

## Stop this farcical reshuffle



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NAZRUL ISLAM

**T**HE reshuffle in the civil and police administration so far has been absolutely a part of a sinister design to befool the countrymen and rig the upcoming general elections. The aim of the hurried changes is nothing but an attempt to create an impression in the public mind that the caretaker government is taking measures to de-politicize the highly politicized administrative machineries.

But let us see who are behind the ongoing reshuffling of the administration. It is the establishment secretary who is mainly responsible for bringing changes in the administration. The man who is sitting at the helm of the Establishment Ministry is an identified and well-known pro-BNP-Jamaat element. He is among one of the beneficiaries of the 2001

elections and became secretary from deputy secretary just within three and a half years.

He along with his other colleagues who are also now sitting in various key positions have been reached the highest positions of the administration, superseding their seniors, and trampling the set rules and regulations of promotion. Just a couple of days before the departure of the BNP-Jamaat government, the establishment secretary was posted there in a calculative manner.

And I would say he is a loyal person who is showing his cent percent integrity to his masters BNP-Jamaat leaders. He was prized by the BNP-Jamaat government and in return, he is repaying them by serving their purposes sitting at the top of the administration implementing their designs. I salute him ... at least he did not

forget his masters.

I think, none except the immediate-past ruling parties' leaders, would raise objection in making the administration and Election Commission neutral for holding a credible election. Neutralisation of the administration and Election Commission is a must to hold the election in a free and fair manner.

But both the administration and Election Commission were so much politicised that it is very difficult to de-politicise it in an arbitrary way.

It is the collective responsibility of the caretaker government's advisors who are oath-bound to remain neutral and not favour or dis-favour anybody in any circumstance, to neutralize the administration and Election Commission. They would have to create a level-playing field where all the political parties find an equal opportunity. The electors also would have to

find an atmosphere where they can exercise their voting rights without any intimidation and obstruction.

This year, it would be the toughest job for the advisors to create a level playing field due to a number of reasons:

(1) The civil and police administrations have never ever been politicized like the past five years.

Not only the identified dissidents, but also hundreds of neutral officials and employees were persecuted, deprived from promotions, and in many cases sent homes from their services.

(2) Those who were directly or indirectly associated in the 2001 elections (mostly of 1979 batch) were unduly given benefits through giving promotions, lucrative postings and allowing them to do whatever they wanted. All of them are now secretaries of the government. Soon after the 2001 elections, they were brought to the key positions of the administration and during the last five years they have prepared the administrations in such a way that none except the officials of their choices could go to the key positions considered to be vital in manipulating the election results.

(3) In doing so, they harassed and deprived many officers from

their due promotions, and the deprived ones are apparently not in a position (such as secretary, joint secretary or deputy secretary) to go to the key posts if the caretaker government does not take special measures to elevate them in the positions that they deserved in a normal course.

(4) In 2001, the caretaker government chief Justice Latifur Rahman assumed the office having a mindset and doing a lot of homework (probably in collusion with the then dissidents in the administration). That is why, within an hour of his swearing-in, he had transferred a dozen of officials and placed officials of his choice at the helm of the civil and police administrations. And after setting the officials of his choice at the top of the administration, he did not have to look into the affairs of the changes that were made by them. But the scenario is totally different this year.

So far the changes in the administration were no doubt made at the dictate of the bureaucrats sitting at the top positions both at the President's Office and Establishment Ministry. Some of the political parties dubbed these changes as eyewash, but actually these were done to achieve a

definite goal i.e. help a particular group reap benefit by manipulating the election process.

Because, in the existing electoral system, the returning and assistant returning officers, presiding and polling officers, and members of the law enforcing agencies have ample opportunity in altering the election results, particularly at the constituencies where there would be a neck and neck fight.

That is why the caretaker government has to bring changes in the civil, police and other administrations in a judicious and even-handed manner if it actually wants that a free and fair election is held in the country. They would have to listen to the deprived officials and consider the demands placed by the opposition judiciously.

During the 2001 election, the then opposition parties did not have to place any demands to create a level-playing field in the administration. The caretaker chief himself had taken the responsibility. But this time, the head of the caretaker government, who is also the president himself, is a partisan man.

Moreover, the president has kept all the vital portfolios and divisions

under him. It is naturally assumed that the president would act under the guidance of the officials of the President's Office and Establishment Ministry where all the key positions are being controlled by the BNP-Jamaat elements. On the other hand, the parties those are demanding to create a level-playing field do not have access to the President's Office or the Establishment Ministry. They are barking on the streets only. Is it

credible one. People would not accept any election if it is held without creating a congenial atmosphere and level-playing field. Without creating level-playing field, any attempt to hold election would only push the country towards chaos and uncertainty.

It is the obligation of the caretaker government to ensure an atmosphere where everybody can participate in the election. The advisors might have different opinions but they have got an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to present the nation a free and fair election.

And in doing so, they must not have to rely on the bureaucrats sitting at the helms of the administration. They should first remove the partisan elements from the offices of the President, Establishment Ministry, and Home Ministry. They must stop the ongoing transfer of the officials designed to produce a pseudo impression of creating level-playing field.

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## All in the family

MANZURUL MANNAN

**T**HE extraordinary political crisis that engulfed the country on the eve of handing over of power to caretaker government has established a simple fact of political reality: our political leadership has agreed only to make the country politically, economically, culturally, and religiously more vulnerable.

The deep distrust among politicians hinders idealism and symbolic consensus for the good governance. Politicians are talking in the language of violence and letting loose their supporters to launch a mob beating. The present crisis is the outcome of the gradual failure of institution-building over the period of 35 years of independence.

Politicians are striving for democracy in which they have little faith. Again and again in our political history, politicians questioned the basic political process which not only groomed them, but also buttressed their existence. Whoever -- Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jatiyo Party, etc -- forms government, they work to erode institutions and organizations of state, which in turn contribute to weaken the democratic foundation of the state.

We have seen that political parties in government come and go, but their myopic policies and political culture create dynamics that further grind down the institutional values. Over the last 35 years of independence, a political pattern has evolved in which both Awami League and BNP are the opposite sides of the same coin.

When they hold power, they work to erode constitution and institutions under the facade of protecting those. And when they are in opposition; they voice to protect constitution in most undemocratic way manifested in hartals and street violence. They rely on people's vote to form government, but in reality it is the people who ultimately suffer.

Politicians have introduced contradiction into ambiguity to shape the democracy. The contradiction is the result between the

public image of political families nurtured by cultural consideration and state institutions that require flourishing of professionalism.

The families of triumvirate Zia-Khaleda-Tareque or Mujib-Hasina-Joy enjoy considerable public support and many vote not only for Awami League (AL) or Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), but also to Khaleda or Hasina. These supports create a condition for the rise of tribunes cheered on by kin and loyalists whose relationship is shaped by a culture of primordial loyalties.

The family and kinship ties are so deeply rooted in it that it is neither surprising nor necessary Machiavellian to observe that families have used parties to enhance their personal standing and influence, and that parties have relied on kinship structures instead of binding ideologies and principle. Except Zia regime (1977-1981), the core decision-making structure of all regimes of Mujib (1971-1975), Ershad (1982-1990), Hasina (1996-2001), and Khaleda Zia (1990-1996, 2001-2006) are influenced and controlled by their kin. The prevalence of kinship is not only observed at national level, but also it pervades even at the local level politics.

The politicians nurture and reproduce the kinship values at various strata of democratic institutions. Major political parties, which vow to establish democracy, lack inner-party democracy because of the family based kinship politics. Family politics spawn despotic behaviour and authoritarianism instead of democratic practice within political parties. Ironically, it is the people who vote for despotic political parties through the electoral system that Bangladeshi polity offers.

Moreover, the problem of democratic governance is that political parties with respective tribunes form governments. Primordial loyalties and kin politics influence the core decision-making structure of these political parties. When political party assumes the responsibility of government, they establish political supremacy over state-

institutions and public servants works at the behest of political tribunes. The implication of kinship has two deep implications for democracy and state institutions.

First, ruling parties transform the core decision-making structure of government into a political club. Such political club is glued by kinship and primordial loyalty only to alienate many dedicated party members whose contribution to party development is significant. Many become disenchanted as they do not get access to political club, resulting in the inner party revolts. Revolting members question the credibility of the party leadership. Further, the family domination erodes their support base and they lose their credibility in governing the country, deterring in formation of consensus for institutional stability.

Secondly, the dominance of political families and their loyalists at the hub of power center produce a negative impact on the healthy development of achievement oriented democratic institutions. When tribunes form a government, they insist public servants to express their loyalties to kin and families of tribunes rather than to people.

Their loyalties to tribunes play important role in career advancement rather than the application of their professional judgments, skills and expertise. The future career of public servants depends not on their professional performances and experience, but on the degree of loyalty to the tribunes and their families. This has in turn deeply polarized bureaucracy into partisan politics. Now inefficient but loyal public servants are rewarded.

As a result, tribunes protect corrupt kin to accumulate wealth and allow kin to interfere in the governance of the state. Thus, political families play instrumental role in pulverizing state institutions. The continuous interferences make the state dysfunctional and unaccountable to people. Overall inference is that the state's prime institutions turn into defaulters to banks and corruption encompasses the police and judiciary. In the process, the moral authority of the state and govern-

ment to rule the country is being questioned.

The inability of tribunes to go beyond the narrow boundary of family and party politics dissuade them from understanding that democracy nurtures political plurality and requires the creation of cultural and political space for accommodating diverse and difference of opinions. However, in our case, democracy means the right to overthrow, negation of opinions, absence of respect, imposition of personal whims on other, etc.

Today, democracy means removal of opposition from power and not the selection of competent persons among the competing candidates.

On the contrary, Bangladesh is a pluralistic society that is built on several competing value systems. However, ironically these competing value systems spawn a process in societies which fail to evolve value pluralism embedded in idealistic consensus.

So long the present system of democracy continues to evolve, Bangladeshis will experience the unabated accusations and character assassinations by one tribune against the other and the legitimacy of government will be questioned at regular interval. For example, in 1990, political parties mobilized people against Ershad regime and he was forced to resign. In 1995, BNP was coaxed to go for election only to experience defeat in 1996 election. In 2001, Awami League thought they would win the election and refused to accept the election result. In 2006, violence was unleashed only to destabilize the nation.

In the final analysis, until and unless all interested parties and professionals meet together for consensus in deciding economic, political, cultural, and religious discourses for the future governance, it is the people who will continue to be at the mercy of the political whims, and democratic values will further erode.

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**JOSHUA HOLLAND**

**I**N less than a week, Americans will go to the polls. It could be like other recent elections -- votes that recalled Shakespeare's line about a lot of "sound and fury, signifying nothing" -- or it could be an immense, cleansing wave washing away the worst period of one-party rule in American history.

The two parties will do what they will, but ordinary citizens will largely determine which scenario will play out.

It may well be a historic moment. Next week has the potential to usher in a rare electoral realignment -- the kind of political shift that comes about once in a generation. The administration's disastrous consistency in everything it touches, from Iraq to Katrina to Terri Schiavo, could do for the progressive movement what Reagan's "revolution" did for the New Right -- move a whole generation of voters.

Analysts from across the spectrum agree that the Republican coalition is facing a perfect storm; it's not just the meat grinder Iraq has become and the boondoggle that's plagued its reconstruction. It's not just a host of scandals -- sexual, financial, and electoral. It's not just an economy that's growing in aggregate but hasn't put more money into most people's pockets. It's not just the four million Americans who have fallen below the poverty line or the five million more Americans who lack health insurance since Bush was sworn in six years ago.

It's all of those things combined with a profound sense of insecurity as health care and tuition costs skyrocket, jobs are shed overseas, Americans are neck-deep in debt, and the country's global leadership is being challenged even by staunch allies. The reality is that these things are by no means all the Republicans' fault. But reality is

essentially coupled with limitless extra constitutional power and influence peddling by the Hawa Bhaban are living testimony to the dreadful record in running the affairs of the state and aversion to live up to the assorted pious election pledges.

The onus must necessarily be on the last ruling coterie because when at the helm of power our politicians indulge in unrestrained, endless and ad nauseam misrule, misdeeds, infractions, and wrongdoing. The successive regimes in the last 15 years have done so ever increasingly but none so brazenly, atrociously, blatantly, and intensely than the recently ended Jamaat and BNP-led 4-party alliance. The regime excelled in boundless capacity for all that is wrong under the sun and contrary to any semblance of good governance.

The Jamaat-BNP unholy nexus logically should be shunted aside for the same set of reasons and by the same rational reasoning, only much insidious in degree and magnitude, as was the case with the previous Awami League-led regime. Many BNP backers are fond of saying that the Awami option will not be all hunky-dory. They may be right. But when presented with a Hobson's choice, you have to discard the last bunch of troublemakers and last real menace to peace, happiness, harmony and contentment as a punishment as well as the fondest hope that things will get better.

It is obvious that the BNP-led alliance realizes it fully well, hence

less important than perception, and people tend to blame the party in power. This year, after four years of unchecked Republican dominance in DC, people know which party holds the strings.

For all of these reasons, the environment is ripe for a rare shift in the fundamental balance of partisan power. Congressional Quarterly calls the environment "toxic" for Republicans, and the Democrats, smelling blood, have fielded more credible challengers this year than in any cycle in recent memory.

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