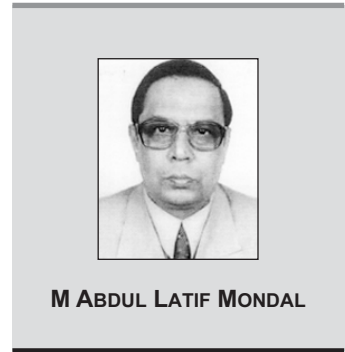


# BNP's 10-point demands: An overview



M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

A seven-member delegation of BNP led by its secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan met the president and chief adviser (CA) to the caretaker government (CG) Iajuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban on November 4 and submitted to him a 10-point charter of demands.

First, it has been demanded that the constitutional bounds should not be crossed for taking any action. The message that BNP has wanted to give the CA is that his request to the CEC and three election commissioners to resign from their offices following the demand of the AL-led 14-party coalition will go beyond the constitution. It may be mentioned in this connection that some constitutional experts have already opined that making requests to the CEC and other election commission members by the CG to step down from their offices is not unconstitutional.

Further, only a few weeks ago, the then ruling BNP finance and planning minister M Saifur Rahman, law minister Moudud Ahmed, and communications minister Nazmul Huda favoured the CEC's resignation. The BNP has since changed its stance.

While addressing the party leaders and workers at the BNP central office in the evening of November 2, BNP chairperson and immediate past prime minister Khaleda Zia termed the CEC and the other election commissioners as "neutral and non-partisan persons." This encouraged the CEC to change his mindset; earlier on the same day he had told newsmen that if the advisers to the CTG requested him to resign, he would consider their request.

Second, BNP has demanded that the CA should not bow down to pressures from any quarters. There is nothing wrong with the demand. Neutrality is at the core of the caretaker system of government. Every body expects that the CA and other advisers will prove their non-partisan role in the discharge of their functions collectively and severally. They are under the oath "to do right to all manner of people according to law, without fear or favour, affection or ill-will."

Third, regarding the demand for taking immediate steps against the persons responsible for creating

anarchy by spreading violence and killing during the take over of power by the CTG, it may be said that it is the responsibility of any government, including the CTG to take action against any person(s) involved in looting, arson and other criminal activities. So, the CTG has to take action against those who committed these offences immediately before and after the assumption of the office of the CA by the president in addition to his own functions. Maintenance of law and

in electoral process. Fifth, regarding the demand for taking steps by the CTG and the EC to immediately publish voter roll in line with the High Court order, with necessary inclusions and deletions, it is stated that the AL-led coalition and some other political parties raised questions on the unusual rise in the number of voters (9.3 crore). Even some advisers to the CTG have reportedly questioned the acceptability of the updated voter list citing the

that government officials, not involved in electoral duties, should not be transferred. It is a fact that politicization of administration is not new in the country. But it reached a new height in the past five years of the BNP-led alliance rule affecting every sphere of the administration. To make the administration non-partisan to the extent possible, all contractual appointments should be immediately cancelled and senior officers known for their partisan

immediate past BNP-led 4-party alliance government. The adviser for finance and planning has already made it absolutely clear that fund disbursement to the new projects, taken in the current fiscal year despite not fulfilling strict economic criteria, would remain suspended until the next government assumes office.

Ninth, as for the demand for removal of the two advisers CM Shafi Sami and Sultana Kamal for meeting the AL president Sheikh Hasina at Sudha Shadan on November 2, for conveying the message that the government has initiated steps to reconstitute the EC, clarification has already been made that they met Sheikh Hasina following a consensus decision of the council of advisers. There is nothing wrong with the advisers meeting the leaders of the major political parties and discussing with them the ways and means to overcome the present political impasse and to hold the forthcoming general election peacefully and fairly.

Tenth, BNP has demanded that the forthcoming general election should be held 15 days before the completion of the tenure of the CTG. The CTG is aware of holding the election in due time to help transfer of power to the elected government before the expiry of its tenure.

To conclude, political parties must not burden the CTG with demands that are beyond its purview and capacity to be implemented within its short tenure. The political parties should extend their full cooperation to the CTG to discharge its assigned responsibilities. The CA and the advisers must prove their neutrality in discharging their functions to win the people's confidence and to create an atmosphere that will enable holding of the ensuing general election peacefully, fairly and impartially.

M Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the Government.

## BARE FACTS

**Political parties must not burden the CTG with demands that are beyond its purview and capacity to be implemented within its short tenure. The political parties should extend their full cooperation to the CTG to discharge its assigned responsibilities. The CA and the advisers must prove their neutrality in discharging their functions to win the people's confidence and to create an atmosphere that will enable holding of the ensuing general election peacefully, fairly and impartially.**

order is the sine qua non for holding the forthcoming general election peacefully and fairly and the CTG has to attach top priority to this issue whether any political party/alliance demands it or not.

Fourth, it has been demanded that the activities of the CTG should be limited to routine work and to assisting the EC in conducting the elections and the CTG does not have any responsibility to make any policy decisions. It may be stated in this connection that although the CTG is scheduled to carry out the routine affairs of the government and assist the EC for holding general elections freely, fairly and impartially, the ground realities will make it absolutely necessary for the CTG to adopt and execute important policy measures for holding the general election smoothly and neutrally as well as for functioning of the government effectively.

The CTG of 2001 went for amendments of the Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972. Nagorik Committee 2006 has prepared a set of recommendations for the CTG to bring amendments to the RPO in order to ensure transparency in the electoral process, and these are: (a) compulsory registration of political parties; (b) bar on participation in elections by government officials within three years of their retirement; (c) disclosure of information about assets and financial liabilities of candidates; (d) formation of disqualification commissions for canceling candidatures in cases of proven violation of electoral code of conducts and for resolving electoral disputes within six months of filing the cases. The CTG and the EC may have to go for amending the RPO to include these recommendations and any other reasonable proposal in the RPO to ensure transparency

unusual rise in the number of voters and stressed the need for immediate measures to rectify the mistakes in the voter roll.

The Daily Star in its editorial of October 7 thus writes: "One of the most important prerequisites of a transparent and fair election is a voter list that is perfect in every sense, acceptable to all. Time cannot be an excuse for allowing wrongs to be sanctified. Mistakes must be corrected even if it means working overtime seven days a week before the election schedule is announced."

Sixth, BNP has stated that it is not against the voter identity cards bearing photographs, but it will be an impossible task to accomplish within the time available. Now the question arises as to why the EC did not take necessary steps for providing voter identity cards in spite of raising the demand by the AL-led coalition much earlier. Voter identity cards can substantially reduce the casting of fake votes.

Seventh, BNP has demanded

role transferred from sensitive posts in the Bangladesh secretariat, department and autonomous bodies.

The deputy commissioners (DCs) acting as the as the returning officer (RO) in their respective districts are the most important persons in the conduct of elections within the areas under their jurisdiction. So, those DCs who are known for their partisan role should be immediately replaced by officers known for their non-partisan role, efficiency, and honesty. The upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) act as the assistant ROs in their respective jurisdictions. So, those UNOs who are known for their partisan behaviour should be replaced by non-partisan officers. Similarly, the superintendents of police (SPs) in the districts, who are known for partisan behaviour, should be replaced by non-partisan officers.

Eighth, it has been demanded that the CTG should continue the development programs of the



# Republicans get their share

**The result of the election is a referendum on the Bush administration's mishandling of issues important to the American people. The control of the House of Representatives by the Democrats means that they will set the congressional agenda, and will have the power to conduct investigations in the Bush administration affairs, including the handling of the war in Iraq.**

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

AMERICA was the promoter of human rights around the world. Today, the Bush administration and the Republican Party have ruthlessly destroyed the values of human rights by their methods of torture and abuse of power. As a result, the Bush administration could not dare contest the election in the newly created Human Rights Council of the United Nations.

America was known as an advocate for freedom and liberty—a land where the Bill of Rights protected the liberty of the people. That protection for the American people has been destroyed by the Patriot Act initiated by the Bush Administration.

Today, America has lost face in the world because of the invasion of Iraq by utilising falsified intelligence reports to pursue the hidden agenda, masterminded by the neo-cons, of the Bush Administration. The war in Iraq cost \$378 billion as of March, 2006. What a colossal loss of taxpayers' money. A research report published by the Public Health School of John Hopkins University and printed in the Lancet, a prestigious British medical journal, states that the war in Iraq has resulted in 655,000 Iraqi deaths. Misuse and misinterpretation of intelligence reports by the Bush administration undermined the intelligence agencies, compromising their credibility.

College costs are soaring, and loan and grant programmes are not keeping up. America today faces the largest wave of teacher retirement in history, and young teachers are leaving the classroom at an alarming rate. The Republican mantra 'lower taxes, smaller government' may sound appealing in theory. In practice, it means tax breaks for the wealthy, and cuts in the key domestic sector—higher education for the working class and the poor.

Congress balances the power of the Executive branch. However, Congress has turned out to be a rubber stamp for the Bush administration because of the calculated and systematic misuse of power by the administration. What purpose does the Congress serve if it does not defend its own laws? I mean foreign the surveillance act. Runaway spending without trans-

parency has generated unprecedented scandals that have jolted the public in America today.

Against this backdrop, the people of America spoke out on November 7 to register their frustration and anger in a massive way, which remains unprecedented in the history of a mid-term election. It was a very impressive turnout of voters. This could be compared to some extent with the election when President Richard Nixon was to be impeached because of the Watergate scandal in 1974. In the midterm election the Democratic Party won 43 more seats in the House, and picked up 4 more seats in the Senate.

Occupation of Iraq, the present conflict in Iraq, scandal-ridden Congress, bad handling of the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, and unsuccessful reform of the social security programme are among the issues that affected the results of the election in favour of the Democratic party. When scandals hit, the Republican Congress handled the situation badly, particularly in the recent case of the disgraced former Representative Mark Foley. The Republicans also alienated their base on the issue of immigration reform. The president's unpopularity is another reason for this debacle.

Of the 435-seat House of Representatives, the Democratic Party has 201 seats while the Republicans hold 230. Three Republican Congressmen resigned because of scandals, while one Democrat resigned because he was nominated to contest for a seat in the Senate, which he won from New Jersey. The Democratic Party captured 24 seats to become the majority in the House of Representatives after 12 years. The present election scenario in the House of Representatives is that the Democratic Party has won 229 seats, while the Republicans have 196, with 10 seats remaining undecided. Nancy Pelosi, the incumbent Minority Leader in the House, is now poised to be the Speaker of the House, who is also third in line for the presidency. This is the first time a woman will steer the House of Representatives. President Bush has congratulated her. In an Election Day victory reception Nancy

Pelosi said: "Today the American people voted for change, and they voted for Democrats to take the country in a new direction, and that is exactly what we intend to do."

One of the sweetest victories of the Democrats is the winning of a seat in Texas 22 district, which was vacant following the resignation, in June, of powerful Majority Leader of the House of Representatives, Tom Delay, a friend of President Bush, because of charges of misuse of public finance, and other scandals. Another surprising defeat of a Republican incumbent is that of Senator Jim Tallent in Missouri, who was a strong supporter of the president and the war in Iraq. President Bush himself had campaigned for him in the elections. In another development a Muslim Democrat, Keith Ellison, was voted to the Congress for the first time, from the fifth Congressional district in Minnesota.

Of the 100-seat Senate, the Democratic Party has secured 22 seats out of the 33 contested. One-third of the Senators contest every two years. The Democratic Party has won 51 seats while the Republicans 49 seats, and there are two independents. Therefore, the Democratic Party wins the Senate as well.

The result of the election is a referendum on the Bush administration's mishandling of issues important to the American people. The control of the House of Representatives by the Democrats means that they will set the congressional agenda, and will have the power to conduct investigations in the Bush administration affairs, including the handling of the war in Iraq. I would like to conclude this piece by quoting Stephen Wayne, a political analyst from Georgetown University: "There would be a great incentive to investigate the executive branch, and the Democrats would try to drag the administration through with non-stop investigations for the next two years." President Bush will have to seek the advice of the Democrat dominated Congress on issues of national and international matters over the next two years of his tenure. Not an easy-going time, of course.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, a former diplomat, writes from Virginia, US.

# The uneasy impasse portends disastrous consequences

TMA SAMAD

THOUGH the caretaker government has ultimately taken over the charge, but the impasse is yet to be over because of the eccentric and obstinate attitude of the CEC. Rather, the situation is becoming more complicated. The threat and counter threat from both the sides are on and the situation may worsen and get flared up anytime. Like others one also humbly request the CEC and other two election commissioners to follow the path of justice KM Hasan for the greater interest of the country and the nation. Justice KM Hasan has proved himself wise and prudent. He has chosen not to be the victim of dirty politics. Now, as it appears, without resolving the issue of reforming the election commission there is every possibility of serious confrontation leading towards a catastrophe.

As a conscious citizen with some patriotic feeling, it is painful to observe such a queer situation and restrain one's emotion. One notes with great sadness that more than three decades after independence the sacrifices by the valiant sons and daughters of this soil seem to have been made in vain and an act of hypocrisy characterised by pervasive corruption, intolerance and mistrust is ritualised in our politics.

Broadly speaking there are two ways of resolving disputes—coercive and non-coercive. Since the dispute is between the two camps within the country the question of adoption of first one does not arise; as such the second option seems the right choice to arrive at a just and honourable solution of the genuine issues of reform of Election Commission for the greater good of the nation.

Since comprehensive voter list is a prerequisite for fair election, its

absence or distorted presence will simply not reflect the will of the people. Unfortunately, a serious stalemate has been created in the election commission, which has failed to prepare an acceptable voter list for the next general election. Besides, the CEC and his associates have lost their credibility long before and public confidence in their ability and intention to conduct free and fair election has eroded largely after the Supreme Court verdict. Here I would like to fully endorse the views of Mr. Mahfuz Anam, Editor of The Daily Star "The trio and their election subversion play". He has rightly pointed out that the mind set of the two commissioners can easily be gauged by their comments on January 17, 2006. The day following their appointment Mr. Mahfuzur Rahman (EC) said that since the judgment of the High Court was not lawful the question of compliance did not arise. Mr. Jakaria, talking to the election commission staff, after becoming Commissioner made an uncorporate remark on his two predecessors that they knew nothing and were illiterate. A person having minimum sense of efficacy and manner cannot make such a remark. Of course, it is the human nature to think others at his own level. Both Mr. Munsef Ali and Md. Ali are retired district judges. They are well-respected and reputed for their honesty, integrity and ability.

The election commission informs the caretaker chief that it is not possible to correct the mistakes in the controversial voter list but I believe it should not take more than two months to update the voter list. Of course commitment, political wisdom and appropriate fund are prerequisite to that.

On the plane of government performance the BNP-led four-party alliance started well initially but at the terminal year it has

totally disappointed and its political behaviour has failed to inspire confidence. It should be the spirit of government to accept the reasonableness of the opposition stand and come out of the rigid postures. To this end, a radical departure from the present approach is called for particularly on the issue of reform of election commission. On the other hand, the fourteen-party opposition shall also be urged not to create too much pressure on the caretaker government. For example, when the power has been handed over

ity towards resolving national crises.

The parliament became virtually dysfunctional and instead of addressing the national issues, unnecessary bickering took place in the sessions; and hartal and barricade became other regular activities which caused unnecessary loss of lives and properties. We had a jumbo cabinet with few ineffective ministers, besides two ministers without portfolio and two advisers. One cannot comprehend the logic behind keeping more than one minister in one

assuming the responsibility of caretaker chief by the president himself should not continue further, rather we should look forward to ways for holding a free and fair election. Our Nobel laureate Dr. Yunus has rightly pointed out that the honorable president and caretaker gov't. chief should listen to everybody but not to be influenced by any body. He should be tough on running the country and make a congenial atmosphere for holding a truly free and fair election.

Reform of caretaker govern-

**There are good, competent and honest people in this country who are capable to run its affairs efficiently but the present system allows them little scope to be elected. There lies the problem. Hence, a system should be innovated so that only the honest and dedicated people can come to power; otherwise, our future will be at stake. Nobel laureate Dr. Yunus has brought pride and honour for all of us and the onus has fallen on all of us to uphold the prestige of this country now.**

to the caretaker government, it is implied that the photograph of Begum Khaleda Zia will be automatically removed from the offices, and secondly voters' photographs at this stage is simply impossible. It will take minimum two years to do the job of making identity card with photograph.

So the demands should be pragmatic and practical. There is no reason to underestimate the people at large of this country. Our people are intelligent enough to judge the intentions of the respective political parties and we have no reason to underestimate them. The very essence of leadership is that you have to have vision. Unfortunately, most of our leaders lack vision in terms of political thought, national integrity and economic development of the country. They are inclined and oriented to their party interest, personal gains rather than concentrating their efforts and sincer-

ministry and minister without portfolio. A poor country like ours should not afford to maintain such a huge waste of public exchequer.

In parliamentary democracy, an impartial speaker representing the dignity of the House would regulate the House since he is the kingly in the system. We all know that parliamentary democracy requires stout opposition and their forcible expression of opinions and views is a healthy practice in democracy. It is a duty of the parliamentarians regardless of their political affiliations to work unitedly in order to institutionalise parliamentary democracy. Sadly, all this did not happen.

The Constitution guarantees neutral and non-partisan election commission and caretaker government. Unfortunately, both election commission and chief of caretaker government have become controversial. However, the issue of controversy on

ment and election commission were first initiated at a press conference on July 15, 2005 and later on formally placed in the parliament by the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina in February 2006. Eight months had elapsed but there was no positive response from the four-party alliance gov't. There is no denying the fact that the reform of election commission in particular has turned into a national consensus and bypassing the issue will bring a disastrous situation in the country. The caretaker government should take immediate effective steps towards this to avert any catastrophe.

What British historian Robbers said 150 years ago seems to be true to a great extent even today. To him people of the Gangetic plain seemed corrupt and deceitful. Some people of this country pretend to be pious and God fearing but do not hesitate to tell a lie. Problem lies here. Of course,

Machiavelli, the eminent political philosopher pointed out that a successful politician should have at least three qualities: (1) He must be a liar; (2) he must be clever like fox, and (3) he should be lion-hearted. The ruling four-party alliance claims that flood of development have taken place in this country. No doubt over the last five years some infrastructure have been established and some development has taken place but nevertheless the BNP chief and her associates know well that their image has already been tarnished

society may join hands with them to strengthen their efforts towards realising noble objectives.

In a Muslim majority country like ours even one with a high record of all kinds of mischievous activities aspires to gain power and speak about Islamic principles! What the general people will learn from such kind of leadership having no integrity but hypocrisy? While I studied at George Washington University, USA, two quotations really influenced me so much that I cannot check my temptation to quote from the speech of George Washington, the first president of the USA, "Character is the governing element above genius. A person having high moral can contribute more than a corrupt person." Congressman Randolph categorically said, "A man of splendid abilities, but utterly corrupt, shines and stinks like a rotten mackerel (a fish) by moonlight."

It is painful to see a news item in The Daily Star on 6th November, 2006 that Mr. Moudud Ahmed, the former law minister, has written in the latest version of the constitution that "The elected political leadership failed to give direction to the people at that critical moment (25th March, 1971). In that situation, in response to the indispensable demand of the time, the then Major Ziaur Rahman of the army, made the historic declaration of independence from Kalurghat radio station in Chittagong as a leader of the war of resistance." Whereas, the proclamation of independence describes that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh and asked the people to save the sovereignty and dignity of the country. In fact on 7th March, 1971 at the Racecourse Moidan the informal declaration

was made. On 25th March, 1971 through a telegraphic message to Mr. Hannan at Chittagong the declaration of independence was conveyed and on behalf of Bangabandhu, then Major Ziaur Rahman declared the independence. When Mr. Ziaur Rahman was asked whether 'on behalf' should be deleted from his speech or not, he categorically mentioned that history cannot be wiped out. He uttered it twice. But the sycophants are trying to distort the history.

No doubt late Ziaur Rahman was a valiant freedom fighter and fought for this country and later on multiparty democracy was established under his leadership and production oriented politics got a momentum in this country which had a good impact on the development of the country. His honesty and integrity and patriotic feelings are praiseworthy. But he should not be compared with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman because without Bangabandhu the emergence of Bangladesh was unthinkable and there should be no ambiguity on the issue of the father of the nation.

There are good, competent and honest people in this country who are capable to run its affairs efficiently but the present system allows them little scope to be elected. There lies the problem. Hence, a system should be innovated so that only the honest and dedicated people can come to power; otherwise, our future will be at stake. Nobel laureate Dr. Yunus has brought pride and honour for all of us and the onus has fallen on all of us to uphold the prestige of this country now.

The author is former Director, BSRTI, Rajshahi.