiety as US casualties have exceeded 1400 in Iraq and expenditure exceeded more than US Dollar 100 billion.

In this context, the comments in the press in the Middle East have been one of guarded optimism.

making these elections a prelude to the departure of foreign troops and the restoration of Iraq's sovereignty.

both 'Haaretz' as well as the 'Jerusalem Post,' was as expected. They welcomed the holding of elections and the ushering in of democracy.

Cabinet, which must subsequently obtain a National Assembly vote of confidence, the National Assembly has until August 15 to write a draft constitution.

so because they now know that the USA will not allow a militant Shia Iraq.

Jordan's 'Al-Dastour' has speculated about the electoral lists and the manner in which 'democracy and freedom' is being ushered into Iraq.

Israel's response as reflected in the press in the Middle East have been one of guarded optimism.

What is important is the need to understand that the election is just a first step. Whatever the result, it is just the beginning of a long haul to stability which will have to overcome more violence and political turmoil.

Brigadier General Doug Lute, Director of Operations for US Central Command, which runs US military operations in Iraq and

Afghanistan has shown wisdom when he commented that 'the election themselves are not going to prove to be a panacea'.

There are several tough tasks ahead. The 275 member National Assembly has to elect a President and two Deputies by two-thirds majority.

They are also insisting that they should get either the Presidency or the Prime Ministership. They have already started talking of Jalal Talaban, leader of one of the major Kurdish groups being suitable for the post of President.

The US Administration has to be

another page in the history of the Middle East. There has been a multiparty election. That is a positive.

However, the challenge comes now. The mechanical part has been partially completed. A lot remains to be done nevertheless in the context of creating institutions.

It will not be enough to say that 'we have given the Iraqis a chance to govern themselves.'

The United Nations and other important powers need to help the Iraqis, more than ever, over the next two years.

The US needs to withdraw but not in haste. A precipitous withdrawal, based on domestic public opinion will now be seen as an abnegation of responsibility.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador -- any response to mzamir@dhaka.net

POST BREAKFAST

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OPINION

When will our civil society wake up?

SYED M RAHMAN

THE brutal and cowardly killing of SAMS Kibria has saddened all the conscious and sensible people of this land and elsewhere in the world.

Even the government employees who are supposed to be neutral, at least as far as their actions and deeds are concerned, at times go out of their way to demonstrate their allegiance to the ruling party.

I may sound somewhat sarcastic but I really cannot help it anymore. As a nation I believe it is time to call a spade a spade.

There is no denial of the fact that we as a nation do not deserve to be treated by the rest of the world as unruly, inefficient, and corrupt kind of people with no self-esteem.

are aware of the name of this small piece of land called Bangladesh. No matter how cruel this is, it has never been truer before than it is now.

We all know, at end of the day, they are all diplomats who are taught in a professional manner on how to be critical without hurting one's feelings.

The point I am trying to make is the role of our intellectuals is now being seriously questioned by the ordinary public in the sense that rather than uniting these two leaders they are helping them only to get apart from each other.

These international friends have been offering 'certificates' to both ruling and opposition party camps which in turn are being used by them against each other.

I would not say that whatever these friends are suggesting is incorrect or irrelevant. My question is: are we not competent enough to identify these menaces and bring an end to these all by ourselves?

done to make ourselves proud before the world? There could be two possible answers: either yes or no.

If yes, then why our leaders are not paying heed to them? There is only one answer to that and that is they have lost their credibility!

In the case of the answer being

government, be it home minister or prime minister, made any officer from DFI, NSI, SB, or CID resign for failing to unearth the issue?

This also demonstrates that the decision makers in the government have not only failed to catch the perpetrators, they even failed to identify the officers of its intelligence and law enforcement agencies who were responsible for not being able to gather intelligence information to frustrate this attack.

expressed their total outrage and demanded investigation by independent international agencies.

Some may consider this as an over-reaction by the Kibria family. But in my view, at that point in time this is quite natural.

On the other hand, Awami League readily pointed their fingers to the ruling party for this attack without taking any time for thinking or doing the assessment.

Moreover, the leader of the opposition was so disgusted with the prime minister that she refused to allow her to come to her residence for seeing her condition.

Civil society, belonging to the AL

camp, decided to keep their mouth shut about this impolite act, and the smarter ones even staunchly supported Sheikh Hasina's stance.

The second incident is the last one on January 27, 2005 at Habiganj. Mr. SAMS Kibria lost his life as a result of the grenade attack there.

I know one does not have to be an astrologer to say what I have just said. I do not even intend to indemnify the Khaleda Zia's government from failing to find out the culprits behind the grenade attacks.

The movement by the opposition AL and its allies to unseat the government would be a futile exercise. If we take lessons from history, AL and BNP must stay together or at least reach some sincere understanding on democratic norms.

To sum up, had Sheikh Hasina allowed Khaleda Zia to pay her a visit after August 21 attack, the tension between these two leaders would have diffused substantially.

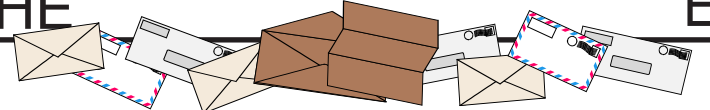
dig out the criminals. Hasina would have enjoyed more sympathy from the public in that case and surely this would have prevented the killing of Kibria in a subsequent grenade attack.

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The movement by the opposition AL and its allies to unseat the government would be a futile exercise. If we take lessons from history, AL and BNP must stay together or at least reach some sincere understanding on democratic norms.

They would have also put Khaleda into an obligation to make her machinery work more effectively to

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

On the verge of losing temper!

Firstly, I offer my condolence to the families of the five killed in the Habiganj bomb blast.

This type of heinous crime is nothing new--starting from the previous AL regime and still it's going on.

Bangla Bhai is not arrested, despite repeated orders from the prime minister? Is it that a small group of fundamentalists have become more powerful than the government, or is it that there are some people in the government who support these fanatics?

On Feb 4. Is it not enough for the government to realise how annoyed the people of the country are? It seems the answer is no, when we see our honourable LGRD minister saying things like Awami League will not get more than 40 seats next time.

Lastly, I would like to write something in reply to what Mr. Wasiuddin Khan wrote on Feb 8. Mr. Khan said the AL was adopting different unfair means to topple the government and it was not easy to topple a government with two-thirds majority.

Arafat Islam Dallas, US

Absurd

I found Mr. Kabir Mia's letter to be absurd. One wonders if Mr. Mia even read the article in question.

We, the common people of the country, have had enough of this and now we want serious and determined steps from the government.

Those of us who have been reading this newspaper and others were not surprised by this.

Niraj Agarwalla On e-mail

Talented actress

I refer to your article on Shomi Kaiser, which appeared in the online version of your daily on Monday, February 7.

I had heard about her from various online showbiz journals and didn't really pay too much attention until I read in your article that she is from the same district as I am.

Abdul M Ismail On e-mail They should remain

informed

Early morning during breakfast, I tune to my TV for news, immediately after returning from work watch news during late lunch.

This is a general trend among majority human beings out of a passion to remain updated with things happening around them.

The speaker of the parliament, certainly not an ordinary man, didn't bother to update himself before going to bed.

That is regrettable. MM Haque Jeddah, KSA

Big brother?

My heart aches, how nicely Dhaka was decorated for the Saarc summit! Suddenly, India refused to join the summit and surprisingly Mr. Samad Azad, the elderly AL leader, has appreciated the decision of India. I'm hurt!

Is there any country where there is no terrorist? And is there any country where no political assassination had taken place? In India, both Indira Gandhi and her son Rajeev Gandhi were killed.

ence gets stopped for the killing as it has been stopped now here in Bangladesh.

India has raised the issue of security and deteriorating political situation of Bangladesh, but Bangladesh took all safety measures for the guests.

China is a far more progressive country than India. But the Chinese PM has no problem visiting our country, he did not show any lame excuse.