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Tense situation



Reports confirm that most people in both camps want peace, yet at the same time there is mounting hatred and extremism. Both sides now speak of a direct confrontation. The failure of the Awami League to defeat the BNP-Jamaat design, and the failure of secularists to overcome the religious bigots have given new hope to BNP-Jamaat alliance, who still believe in the possibility of getting back power. They captured (and still hold) the presidency, the CG and CA, the EC, and administration, and are increasing their pressure on the political rivals by ousting Ershad from the political scene, virtually, by locking him in corruption cases. This certainly angered the Awami/Jatiyo Party duo, or it might well simply be a move to avoid a 'pre-determined defeat'.

So the situation remains tense. Some of the civil society members in Bangladesh, and newspapers have seen the dangers more clearly. To take the most irresponsible and unrestrained leaders to the post of 'most badly needed ally' for both the camps on strategic reasons is itself a strategic threat or strategic failure. These left-outs 'second-hand' politicians and the religious bigots are certainly liabilities of our nation, not assets. The danger is heightened by this development in the Awami camp in Bangladesh, and they want to have the assurance that their win is confirmed!

So the nation is aware and beginning to understand that there will be no peace in Bangladesh until the Awami League and its allies are offered a place over the power machine.

Sirajul Islam
On e-mail



Country in deep crisis

Today (03/01/07) the Awami League led grand alliance decided not to participate in the January 22 election and withdrew their nomination papers. The country is facing another blockade on January 7 and 8.

The people of Bangladesh got relief when the 14-party alliance decided to participate in the upcoming election and their candidates also started the election campaign but the sudden blow came when all of the five nomination papers submitted by HM Ershad were rejected by the Election Commission.

Before he joined the grand alliance the Awami League severely criticised him for his decision to join the four-party alliance, but today they won't participate in election without him. On the other hand,

Mannan Bhuiyan had expressed his satisfaction when Ershad wanted to join them but today at a press briefing Mr. Bhuiyan completely changed his position (because Ershad didn't join the four-party alliance).

Both alliances are now fighting for a dead horse that suddenly has got new life and the country's economy will swallow the bitter taste, already lamented by economists and business that the current political instability would discourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Not only that, the export sector will be hurt badly for being short of orders as political instability may distract buyers from other countries.

Without FDI the job opportunities can't be extended and the unemployment rate will increase. We, the young people, are

the sufferers. If the export sector fails, new entrepreneurs won't emerge and again the sufferers would be the youths who are in the hunt for jobs. Those who wish to set new business will think twice before investing.

Here is another bad news for us that the expatriates, who send their hard-earned money, would hesitate to send remittances to the country.

We are in trouble. I have no idea about the alternative but it will be devised very soon by the young generation!

Md. Asaduzzaman
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Election boycott

I have just read the article "Factors leading to boycott decision" on the online edition of The Daily Star (4th January 2007).

The writer tried to convince the readers using numerous reasons behind the grand alliance's decision to boycott the election. The reasons he gave were all old and settled. Since those issues were settled, the grand alliance decided to submit their nomination papers before the Eid break. The only change I could see that happened during the Eid holidays was the cancellation of all of Ershad's nomination papers. This led him and his party to go for 'no Ershad, no election' strategy. Sensing a debacle in the upcoming election without Ershad and JP, the grand alliance also decided to follow the same path i.e. 'no Ershad, no election'. The writer failed to notice the simple matter of fact and went on and on about other reasons like voter list, neutrality of administrator, package proposal etc. He failed to see that the grand alliance was so morally bankrupt that they decided to boycott the polls in support of a former dictator, a corrupt politician against whom we fought for eight years.

There was an opinion poll in the daily Prothom Alo right after this boycott decision. The question was if we thought the boycott decision was logical. The majority of the readers thought the boycott decision was not logical.

Khairul Hasan

Surrey, UK

Imposing democracy on Iraq!

Although Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator who committed genocide against his own people, the way he was executed by the US-backed Iraqi government has left many questions unanswered. Saddam was tried and executed under the shadow of US military occupation at a time when U.S. President George W. Bush's approval ratings are at a record low. To many skeptics, it might look like an attempt to spike up Mr. Bush's sagging popularity at home.

In his attempts to bring democracy through armed intervention in Iraq, Mr. Bush seems to have forgotten that democracy cannot be imposed by force. It must grow within through a long process. Neo-conservatives often refer to democratization of Germany and Japan after the Second World War as examples of America's success in transforming dictatorial regimes. But they tend to forget that both Germany and Japan had democratic interludes before the war and Hitler himself was elected by the German people. And Japan was going through a process of democratization before the generals hijacked it in the name of the emperor.

The oligarchs in the Middle East are following what may be called cultural essentialism while neo-cons in America are following what

may be termed as cultural imperialism. Cultural essentialism stems from a belief among the oligarchs that it is essential for a ruler to be feared and not loved by the people. A ruler who is not feared by the people is perceived as weak and likely to be ousted. They tend to believe in Roman tyrant Caligula's dictum: "Let them hate as long as they fear."

Saddam Hussein followed this to a fault and fear his people did. He brutalised the Shiite majority and the Kurdish minority and as long as he kept his brutal acts at home, no one cared. But once he crossed the line and brutalised Kuwait -- an American ally -- and threatened Saudi Arabia, another US ally, he infuriated the world's only superpower and his fate was sealed.

Mr. Bush and his neo-conservative advisers seem to be following cultural imperialism in the name of spreading democracy. They used America's enormous military power to oust the dictator, hoping to bring democracy in Iraq. But instead of bringing democracy, the US military intervention has

try's wealth and the peoples' abject poverty.

AR Shams-ud Doha,
Tripoli, Lebanon

Congratulations!

Congratulations to the unopposed 17 winners in the 2007 national election so far.

The 4 party alliance needs 287 seats more to ensure a complete whitewash! The possible scenario that will give full satisfaction to the Jote to run the government for the next five years would be:

BNP: (Ruling Party): 201
Jamaat: (Opposition Party): 79
JP (Nazir): 10
IOU: (third majority): 5
Independent and small parties: 5
Total: 300

This will ensure BNP retaining full control of the parliament through a two-third majority in the event their friends ever turn out to be foes.

Whether the parliament will meet the same fate following the

even desiccated history!

Mr. Ahsan's conviction that is frank and firm, warmth at heart and the love for the truth reveal his mind that is much dedicated to truth coupled with an undaunted love for the country.

Next comes the creative writer Shahnoor Wahid who writes under the caption "Sense and the Insensibility" is great for the fact that he shows a candid approach coupled with a very good sense of humour in his features. He creates a wonderful canvas that appears to be gripping to the readers and his insight into the matters relates his vast reading and also his love for truth.

Finally, it is the maestro writer MJ Akbar who writes under the caption "By Line" with all his extra ordinary thoughts on a vast canvas of interests that almost covers the issues around the globe.

His amazing craftsmanship, a wide range of knowledge and the beauty of coinage are, as they appear to be so in his write-ups, at his fingertips he does not have to look for them they happen to pour

Two, the prospect of a fair election would be hopefully brighter. In such an event, it is expected the election will be more participatory, credible, peaceful, and cost sensitive plus cost effective (by avoiding say, the cost of two possible general elections that could follow one another within a short span of time). Three, more time will be available for the rectification of voter list in order to make that more acceptable to all concerned (per se), facilitating, among other things, the creation of an environment more conducive to a fair election. Four, the ramifications of further anti-people activities (such as: loss of life, loss of property, and loss of earning) and anti-Bangladesh activities (such as: economic loss, and image loss - particularly, at a time when Bangladesh - through Professor Yunus and the Grameen Bank - can take pride in its winning the Nobel Peace Prize - 2006) that might arise out of or in the course of (or both) future political programmes could be minimized, if not eliminated.

A windfall from above and other

new date could be instrumental in adding an additional dimension to its goals like: politics of production, prosperity and progress.

Interestingly, the election could still take place on 22 January 2007 with perhaps the participation of all political parties, regardless of its (the election's) quality though, provided that AL and BNP-led alliances plus others are able to convince collectively President Prof. Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed to relinquish the position of the caretaker chief in the greater local, national and global interest and that the president decides to do that for the sake of at least a 'fully' participatory election in the country, among other things.

In that event, it will not be grossly illogical to assume, the president will, in consultation with AL and BNP, invite Nobel laureate Prof. Dr. Yunus or any other respected citizen to assume the responsibility of caretaker chief for the remaining period of caretaker government. It could, among other things, enhance the image of Bangladesh, Bangladeshis, the presidency, Prof. Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed and others before the world community.

M. S. Haq
On e-mail

RULING BY US CHIEF JUSTICE

During the US presidential election of 2000, there was some dispute about some ballots. The disputes were finally settled in the US Supreme Court. The case bounced between the Supreme Court of the state of Florida and the US Supreme Court. The Florida Governor's office was held by Lawton M. Chiles, Jr. and Kenneth H.

Mackay, Jr. both from Democratic Party from 1991 to 1998. Most of the justices in the Florida Supreme Court were appointed by them. Majority of the justices of the US Supreme Court were appointed by Late President Ronald Reagan and George Bush (the father of current US president Bush). The world noticed the rulings of these two courts. The rulings

widened the sectarian divide and Saddam's hanging will only add to a conflict which has already cost countless Iraqi and 3,000 American lives. Neo-cons must realize that they failed because democracy cannot be imposed on a people by the marines and their high-tech weapons. Only an orderly withdrawal of American troops may allow the Sunnis and the Shiites to find a common ground to live together. Any escalation of US military presence will only cost more Iraqi and American lives and an already violent situation may spiral out of control. The avoid further catastrophe, the American people must force Mr. Bush to withdraw from Iraq immediately.

Mahmood Elahi

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1996 February election is however a separate, yet interesting issue to watch!

Abed Jilani

Melbourne, Australia

Favourite columnists

I take the privilege to extend my heartfelt thanks to the regular columnist in my favourite daily. Prolific writer Syed Badrul Ahsan who writes under the regular column "Ground Realities" is diverse and unique in his renderings. His features on varied topics depict his understanding of facts that lie deep into the matters that he deals with. A rare insight into the fields that fathoms in a unique brand of writing style that bears the flavour of Victorian beauty of English language --- his crafting of words and the weaving of ideas reflect the mastery that he enjoys over the language. He plays with the words at very much ease. In terms of the contents of his features, reading them one comes to learn a lot about the intricate points that lie beneath the events he digs into because of this uniqueness in his language.

readers find his write-ups interesting, on whatever the topic, be it

forth on the page while he writes them on!

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Political scenario

As of today (5 January 2007), it appears the AL-led alliance will not participate in the election slated for 22 January 2007. They cited the absence of an enabling environment for fair election in the country as one of the reasons for boycotting the election. The BNP-led alliance has been, on the other hand, maintaining: the election must be held within the 90-day period as per the country's constitution. Let us now examine - briefly though - what could probably happen (?) if the election, with the participation of at least all major political parties, takes place a month later (meaning, after 22 January 2007) say, in the last week of February 2007.

Several things could happen. For example: one, constitutional crisis - but that could be tackled with the help of the power currently vested in the president of the republic by the constitution, political consensus and available legal means, besides, other options.

related developments could bring in a win-win situation for both the alliances depending on, among other things, how they would - from their individual plus collective positions, as well as perspectives - interpret the gains resulting (to be) from the shift of election date and utilize those gains in the effort towards achieving respective election goals and strategies, per se.

The AL-led alliance could, for example, claim their apparent success in managing and winning political objectives that reflect on, among other things, changes for the better with regard to matters pertaining to the upcoming election.

The BNP-led alliance, by accepting the change in the election date, could inter alia facilitate a further strengthening of people's perception and for that matter the voters' perception about their pro-people stance and convince more strongly the undecided voters (for example) that they are example setters or trend setters or both when it comes to say, local, national, regional and global interest. In that respect, it may be mentioned here: a possible participation of BNP in the election as

Political agitation

We, the people of Bangladesh, are really in a dilemma about the present political impasse. It is really difficult to predict the direction towards which the country is heading. The strategies of the political parties are changing every day. May be it is moving towards a point of no return. I personally condemn the activities of the Bangladesh Awami League. This old political party which actually led us in the liberation war has now left no stone unturned to misguide us. It has even sacrificed all its objectives and ideology just to win in the cheap political game. In these crucial days the whole nation is looking at the party for proper guidance which it miserably failed to provide. I do not know what will be the fate of the Awami League if it does not participate in the election but surely it will not be a good example for our immature democracy.

It seems to me that the AL is afraid of participating in the election; therefore Sheikh Hasina is trying to fish in troubled

water. The BNP is also not above controversy. In spite of being out of power, it is still trying to manipulate the election process. Both the parties are now striving to secure power even at the cost of the future of the country. They neither have patriotism nor mere sympathy for the countrymen. So now the million dollar question is: should we vote only to replace one corrupt, intellectually bankrupt and morally depraved group by another?

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Caniz Fatema Jui
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New task for Dr. Yunus!

The triumphant return of Dr. Md. Yunus to Bangladesh after receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace certainly makes every member of the Third world (particularly the people of Bangladesh) proud and should signal a positive surge of political values in Bangladesh. He has rightly stressed that there is no alternative to holding peaceful election in the country which must be participated by all parties to be credible and generally acceptable. There is no alternative to humanist democracy. World peace depends largely on disarmament and end of wars and Dr. Yunus should strive for that noble objective as well, for world peace can be achieved only through comprehensive nuclear disarmament. He warned that political unrest in Bangladesh or any other country for that matter would adversely affect the economy of the country. Irrespective of the outcome of his efforts to clean up the muddy politics of Bangladesh, Dr. Yunus should pursue his socio-political and economic goals for which he was awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize this year.

The expectations of the world from Nobel Peace Prize winner ought to be very high. The awardee has to serve the cause of world peace forever, even though the award is given for the services rendered by the awardee for a specific cause, like M. Gorbachev was conferred this for helping end the Cold War that in turn resulted in sea changes in international politics. Similarly, Dr. Yunus should use his diplomatic resources for the cause of world peace as well hereafter. In the light of the recent killing of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein at the behest of the occupation forces in Iraq and Afghanistan led by the US, Dr. Yunus should raise voice against capital punishment per se as being the most cruel way of murder, still preferred and "performed" by the so-called Western world.

Long live Dr. Yunus!
Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal, JNU, New Delhi