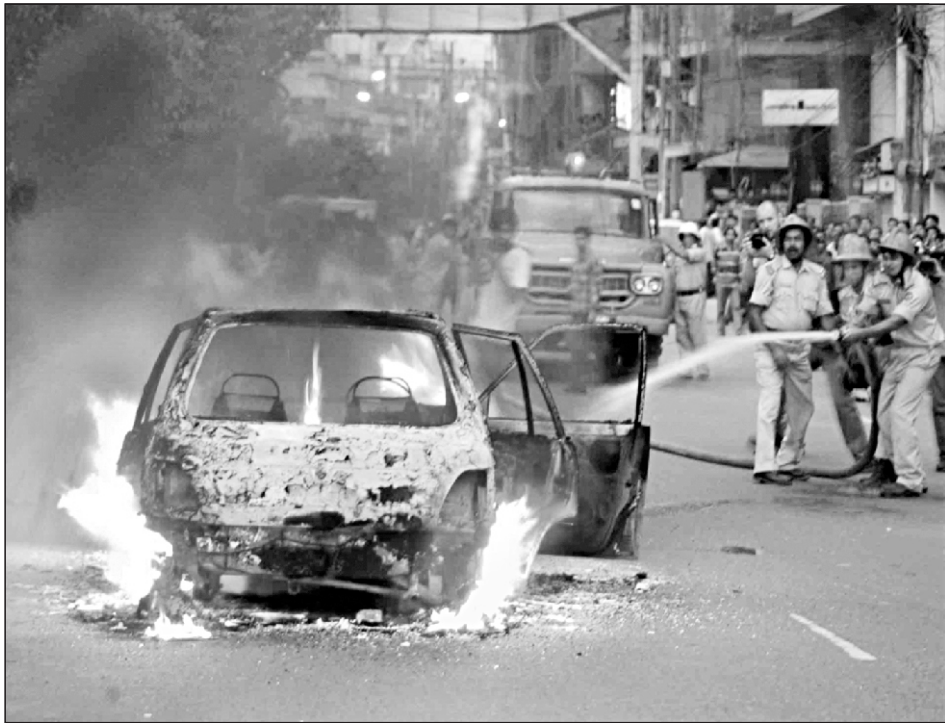


What should we do now?



PHOTOS: AFP

Although I am unable to support any of the political parties of our country due to their failure to think about the nation rather than their personal gains, I feel compelled to write this letter. Not because I feel that either one of our major political parties is correct or better, but because I am having my most fundamental rights as a citizen of a democratic nation snatched away from me.

Having a partisan caretaker government and a partisan Election Commission takes away any possibility of a free and fair election. Even if the Awami League is resorting to mob justice, a form of justice which can only be titled as revenge, I feel that it is impossible for them to come to a solution with the caretaker government and the Election Commission as it stands now.

Unfortunately, we Bangladeshis do not have the choice of electing a party which will give us good governance. But what we must have the right for, is to choose even between a rock and a hard place. If an election is not free and fair, it takes away that choice from us. If votes can be rigged, then the essential characteristic of a democracy, one man one vote, has been taken away from me.

It is, therefore, my opinion that no political party should participate in an election if it takes place under these partisan circumstances. I have heard many people who talk of freedom, rights and the good of the nation, saying that the Awami League should assent and come to a compromise. What they fail to understand is that there is no place for compromise. Any compromise and participation in an election, is not for the good of the country. It is the worst thing that could happen to our nation. We may lose economic growth every day, we may be restrained in our homes every day, we may even have to watch beating to death on television every day. And even though this should stop, participation in elections

will be the greatest failure of any political party which cares about the nation. My right to have my vote count is the most essential right I have as a citizen of a democratic country. And to give in now, to compromise that right so as to have peace and economic growth along with a biased election, is not an option. It is better to shed blood every day to protect our right to choose who will govern us, than to have the right of choosing who will govern us taken away from us. I am saddened by the situation in the country, but it is my opinion that giving in to biased elections would be the saddest thing for our democratic nation.

Adeeba Aziz Khan
On e-mail

Looking back at our so-called national events, it got me thinking. Should I care? Yes I should. The disruption in our daily lives has been substantial enough to affect my day-to-day existence. I am grateful to the Almighty that I have been given a social standing where I don't have to earn my living on a daily basis through physical labour. Had I been a rickshaw-puller going through my daily grinds of noxious fumes, abominably undisciplined traffic, and then spend my earnings on the market for the basic food items, these are lean times indeed. The Jalils, Bhuiyans, CAs, and CECs are from an alien planet who can still somehow manage to hold my stomach hostage in a way that is unfathomable. I am sure that 'they' will take credit for this poor fellow being at least a rickshaw-puller, without their input in the national policies, he would still be a poor landless soul, toiling in the boonies somewhere. So, instead of complaining about a few inconveniences, he should be grateful that he could occasionally pretend to be the king of the road.

Then, in the long run, does it really matter

what happens in Bangladeshi 'Rajneeti'? In the chess game of these rajahs, we 'projas' are always treated like a footnote. Every five years it's the whining of the Begums whose stereophonic adulations against each other point out the fact that the fiefdoms are up for grab again. Once the institution of the Election Commission gets their act together, either by hook or by crook, it does not really matter, there will be a song and dance routine of crying foul, boycotts, scared investors, port closures, along with the expected gradual degradation of basic amenities such as electricity, gas and water (thanks to the mobile operators, I am no longer hostage to the vagaries of my BTB linesman). On a good day, it will still take an hour and a half to get to Motijheel from Uttara, the vegetables and the onions will get dearer, my staff will sit idle for hours on end since none of the computers will be working without electricity, and there will be general concern from the household about getting entangled in some street processions every time I leave the house, and come back with a fractured skull, or worse, not come back alive at all.

All these blockades, burnings, and taking over the streets have a name. It is called 'Anarchy'.

Md. Aref
Gulshan, Dhaka

One of my teachers used to say during the 1990 mass upsurge that we the public could do one thing—just drive away all these politicians and try to bring the new generation of leaders into the political arena. I know that is not the solution, and then what should we do? When we see countries like Vietnam and Cambodia doing so well in the world economy and getting the status of emerging economies, we could only bemoan our lack of progress. We are lagging behind even some African

countries. What can we really do to come out of the political crisis?

Utpala
Singapore

No conscious people can accept this situation, which is prevailing in our country in the name of democracy. We are living abroad wishing welfare of our country and its people. What is the goal of the political parties? Is it only grabbing power? We are always apprehensive what is going to happen next? We want the people to live peacefully and this can be ensured only by the political parties. If they really love the country and the people, they should refrain from the extreme activities.

If we look at the other countries in the world, the political parties are developed as institutions performing their functions of politics for the welfare of the country and its people.

But the scene is different here. The countrywide blockade is destroying our economy.

Few days back, I saw an article in a newspaper "How blockade fits in", which focused on politicians' bankruptcy. But the name of the writer was not published. I want to congratulate the writer who has written this article in the context of the present political crisis.

The Chief Election Commissioner is not conducting the election alone. The power and functions of the CEC are decentralized up to the field areas and there must be some system and instruments to conduct the election in a fair way.

Finally, we urge the major political parties to try to reach a consensus on the burning issues for the sake of democracy and development of our country.

S.M Mofleuddin Ahmed
LL.B, P.G.D.I.M, MBA,

Doctor of Business Administration (In Process)
University of Northern Virginia

Bangladesh is at a critical political juncture at the moment. Its people are in great frustration and uncertainty, being hostages of political parties. I do not understand why all political parties, caretaker government head and its advisers cannot find out a common solution which is acceptable to all the political parties. It seems the BNP and its political allies have fallen off the common demands and agendas raised by other political parties. This will portray their political image negatively in the upcoming election unless they decide to work together with other political parties. On the other hand, all the political parties should realize that social and economic conditions should get priority over their individual and party agendas. Unfortunately, common sense does not seem to prevail among all the leaders despite these leaders being mandated by the people simply because they prefer to bypass their political advisers and prefer to act on their own in policy making. Results are very obvious: miserable sufferings of the common people. The caretaker government is a way of having a common and fault-free election in Bangladesh. But the problems surrounding the choice of one neutral caretaker head are too many. Our leaders should be more understanding, considerate and caring for the country. All the Bangladeshis living in Canada are closely observing the political situation in Bangladesh very keenly and we are hoping for a peaceful and progressive Bangladesh through the new election, which is due soon. Let's all hope and pray for a true Sonar Bangla.

Mohammad Jamal
Scarborough, ON
Canada

I am surprised to see how some leading politicians and journalists are directly or indirectly accepting violence as a means of protest. How civilized and independent nations accept city blockades? Why make people suffer when they have nothing to do with politics? Bangladesh needs progressive leaders who can lead the nation into the 21st century. If we had spent our effort to pursue the political parties to nominate honest and educated candidates, election anomalies would have been reduced. We cannot have a fair election when political parties are not honest. Democracy is not a perfect process. It is as good as the citizen!

Engr. Md. Zaman, M.B.A., P.E.
California, USA

I am a regular reader of your newspaper's internet edition.

Many thanks for printing the well written piece by Tarikul Ghani on the EC, Voter List and Electoral Reform. The article provides an excellent analysis on the credibility of the EC, convincingly argues why the EC should pave the way for meaningful elections, and finally a set of critical electoral reform recommendations. The important recommendations from a technical and political standpoint must be considered by our EC and caretaker government. If adopted these recommendations will not only provide a level playing field but also facilitate holding of credible elections meeting international standards.

May I request you to print more incisive articles from Mr. Ghani?

Ashma
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

CEC controversy

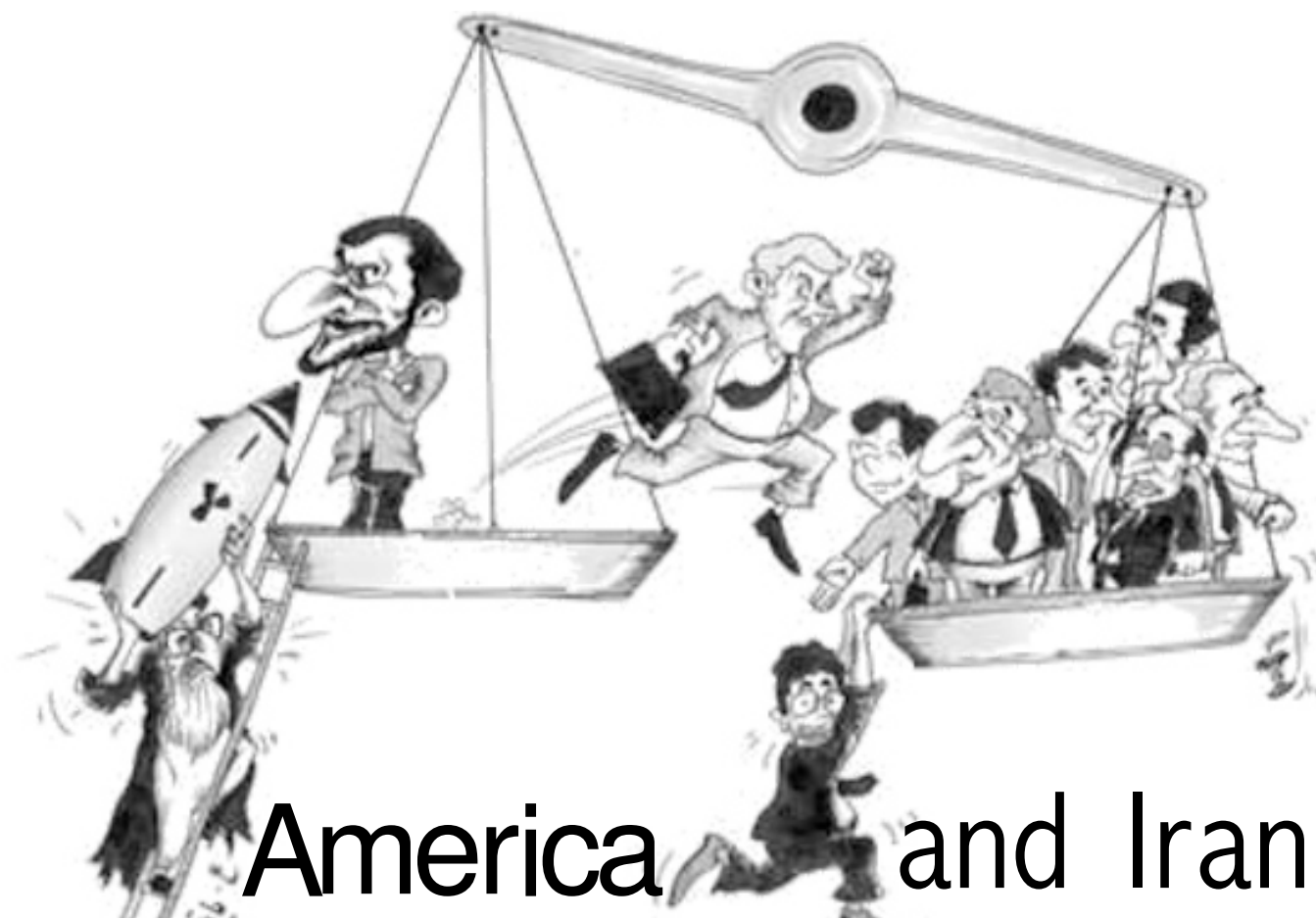
I don't really know what's appropriate for me-- to laugh or to cry when I observe our political leaders, members of erudite society, as all of them make very assertive claims that their own opinions are the opinions of the whole nation or of the vast majority!

I strongly believe that our leaders and our pedants are the main problem of the country. The vast majority who are poor farmers, villagers or other different low-profile professionals are not the cause of the ills plaguing our society today.

Mohammed Giashuddin
On e-mail

Ignoring the demand for resignation, he is sleeping. Yes, I am talking about the CEC, whose obstinacy is pushing the nation towards a big crisis. The prevailing political situation is compelling us to become captive audience to TV news leaving all necessary activities, and producing profound pulsating in our hearts whether free and fair polls would be held or not. However, all the people have gained horrid experience through observing political violence across the country that has shown "how to jump on the dead body". To get rid of this captivity, undoubtedly, consensus among the political parties is a dire need. We should keep in mind that the constitution is not above the nation because it has been formulated to serve people's interest. So, we the people are no more willing to accept any lame excuse from the political parties as well as the caretaker government for their failure to find out a solution, as we are being repressed.

Md. Nobilul Islam
Department of Anthropology
University of Chittagong



America and Iran

Recently, a top investigative reporter of America has revealed that the CIA assessment has found no farm evidence of a secret drive by Iran in developing nuclear weapons as alleged by the White House. Disclosure of this report by Seymour Hersh was supposed to appear in New Yorker magazine on November 27, but got revealed earlier. This might have put the Bush administration in an uneasy situation but still it is unclear if America will go ahead with the military power as the last resort to contain

Iran from enriching uranium. As quoted by Dick Cheney, the US Vice President, to a group of his close aides that even if the

Democrats hold sway in the Congress they have the ability to circumvent it (what a shameless blustering).

In another development, Henry Kissinger, the former Secretary of State, said in a British television broadcast that military victory is no longer possible in Iraq. While presenting a bleak vision of Iraq he said that the US government must enter a dialogue with Iraq's regional neighbours including Iran if progress is to be made in the region. Kissinger also advised Bush that a rapid withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq could destabilize Iraq's neighbours and cause a long lasting conflict.

We all hope that the study group on Iraq

led by the former US secretary of State James Baker III who sought Kissinger's advice for a probable solution to Iraq problem will emphasise bringing in the United Nations Security Council, Iraq's neighbours Iran, and regional powers like India, Pakistan to work out a way forward for the region. We all hope that Mr. Baker's initiative works out as a ground-breaking accomplishment towards achieving lasting peace and stability in the region.

Humayun Hyder
Zigatola, Dhaka

