much of the administration at the national as well as local level as a continuation of the outgoing government in all but name with a clear interest in seeing the 4 Party Alliance returned to power. Prospective candidates from the Grand Alliance claim that their party workers are being arrested by the law enforcement agencies as was the case during the tenure of the outgoing government.

The prospect of relief from the judiciary for those seeking justice from partisan governance appears far from assured. The way in which the judicial process was used, first to give relief to HM Ershad when he opted to join the 4 Party Alliance and then to reactivate his corruption cases when he opted for the Grand Alliance, suggest that the law has now assumed a partisan hue. The same attorney general's office which expedited the withdrawal of cases against Ershad during his honeymoon with the 4 Party Alliance is now seeking to rush to judgment now that Ershad has changed his alliance. Since these same officers of the law who served the 4 Party Alliance are now serving the CTG, the partisan bias in the conduct of their duties impacts on the credibility of the CTG.

The response of the two alliances

The public utterances of the leaders of the Grand Alliance suggested they were all fully aware of the ground realities but they chose to hold out the prospect of contesting the election. They periodically generated expectations in the minds of their follower that a sufficiently powerful mobilization in each constituency could override the partisan character of the CTG. They further conveyed an impression that if the CTG delivered a manifestly fraudulent result in favour of the 4 Party Alliance, the Grand Alliance would lead a powerful mobilization at home and draw on public opinion abroad, to challenge the legitimacy and authority of the government "elected" to power on January 22. These signals of participation and resistance to the elections confused their supporters.

In seeking to challenge the bias in the CTG towards the 4 Party Alliance, the 14 Party Alliance set out to build a Grand Alliance bringing together some odd bed-fellows, ranging from Ershad and the LDP to some of the more extreme fringe groups of the fundamentalist parties. Such a Grand Alliance has now assumed a rather heterogeneous character with little political or ideological coherence. The rather unprincipled compact of the Awami League leadership with the fringe group of fundamental parties was not one of the more glorious moments in its long history as a leader of the forces of secular politics. This manifestly opportunistic move has demotivated many of the AL's followers, particularly from civil society, and alienated some of its vote banks. In return, the prospect of political gain by the AL appears questionable since their new allies are hardly significant vote winners.

Until January 4, the 4 Party Alliance for obvious reasons, felt that the tide was flowing their way. They have seen a person who was casually affiliated to the BNP a quarter of a century ago, replaced as chief advisor by a serving loyalist with deep-seated obligations to the party. They have seen virtually the entire administrative structure they put in place before they left office, down to the grass roots level, still in place. They have witnessed the resignation of four members of the advisory council who were willing to play a non-partisan role and the silencing of those from the advisory council who were once willing to also speak their mind. The four out-going advisors have been replaced by advisors either of proven loyalty or those with a talent for providing comic relief. Whilst Aziz and Zakaria may have gone on leave the incumbent acting chief election commissioner appears to show little capacity for decisive action whilst Mudabbir appears to have been a 4 Party Alliance member seeking an election ticket.

In their moment of triumph the 4 Party Alliance should have had the good sense to conduct themselves with more finesse. They could have accepted the original "package" or conceded an extra day for filing nominations or deactivated the serviceable attorney general's office from frustrating the opportunity for HM Ershad to contest elections.



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In their moment of triumph the 4 Party Alliance should have had the good sense to conduct themselves with more finesse. They could have accepted the original "package" or conceded an extra day for filing nominations or deactivated the serviceable attorney general's office from frustrating the opportunity for HM Ershad to contest elections. But in their moment of triumphalism they seem to have overplayed their hand. Both the leadership of the 14 Party Alliance and even more so, HM Ershad, were keen to contest elections, even on January 22, in spite of the opposition of many of their principal lieutenants and allies. The Grand Alliance was prepared to go to the polls, on such uneven terms, had the HM Ershad affair not been played out. In this final play the 4 Party Alliance appear to have not only undone what they had achieved through more tactical political