

# A no-nonsense mechanism for reforming the caretaker government

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN AND GHULAM RAHMAN

**T**HE Chief Election Commissioner's (CEC) "getting-to-know" meetings with all political parties have apparently flopped. The CEC, however, observed that trust, understanding, and tolerance are absent among the politicians. He was dismayed to discover that there are two or three factions in each party and that they do not want to sit together. The CEC was surprised that even the partners of the coalition government set an example of such a discord. We are only surprised to see the naivete of the CEC and his lack of knowledge about the nature of our politicians. That is why the country needs no nonsense constitutional reforms in both the EC and the Caretaker Government (CTG).

Chief Election Commissioner's (CEC) "getting-to-know" meetings with all political parties have apparently flopped. The CEC, however, observed that trust, understanding, and tolerance are absent among the politicians. He was dismayed to discover that there are two or three factions in each party and that they do not want to sit together. The CEC was surprised that even the partners of the coalition government set an example of such a discord. We are only surprised to see the naivete of the CEC and his lack of knowledge about the nature of our politicians. That is why the country needs no nonsense constitutional reforms in both the EC and the Caretaker Government (CTG).

Prior to attempting for any consensus reform package for the EC and the CTG, the nation may be well served by participating in the proposed convention scheduled for November 2005 to be organized by the so-called "Tuesday Group of Diplomats" (TGD), and make it look like a home initiated event. Unfortunately, the TGD initiative for such a convention has already caused alarm among BNP stalwarts, for reasons not easily discernible. The TGDs, representing the wealthiest democracies of the world, have planned to invite people

from all walks of national activities and possibly some foreign guests, totaling nearly 400 or so participants. On paper, it looks, prima facie, a grand idea -- an exercise of academic and intellectual interest as well as a forum for harvesting innovative ideas while divesting those that seem outmoded and unworkable. The format should be such that the diplomats must keep their lips sealed and follow diplomatic norms.

The TGDs held such a conference prior to the general elections of 2001. One wonders why this time the Foreign Minister became so acerbic in his reaction against it. Last time, prior to 2001 elections,

countries (which many of us also call home) educate our children in schools, colleges, and universities, run businesses and corporations, provide medical services, work as attorneys in courts, and discover patents in science, medicine and technology. When it comes to intelligence and ingenuity, we stand at least on equal term and on equal footing on any area of human endeavour. So, they would not act savior-faire to tell us what to do? But there is no harm to listen to what they may have to say.

We live in an ever expanding Internet era and ever opening "global village." Foreign experts can write a book about our system of

look at the growing generations of politicians grooming in college and university campuses, there is not much hope that they will display many democratic values and the rule of law as their times are advancing. So, the onus is on the older statesmen to harvest the few openings that come along to steer the country to a stable democracy and frictionless economic prosperity.

The CTG concept, although home-grown, is a unique feature in our evolving democracy innovated to overcome the problem of questionable integrity of our politicians and for holding a credible free and fair poll for orderly transfer of power. Unfortunately CTG's overstepped

and the stalemate continues unresolved, the following "no nonsense" mechanism to form a "Non Political Council" (NPC) to appoint the Chief Advisor and other members to the interim CTG may be added to the streams of other competing thoughts.

The formation of NPC is necessary (but not sufficient) to produce a panel of three nominees for a position of the Chief Advisor and 20 nominees for 10 advisory positions in the CTG. The members of the NPC and the nominees for Chief Advisor and 10 other advisors must be politically neutral with an impeccable record of unblemished integrity and character (e.g no criminal

parties. In other words, an opposition party, say X, which received 15.21 percent popular votes will submit a list of 30 eligible neutral persons for acceptance by the ruling FPA of which 15 will be selected by the ruling FPA for party X's representation in the NPC. For acceptance of FPA's nominees, the same procedure would apply except that the opposition parties would act as a combined group.

Once the NPC is formed, its members will elect a panel of 3 nominees for a position of Chief Advisor and 20 nominees for 10 Advisors to the CTG. They may consider names from within and outside the NPC. If they fail to finalise a panel by consensus, a "two thirds majority rule" would automatically be invoked. The NPC would then present the panel to the President, who would ask the PM and the Parliament's opposition leader (POL) to give him two choices out of three for the CTG Chief.

The President will appoint the person as the Chief Advisor common to the selections by the PM and POL. The Chief of CTG then will fill in the 10 positions of advisors by consulting the PM and the POL by a similar procedure adopted by the President to appoint the CTG Chief Advisor. The mechanism must then be passed by the parliament as an amendment to the constitution thus fulfilling both the necessary and sufficient conditions to reform a Caretaker Government.

The longer the FPA delays the process of negotiating a consensus reform package, the thornier it will be to accept the inevitable. All ideas, good or not so good, wherever they emanate from, should be looked into dispassionately and the good ones must be harnessed. This underscores what freedom of choice and thought in a democratic process are all about.

The authors are, respectively, Professor of Economics, Eastern Michigan University and former Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh.



All health information to keep you up to date

## Occasional fasting--an amazing prescription

**O**NCE Benjamin Franklin said, "The best of all medicines are rest and fasting". In recent times researchers have started saying about scientific reasons to go on occasional fast. A series of studies from Dept of Neuroscience Research at the National Institute of Ageing (NIA), USA, suggest that people can gain significant health benefits both physical and mental by occasional fasting throughout the year. On the basis of their study on animals, they found that there is also lower risk of developing age-related brain disorders which includes Stroke to Alzheimer's disease. A healthier brain is just one of the benefits of this kind of eating i.e., occasional fasting. This seems to be also like exercise. It sharpens the body's ability to respond to stress. Exercise is associated with lower heart attack -- in their studies it has been found that intermittent fasting is more effective at lowering heart rate and blood pressure. The benefits of fasting are imperative in improving a number of physical diseases, including those of the digestive systems, such as chronic stomach-ache, inflammation of the colon, liver diseases, indigestion, and conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure and many other problems.

In fact fasting is the world's earliest natural healing process. Knowing when and how long to fast is also important. It activates an amazing cleansing process which reaches to each and every cell in the body. There are obviously a number of common metabolic changes during fasting. After restricting food intake for many hours, enzymes stop entering the stomach and travel instead into the bloodstream, where they demolish all sorts of waste matter. Physiologically, all organs and glands of the body get a much-needed rest and cells are not only purified but also revitalized, especially the stomach, small and large intestines, pancreas, gallbladder and liver. This ultimately means that the entire gastro-intestinal tract is swept clean. 'Liver, the large metabolic factory', one of the most important organs of our body, can also spend more time cleaning up and producing its many new essential substances during this period. Immunity is being upgraded and health is naturally re-established. If health is carefully maintained after that, you will be in a good shape.

From Socrates to Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, all believed in fasting therapy. Most spiritual teachers also recommend fasting as a constructive and useful device. Fasting is a way to increase our natural resistance to disease. When animals are sick, they fast. Armenian doctor, Dr. Grant Sarkisyan, had treated many patients effectively with fasting therapy. There are some physicians who advise their patients to skip meals, sometimes for a few days, before prescribing them a controlled diet. According to Dr. Barsilus, a Swiss physician, "The advantages of hunger as a remedy exceed those ingesting medicine several times". Dr. Mark Mattson of NIA, USA and his colleagues have found occasional fasting (eating freely one day and refraining from eating the next) offers even greater benefits than radically cutting back on calories on a daily basis.

Undoubtedly, fasting is a multidimensional experience. Throughout the centuries, many doctors have treated different types of patients with fasting, realising that ignorance may be our greatest disease. This is also true that fasting is not appropriate for many ailing people; but for the rest it's going to be a good habit. In the near future, certainly one of the most overlooked but most valuable modes of healing that will be rediscovered will be fasting.

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did the FM react the same way and rebuke the Tuesday Group against holding such a convention on the soil of a sovereign nation? Were there any topics of conference presentation by any foreign guests or diplomats which have intruded into our sovereign constitution? Were there any derogatory comments or remarks made by any foreign diplomats on any provisions of our constitution? Now about the proposed November 2005 convention: did the Tuesday Group publish or distribute any booklets and the nature and topics of discussions in the proposed convention? Have they placed any demand or recommendations about the modus operandi of reforming the Election Commission (EC) and the Caretaker Government? If they did, then they should be asked to leave our soil immediately. Otherwise, what the big fuss is about?

We have no reason to believe that the TGD would be a player with our intensely partisan and acrimonious political playground, and risk our market for their goods and our goodwill. Many of us living in their

government, debate in their academic institutions or in international forums on our democratic process and constitutional matters and we learn from them or we, in our homeland participate in a convention for crisscrossing and ventilating provoking thoughts and ideas. Isn't the latter one preferable? Hopefully, good ideas will percolate through the process for our serious review and further discourse. Nothing else, we still win by having an academic exercise and thus a tradition will set afoot.

We solicit foreign expertise in all areas in which we lack experience and skill. All nations do that. So, what's wrong in holding a convention of "think tank and academic in nature" devoted to making democracy work where the participant will be our own citizens, and may be some foreign guests? If nothing else, this offers a venue where "current tangles of no talking between ruling party leaders and opposition politicians" may create a nexus leading into building a bridge of trust and mutual appreciation which does not exist now. When we

activism under Chief Justice Latifur Rahman prior to the election of 2001 culminated in the current waves of controversy about "how mixing judiciary and politics" can be counterproductive to anotherwise well conceived idea. Further, because of such a provision in the constitution, people of lesser integrity are already getting appointments in higher judiciary on the basis of their political lineage and loyalty than ever before.

Thus the 14-Combined Opposition Parties Alliance's (COPA) demand for Chief Advisor to the CTG from a wider circles through dialogue and consensus does not seem to have been born out of a self-aggrandising prophesy. The COPA seems to sincerely spare the higher judiciary from the controversy of politicising it. This is consistent with the Supreme Court's 12-point directives for separation of judiciary, appointing of judges on the basis of honesty, efficiency and talent, and freeing the judiciary from politicisations. If the Four Party Alliance (FPA) continues to express their nonchalance to the proposals

record, no back money holder, and no loan defaulter etc.). Political parties which submit nominees with false information, if detected, will lose their representation in the NPC.

The "NPC" may be composed of 100 (or some other magic number) Bangladesh citizens to be nominated by political parties based on the percentage of votes received in the 2001 election. For example: a party, which received at least 1.0 percent of popular votes regardless of its representation in the Parliament, would be assigned to nominate one member in the NPC; a party receiving 3.79 percent votes will nominate 4; another party receiving 27.49 percent will nominate 27. Any party which received less than 1.0 percent popular votes will have no representation.

If one wishes to make the selection of NPC members somewhat more participatory, one may ask each eligible political party to nominate two candidates for each membership position in the NPC for review and consideration by other

# Travels in Pakistan: Sorry, I do not speak Urdu

HISSAM KHANDKER

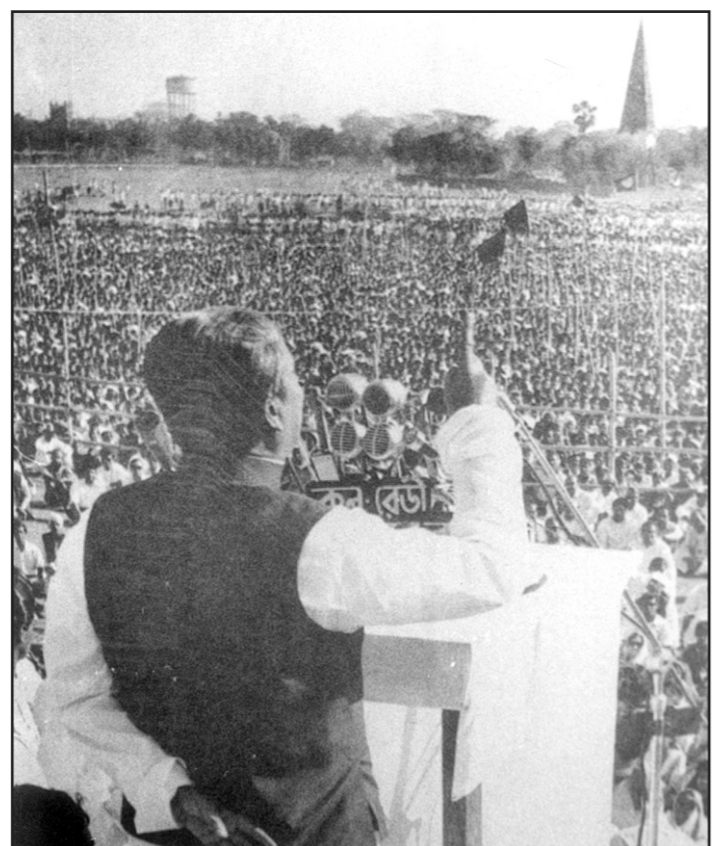
**R**ECENTLY I went to Pakistan primarily because I consider myself an amateur history enthusiast and wanted to see Lahore with its famous Mogul monuments, and overindulge on its much acclaimed food. I was not disappointed with either.

What struck me while traveling in Pakistan was the continuing underlying perceptions that Pakistanis have toward us Bangladeshis. Born in 1970, I am from a generation whose knowledge of the war of independence and its legacy is based primarily on stories told by parents and grandparents regarding the sequence of events from 1947-1970 that led to the devastating war of 1971. I sincerely wish to avoid labeling those I meet during my travels, and choose to believe that the views I came across were based more on years of biased political propaganda regarding 1971, than on there being a desire to be intentionally malicious.

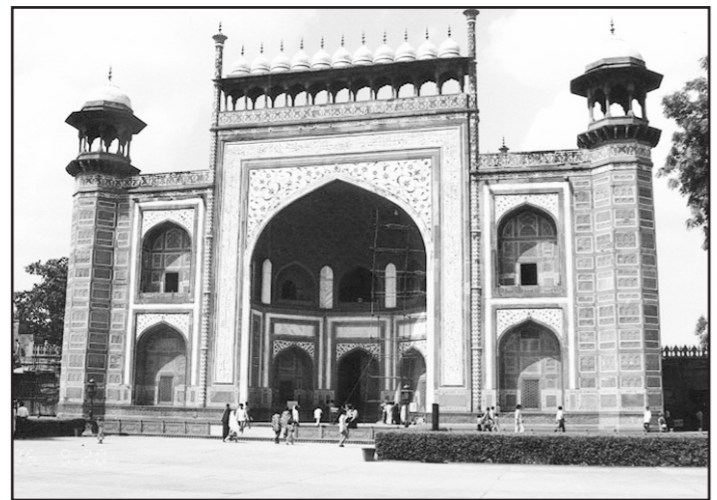
What was noticeable was that Bangladesh in conversation continues to still be referred to as "East Pakistan," the end of the war of independence as the "Fall of Dhaka," and it is expected that Bengalis speak Urdu. The cause of the 1971 war of independence is believed to be purely the interference of India and that the war would not have been lost by West Pakistan was it not for this. There continues to be an amazing lack of self-reflection in today's Pakistan with regards to the contribution and sacrifices made by Bengalis in the struggle leading to partition in 1947, and the reasons that led to the war of 1971.

I do not wish to lay all the blame on this lack of consciousness just on Pakistan, we as Bangladeshis continue to politicise 1971, instead of addressing the terrible injustices and humanitarian crimes that were perpetuated on an unarmed civilian population, we debate who qualifies to be the "Father of the Nation" and the re-naming of public roads and buildings. The war of 1971 in essence was a populist uprising against a continuing brutal exploitation, those that suffered the most were civilian Bengalis that fought for the ideals of freedom and in turn inspired that world with their courage. Thirty-four years on we seem to have lost the spirit to assert oneself against a manifest wrong and the ideals of an inspired generation that fought so valiantly have faded to apathy.

When I visited the Lahore museum there was a remarkable collection of Gandhara sculptures, probably the world's finest Moghul miniature paintings, a section on Bengali painters, and a museum wing dedicated to "independence." The "independence wing" reviews the independence movement against the British Raj from 1857-



Sheikh Mujib's March 7, 1971 historical speech: The struggle this time is the struggle for freedom...



Lahore: Famous Mogul monuments.

1947, however it lacked any mention of the contribution by Bengalis and the political movements in Bengal during this period. I was traveling with my 12-year-old cousin who went up to our guide and asked if there was a section on 1971. There was none. Bengal had effectively been swept under the political rug.

However, what inspired me to write on my travels was an article I read in Pakistan's Dawn newspaper titled "Sheikh Mujib Wanted a Confederation: US Papers" by Anwar Iqbal published on July 7. With great gusto, Mr. Iqbal's article

refers to the recently de-classified US State department papers dealing with the Nixon and Ford presidencies and the 1971 war in Bangladesh. Several points struck me about the article, the first being there was no reference to the elections of 1970 and the subsequent denial of erstwhile East Pakistanis (Bengalis) in Pakistan's political process that so influenced Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's policies, what was highlighted was that "Mujib wanted a confederation."

The article then proceeded to reference: "several Bangladeshi

scholars as acknowledging the official Bangladesh Government figure of 3 million killed during and after the military action as not authentic," and state that the Bangladeshi ambassador to Washington Mr. Shamsheer M. Chowdhury "acknowledged that Bangladesh alone cannot correct this mistake."

The author of the article then states that "almost all scholars agree that the real figure was somewhere near 26,000 as reported by the Hamoodur Rahman commission, and not three million, the official figure put forward by Bangladesh and India."

The article also references a Prof. Sharmila Bose, "a Bengali herself and belonging to the family of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose" as having extensively researched the 1971 war and concluded: "The Pakistani army personnel raping Bengali women was grossly exaggerated" and "All parties in this conflict embraced violence as a means to an end, all committed acts of brutality outside accepted norms of warfare."

The author with eloquence diminishes the unspeakable atrocities perpetrated in Bangladesh and seemingly reasons that the war of 1971 was merely an unfortunate and easily resolved minor internal problem, instigated by India, as "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman wanted to have a form of confederation" -- a sanitised view that seems commonly accepted in Pakistan.

As far as I am aware the only readers comment published by Dawn with regards to this article was published on July 11 written by a reader who titled his reply "Pakistan-Bashing" by Mahdi Masud and seemed to feel Mr. Anwar Iqbal's article was unfairly critical of West Pakistan's role in the 1971 war. Sadly, to my knowledge, the Bangladeshi mission and its political wing in Pakistan has as yet to voice an opinion on Mr. Anwar Iqbal's article even though the article directly quotes our ambassador to Washington.

It would be wrong of me not to acknowledge that during my stay I found Pakistanis extremely hospitable, with an incredibly rich cultural heritage spanning many millennia. Yet regrettably I am left feeling that if Pakistanis after thirty-four years still do not understand 1971, then far greater than their failure, it is a powerful reflection of our failure as Bangladeshis towards those who suffered, sacrificed, and gave their lives for our independence and the rights of self-determination we enjoy today.

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# Kyrgyzstan: What does the future hold?

SAAD S. KHAN

**T**HE first step towards democracy was successfully accomplished in Kyrgyzstan on July 10, as promised by the new leadership, and in the eyes of 800 or so international observers, they were by and large free and fair. And if election process were an end in itself, one would be relieved by the outcome. But if election is a means not an end in itself, then one would have to look further.

After all, the Kyrgyz nation has given so much sacrifices in life, liberty and property during the Soviet rule and then under the despotism of Askar Akayev, not solely for the purpose of having a grandiose electoral exercise costing millions of dollars in a nation where 40 percent live well below the poverty line. All they wished was to have a say in governance, rule of law, an end to rampant corruption, and a few glimmers of hope for a decent standard of life. Whether the Bakiev-Kulov duo will be able to do it, is the million dollar question.

To begin with, even the 369 OSCE observers have not rated the elections as excellent or perfect but have given varied ratings from "good" to "very good." They have agreed that the campaign was largely fair and on a level playing field. No harassment for non-official candidates was carried out, although the number of candidates was reduced from 21 at the beginning of the hustings to only six on election day, as one after another candidate was knocked out on technicalities.

The two main candidates, Kurmanbek Bakiev and his arch rival Felix Kulov, made an alliance that if the former became President, the latter would be nominated the Prime Minister, so effectively the electoral exercise was reduced to a formality. After the fifteen stifling years of Akayev's rule, Bakiev's interim administration was not at all unpopular and the five remaining presidential contenders were political nobodies. This partly explains the Bakiev landslide of 89 percent of the popular vote -- a figure reminiscent of the Communist era farcical polls results.

Now, whether the relative fairness in elections, by Central Asian standards, not European ones, owed to a genuine commitment to democracy or to the fact that their victory was a foregone conclusion, remains to be seen by subsequent conduct. After all, the same Bakiev as Prime Minister and the same Kulov as Security Minister had been responsible for killing of unarmed civilians in Aksy (2002) and elsewhere, as loyal lieutenants of a ousted dictator.

The electorate of 2.5 million voted all across the country as well as at polling stations in 11 Russian cities and 28 Kyrgyz embassies. The presidential hopefuls had to be Kyrgyz nationals, had to pass a test in Kyrgyz language, deposit \$2,500 as security, and gather 50,000 signatures from supporters to be fielded as candidates. The OSCE

**The Kyrgyz nation is in a state of flux and transition, and greater tact and statesmanship is called for at the hour. The supporters of losing parliamentary candidates of the March electoral farce that had instigated the chain of events leading to the "tulip revolution," occupied the Supreme Court building for a month, the election related violence claimed many lives, a leading politician was recently murdered in broad daylight in Bishkek...**



Bokara: A Kyrgyz landmark

PHOTO COURTESY: MADA.KTH.SE

noted some problem with these conditions and had also expressed concern at some isolated incidents of ballot box stuffing, problems during counting and, at some places, implausible sudden rise in turnout figures, but welcomed Bakiev and Kulov's decision to resign from their posts temporarily before elections.

The promise of a fair and corruption-free democracy made by Bakiev notwithstanding, it has been noticed all over the world that the leaders with the best of intentions tend to concentrate power unless there are checks and balances within the system, including an active and vibrant citizenry. The Kyrgyz nation's courtship with democracy is only weeks old and a proper democratic culture takes time to evolve.

In the meantime, the world community should try to help Kyrgyzstan in embracing a sustained democracy, lest it falls within the Central Asian political culture of Stalinist governance, and the fate of Kyrgyz nation gets sealed for another how many decades.

The first steps to be taken towards constitutional reforms are strengthening the Supreme Court, constitutional changes to transfer many powers to the office of the Prime Minister to create a balance between the two apex offices of the state, and new parliamentary elections, as this March's parliamentary elections were no more than a joke.

The new President has a number of challenges before him, one, the fate of the US military bases, that

breakdown of stability. But these pangs are not unusual during such transitional phases after long and dark spells of dictatorship. A strong will on the part of the leadership and the nation will make these shreds of turmoil a mere passing reference in the history textbooks.

New President is a combo of an economist, an electrical engineer, and a soldier. Born on August 1, 1949 in Yeyit village, near the Southern city of Jalalabad, he got higher education in engineering from Russia, where he met his future wife at the Technical Institute, before joining the army in 1972. He came back in 1979, along with his wife and two sons, to resettle in Kyrgyzstan. He joined politics in 1990 and became Governor of Jalalabad in 1992, and held many positions until he became the Prime Minister in 2001, and leading opposition figure the following year, when he resigned after falling out with President Akayev.

How long can Bakiev remain a bedfellow with erstwhile foe, Felix Kulov is a moot point. In the Central Asian political culture, will he be able long to keep his sons, Marat, Deputy Chief of National Security, and Maksim, a private businessman, from becoming shadow presidents? A combination of fate and circumstances has placed onerous responsibilities on his shoulders.

The writer is an Oxford-published author and a widely read analyst on politics, law, and governance in the Muslim world.