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PHOTO: AFP

Limping politics and lawlessness

I must and do congratulate and give all the credit to the 14-party alliance and its leader for helping to defuse the volcanic situation & thus save the country from a catastrophe by accepting President Iajuddin Ahmed as the head of the caretaker government against their will, in spite of the provocative speeches by the ex-prime minister and her son. It will go down in history as a high water mark, the supreme sacrifice made by the alliance through accepting the unconstitutional decision of the president realizing his helplessness in the face of the desperate pressure from the BNP and its allies who seemed to be more concerned to safeguard their ill-gotten properties than state and party interest.

The unhappy turn of events, where lives of some innocent people and state properties were lost could have been avoided had the BNP been a bit tolerant and accommodative and cared to uphold the constitutional provisions in dealing with the situation.

A citizen

On e-mail

The bitter rivalry between the two top leaders proved to be so contagious that the entire nation has been engulfed by anarchy and distrust. Hatred and acts of revenge among the people have become the most popular pastime. We must rid our country of this rivalry and eliminate corruption for good. The caretaker government is the right authority to clean up the mess, provided it acts neutrally and it is given power not only to arrange fair election but also to clean up the whole country. One must understand the main reason for this hatred in our minds, which has been so meticulously instilled by the shrewd politicians for their personal gains and by a section which from the day we got independence wanted to divide us to take revenge. And it all started by distorting the history of our glorious liberation war and disrespecting the once honoured leaders.

The post war generation got really confused with the various versions of the war history contradicting each other published during different tenures of the various political parties, glorifying only their mentors. It is very sad that so many among our young generation have grown up in complete confusion about the war that they started disbelieving and disrespecting our most glorious achievement, that is the independence. This is the best time to straighten up all distortion once and for all and bring to the nation the truth and only the truth

based on the real facts of our independent war. All war time leaders, martyrs, freedom fighters should get appropriate recognition and respect. No false or imaginary achievement should be recognised. All school and college history books should be rewritten with true history and should be sealed by law as infallible. The other vital step this caretaker government must take is to make our government administration neutral and to set a system so that there cannot be any ruling party influence in future in recruitment, transfer and promotion. Building up a very strong independent Public Service Commission is the need of the hour. This would be a very difficult job as the public service administration has been plagued by politically biased recruitments since late seventies. However, major screening can be done if the caretaker government is bold enough to remove the known elements who took unfair advantages during the tenures of their liking. The caretaker government must address the corruption issues very strongly. This is the most appropriate time to bring all the culprits under fair trial and to give them exemplary punishment. Unless done in this tenure we will never see bold and fair action against the huge corruption that drained the country of wealth. Culprits having political clout will never be prosecuted or will always fool us by getting acquitted in graft trial for the benefit of the ruling party. The caretaker government, besides taking steps to arrange a fair and square election, has a huge commitment to bring the country on course from the anarchy prevailing at present in all public sectors due to complete failure of previous ruling parties. If it fails, we are doomed to face an era of uncertainty with no hope.

Capt. SS Hasnat

Agrabad C/A, Chittagong

It has been observed that people use to put all their hopes of getting things back to the right track on the caretaker government. We observe that people along with the political parties expect to get things changed outright by a magical touch by the CG in its ninety days tenure!

Now the questions might arise: is it possible for this sort of neutral caretaker government to restore everything to the state of normalcy in 90 days? And if it is indeed possible, then why the elected governments fail to do so in their long five years stay in power? Why do they make everything topsy-turvy? And again, is it all right for us to ask for so much

from a government in such a short time to remove the irregularities in almost all sectors of our national life. There are corruption, politicisation of bureaucracy and the incompetence at every level, to mention but a few. Ah, we indeed have to depend on such a system so heavily just because of the fact that we cannot trust our own acts. And yet, we keep on pressing the CG for a miraculous shuffle of things that have already gone awry because of our own misdeeds!

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Before the issue of chief adviser to the caretaker government came to the fore he could call both the parties together to solve the problem. Instead he decided to be inactive and let the situation go out of control. Then he took over himself, in violation of the constitution. Despite these facts many people were still hopeful about him, I was not.

After 15 days of his being at the top, things are becoming clearer. He now enjoys absolute power like former military dictators. The CEC is operating with full force. Despite selecting respectable advisors he is bypassing them in major decisions, trying to make them his rubber stamp. He is making eyewash transfers and promoting stronger partisan cronies of his party men in powerful bureaucratic posts, replacing the less partisan ones. State run TV is enjoying absolute monopoly over the territory and promoting his party agenda.

However, this is a historical opportunity for him. He can listen to and trust his advisors and work to make history. He can prove that fair and peaceful election is possible even under a partisan man. He can rise above political affiliations. All the symptoms are suggesting otherwise, he is walking in the opposite direction.

I want to be hopeful. I want it to be different this time; I don't mind being wrong sometimes. I will be joyous to be wrong this time.

Zakaria Khondker
San Francisco, California

The current political arena is dominated by two vital words such as constitution and neutrality. If one major alliance demands neutrality in governance, the other major political alliance asks for strict adherence to the constitution. If one has to be objective, the need for neutrality is the order of the day; similarly, to uphold the constitution is the obligation of the CG. Now the question is, can the CG follow both. If not, is our

constitution an impediment to neutral governance?

Reading the newspapers from Bangladesh, one gets the impression that the CG is yet to take a firm stand to address the routine and constitutional responsibilities freely without fear or favour. Honestly speaking, there seems to be some loose ends for which the CG appears not to be "proactive".

However, it is their responsibility to run the affairs of the government neutrally and keep the people informed about the correct position obtaining in the political arena.

Just now we have heard important news in BBC Bengali service such as 1) the CEC has categorically said that he has no plan of resigning, nor has anybody from the CG formally or informally requested for his resignation. He was in a festive mood. 2. President Ershad as usual has now postponed his party joining the 4-party alliance and has decided to contest the election on their own. This decision is based on the wish of the majority of his party policy makers, said president Ershad. Without much thinking one can draw the conclusion that the former president is not 100% sure that all major political parties would contest the election. The supportive role of the Jatiya party [Ershad] might be needed to hold the election.

In the given situation, there is no reason to feel comfortable that the CG would be able to handle the upcoming political situation successfully. The alternative option of appointing additional election commissioner(s) will only complicate the situation and create an additional number of constitutional position holders who cannot even be requested to resign officially or unofficially. Who can guarantee that the next CEC will be acceptable to all political parties and the plan will work and pave the way for election with participation of all major political parties. We are sceptical. This is nothing but to surrender to the wishes of individuals, leaving aside the wishes of the majority people of the country.

The 14-party alliance may decide to go ahead with their political programmes. Please ensure that there is no violence and the protests are peaceful. Any violence will help your opponents and the alliance will lose public support and sympathy.

A reader

On e-mail

Democracy (literally "rule by the people", from the Greek *demos*, "people," and *kratos*, "rule") is a form

of government for a nation state, or for an organisation in which all the citizens have an equal vote or voice in shaping policy. Since 1973 we have been proposing a strong and independent Election Commission but still we do not have that. In the name of free and fair election both the major political parties play with our fate. We have never seen any strike against corruption, not even against the water crisis. The entire political process is motivated towards grabbing power.

AKabir

University of East London, London

Have we ever wondered that a few weeks earlier the young man who never even thought of throwing a stone at the police, break windowpanes of people's houses, shops and offices, burn buses, cars and railway bogies, torch CNG drivers by pouring petrol over their heads or beat a living human being with sticks to death and then jump on the lifeless body in sheer triumph, was gleefully doing so on our streets.

Earlier there were only a few, today there are tens of thousands of such party men and are multiplying geometrically every day. Instigated by thoughtless leaders, these docile young minds have now become Frankensteins who are beyond the control of even their own crafty political exploiters. Each day of street rioting is transforming tens of thousands of once humane and innocuous young men into ruthless, blood thirsty monsters whose mentality has become inhuman and revengeful.

When the political dust settles, like the tiger that has tasted human blood and unlike the common men, who tend to forget everything very quickly, they will take a much longer time to become mentally normal again. The effects of their mental state will be seen on our streets. As salesmen, vendors, rickshaw pullers, pushcart drivers, garage-hands, office staff, etc. they would be rude to women, defiant towards the law and riotous towards normal social life. They will vent their anger on every little thing and strike at the least pretext. The Frankenstein created by the leaders is allowing politics to degenerate only to the efforts for attaining power, or clinging on to power with no concern for common people. They will have to answer to the nation for mutilating the minds of those taken to the streets for their selfish ends.

Md. Mahmoodul Haque
Gulshan, Dhaka

prevail in certain national institutions of Bangladesh.

Triporta
On e-mail

Politicised doctors

The news of miscreants setting the biochemistry department at IPGM&R on fire is a pathetic example of the effects of politicisation of the health sector in Bangladesh.

Why a physician has to be a supporter of one party or another is obvious in the context of present day Bangladesh: grab power and wealth. In the past several decades the medical profession has been incorporated into mainstream politics and in turn polluted by the power-mongering politicians. As a result, now these so-called medical professionals-turned politicians control all promotions, postings or overseas trips. How much real contribution they have to healthcare is anyone's guess. This is only one of the many aspects of the necrotic society of present Bangladesh.

Javed Iqbal

New York, USA

Democrats win?

Off course a bit of shake in the Bush administration due to losing the mid-term election. The Democrats have won majorities in both the US House of Representatives and the Senate. It became clearer when Mr. Bush said that due to the Iraq war people are distressed. Next two years of Democrats controlling both the houses will give Mr. Bush a hard time for sure. Now the question arises, why did the Bush administration lose the mid-term election so badly? People are saying it could be: The issueless war of Afghanistan followed by the Iraq war.

President Bush has to think over it.

Rajul Hasan

University of Ballarat, Sydney

No politics, please

People from all over the world will love to respect Dr. Yunus for all time to come and we request him not to venture into politics.

Our politics has become rotten and the politicians corrupt. I do not want a noble man, a social reformist and a Nobel laureate like Dr. Yunus to join conventional politics or form a new party. If he does so he will simply ruin his hard earned reputation, for our politics is so different from the political science that he is conversant with.

Let him rather be a 'free lance advisor' and continue to do what he has been doing already - empowering the less advantaged and thus changing the whole economic scenario, which is the demand of the day. He should keep himself up above petty and party politics and remain as a 'Guru', of common respect. I also do not want him to limit his contribution by compromising himself with any particular group or forum, for that matter with our so-called 'Sushil Samaj' or the like. I want him to remain venerable as a free citizen of the free world without giving scope to any controversy.

AF Rahman

On e-mail

Injustice and prejudice

In reference to the editorial "Minority Voters" in your November 11 issue, I would like to mention that it's not only during the election time that the minorities are deprived of their rights. Needless to mention that the constitution of Bangladesh is based on secularism. However, in practice it may not be secular but rather biased towards a particular section of the population that constitutes the majority in the country.

The constitution does not encourage any sort of religious discrimination in any sector of the government. Nevertheless, prejudice against the minority does

Trust the people

Awami League, the party that led us through many struggles for 50 odd years, relied on sticks and oars instead of us. This is a public relation disaster of the highest order.

They would have learned better if they picked the signals people sent them over last few years, that they were becoming liabilities instead of representation. From Shamsunnahar Hall to Kansat to Barapukuria, wherever common people stood up against government oppression made sure the AL doesn't stain their protests. The party should have tried to regain the touch with people. Instead they decided to flex sticks and oars. Imagination maybe in short supply on the stairs of power, but ordinary countrymen have enough of that to figure out what will happen to this country if some people, who want to get their way through thinly veiled threat of violence, take over.

The AL might as well have put their stick and oar programme in a glittering paper bag, wrap a red ribbon around it, and send it to the BNP as a gift.

Ashish Ahsan
Uttara, Dhaka

New Middle East?

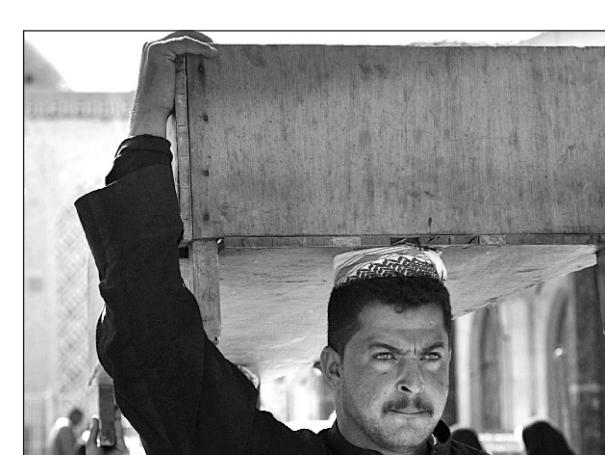


PHOTO: AFP

plundering the resources of Iraq and mass murdering the Iraqis. The fact that Iraq has been made, besides being a very dangerous country, a

corrupt state with the occupying forces squandering the energy resources without proper records, does not argue well for the US claim

of establishing a new democratic Middle East.

The resignation of Defence Secretary Rumsfeld, however, does

indicate a shift in policy of the Bush administration to make changes in its Middle East policy including the troops withdrawal, but chaotic management of foreign policy of the US and UK slightly confuses the world about the real intentions of the Bush policy in the Middle East.

President Bush should clearly indicate what kind of reaction the Iraqis should offer to the US genocide and squandering in the Arab world so that they are safe and their country becomes a free and sovereign state again in the near future.

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