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Mass arrests

Mass arrests have become the topic of discussion. It is really a matter of great regret that AL activists are the main target of this mass arrests. During the BNP rule, we saw such kind of mass arrests. This caretaker government has completely failed to make a correct voter list but it has ordered mass arrests to make the election fair! The grand alliance decided not to take part in the election to be held on 22 January. This is a logical stand in view of the situation prevailing in the country.

I was saddened by the reactions of the relatives of arrested people. Police take bribe and release the victims. As most of the victims are poor, giving bribe is not always possible for their families.

The authorities concerned should look into the matter.

Golam Rosul Maruf
Physics Department
University of Dhaka



Defending the constitution!!

A much talked about phrase goes on these days in Bangladesh politics which is "Protect the Constitution at any cost"!!

We all love to see that the constitution is protected. But do we love to see that it is being

heavily demanded (at least in public!) by those who have violated the constitution grossly on several occasions and who have still been supporting all unconstitutional events?

Dr. Abdul Moyeen, Australia

Forgive us, dear politicians

The sorrow is inexpressible. We, the general people, vote the politicians as they promise to give us a prosperous country but those politicians, soon after going to power, forget everything. Isn't it the greatest betrayal? No political party serves us. Everybody is willing to gain power and money (black money indeed).

Under these circumstances, we urge the government and political parties to be a little more patient, to love the country a little more, to pay a little bit respect to those hard working people who always vote for you. We know you people (politicians) have lots of money and power to destroy us but the abomination of public, which is slowly getting more and more acute, will never die if you do not change your behaviour.

Adrita Ahmed
Scholastica School
Uttara Residential Area, Dhaka

Politics : AL style



We always hear lots of wonderful speeches from our politicians and that they are doing everything for the welfare of the general public and common masses of the country but did they really think even a bit about us? They are not always loyal to their own principles. So how can we trust them?

A new example was given by the oldest and one of the largest political parties of our country the Awami League. This party always shout their hearts out about secular-

ism but just for the sake of grabbing power, it allied with a bigot party (Islamic Shashantantra Andolon) and agreed to go by all the conditions set by the bigots. Just for grabbing power, the AL can ignore its very own principle.

But their real face has been exposed by this. They can do everything to go to power.

Sheikh Wazed
New York, US

Conceding defeat?

By boycotting the elections, the grand alliance has conceded defeat.

The future elections of Bangladesh will always be destroyed by the underdogs, if the simple rule that boycott amounts to accepting defeat is not established. The EC must therefore make this a rule. Bangladesh democracy will always be plagued by a pattern of election-boycotts, if this pattern is not nipped right now in the bud. This ominous attempt to sabotage elections by boycotting is a death-blow to the future of our democracy. There will never be election if parties are allowed to "boycott" it.

If they do not like the caretaker government, or whatever is their excuse, then they either must abandon elections, or negotiate to improve election conditions. This is not an enemy country they are dealing with - it is their own land. Politicians have already established a pattern of hartal, parliament boycott, and now they are trying to establish "election boycott". This pattern is totally destructive, it pleases only our enemies, and must not be allowed to take hold. Voting is a fundamental right of citizens.

No party should be allowed to sabotage the elections just because it is not prepared, or feel overpowered by the other party.

K. Gazi
US

Vice-chancellors

Vice-Chancellors of 21 public universities recently met the President/Chief Adviser and placed a number of demands including issuance of quick permission to go abroad for attending international events like seminars, workshops and conferences. It's good that the president has assured them of cooperation in this regard. Participation in international events for open discussion and dialogue with the experts is very much important for academic institutes particularly the universities because the world we live in is changing rapidly with advancements in different fields; economic, social and even politics. The vice-chancellors should be given scopes for competing in global market through participation in different events and to let the global citizens know where we are and where we want to go, in respect of higher education. Undoubtedly, the vice-chancellors are highly qualified, experienced and knowledgeable. They can raise the problems as well as the achievements of Bangladesh to the world at large and experts through participation in international events.

I believe the president's assurance of cooperation will enable the vice-chancellors to achieve their goals.

Professor Lutfur Rahman
Vice-Chancellor
Pundra University of Science and Technology

Dr. Yunus

Just watched the CNN special from Norway with Prof. Yunus and his radiant smile, and had to write to you.. Not a solitary false note there, a wise man if ever there is one, level headed, humble and with dignity and self respect, and always respectful of his people and all humanity.. someone who is creative and systematically has put his good ideas to work..

Bangladeshis (and we your neighbours and people with a contiguous culture in India) can be



Collision course

Now that the collision course is set by AL due to the inflexibility of the BNP, it is only a matter of time before a nightmarish scenario unfolds. The agenda has already been fixed by the AL and it would seem that nothing can now avert the repeat of the farcical election a decade ago, the result of which lasted only for a few months followed by fresh elections. Is that history about to be repeated? Well, we will have

proud of nurturing and having a person like Prof. Yunus in our midst..

Hope we can learn and live with his principles and ideas and example.. when you see and hear a truly good and great person it has a sobering and uplifting influence on viewers!

Gopal Kamat
Mumbai, India

Thank you Dr. Yunus for beginning your speech in Bangla. The people of Bangladesh have many expectations, some of them are: poverty eradication, eradication of corruption, etc. But besides these, the people of Bangladesh also expect to uphold their language, history and culture.

Our people also expect our government leaders and future heads of the state or prime ministers to follow the footsteps of Dr. Yunus or Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to deliver their speeches in Bangla, even in the General Assemblies of the United Nations. The prime minister of Japan, the president of Russia, or others are always proud to deliver their speeches in their own languages in the United Nations.

Nazrul Islam Rizvi
Scholastica School, Uttara
Dhaka

Politics in Bangladesh

The present stalemate in Bangladesh primarily revolves around the question of reforming the Election Commission. Some people call it an advantage to the BNP while others see an AL advantage in it. I don't understand why people look at it from such an angle.

The leaders should study Hobbs and John Locke to understand what is called the state of nature and measure the contemporary problems. They should particularly study the more modern system that Max Weber called "rational bureaucracy." These leaders are not acting in a responsible manner.

After the last election, the AL continued strike for the whole BNP term and accelerated the undemo-

cratic activities as election time neared. This even led to the recent blocking of the ports, vandalism by lawyers and other goons, burning of our national flag in the Supreme Court arena etc. The party is partly responsible for the increase in lawlessness in Bangladesh. This is not democracy. This is turning into fascism.

Abid Bahar, On e-mail

Army deployment

You fail to see the need for the deployment of the army just like you were perplexed by the filing of sedition charges against the law breaking lawyers.

Those lawyers must be indicted because they broke the law, plain and simple. No amount of excuses as to why it led them to break the law can be reasons enough to prevent litigation, if the rule of law is to prevail.

As for the deployment of the armed forces, it is about time that they were called in. Just because you, along with the politicians, do not feel the need for such action, does not mean that it is the majority opinion. If you were to poll the general public, you shall find that the majority welcome the military deployment. Why should school children have to attend classes on weekends to make up for lost time, why should a day laborer be deprived of his daily rice, just because a handful of people are engaged in fist fights over their political booty?

Towhid
On e-mail

Can democracy survive in Bangladesh?

The US presidential elections in 2000 was mired in controversy and to this day a significant number of the losing Democratic Party supporters believe the election was stolen. In Nov. 2000, the fate of the election results hung in suspended animation as the two major parties and election officials sought to resolve the charges of vote miscounting in Florida. After a month of vote recounts and court challenges the US Supreme Court which has a majority of Republican appointed

judges voted to stop the recounts in favour of candidate George Bush. Then there were charges of minority vote suppression under the aegis of Florida's pro-Bush Republican secretary of state, Katherine Harris, and Florida governor, J Bush, the younger brother of candidate George Bush. (Many think that Katherine Harris' election to the US Congress in 2003 was her reward for shepherding Bush's election victory in Florida in 2000) In the end, George Bush was declared a winner in Florida by a margin of just 538 votes, i.e. less than 0.1% of the votes. This resulted in Bush winning the presidential election even though his opponent Al Gore won more total number of votes across the US. Al Gore and the Democratic Party, faced with an election loss under very doubtful circumstances, decided to accept the results. One can only imagine what a severe constitutional and political crisis the US would have plunged into if Al Gore and his party had decided to fight the controversial results in court and through street protests. However, since then the various election agencies, state agencies, and public leaders have been trying to figure out ways and means of making the elections more transparent and fair. It is a reflection of the American ethos that an ideal democratic system like any other process is to be constantly strived for through improvements and refinements.

Bangladesh today has plunged into a severe political crisis due to strong suspicion that the CG is biased in favour of the BNP and has been managing the electoral process in favour of the BNP alliance. The big question now is how the grand alliance and indeed the nation respond to this. The vast silent majority of Bangladeshis don't believe that such patently undemocratic methods as street agitation, political violence, burning of private and public properties, shutting down transportation and businesses through intimidation, instigating security forces to break the chain of command, and in general mob rule are the way to achieve democracy. Let us not

forget that elections are not an end in themselves but only a means of installing a good government. If the political parties practice violence and intimidation to achieve fair elections (by their definition), one wonders how they would govern once they get hold of the levers of power - the past history of both major parties is a very good indicator in this respect. Violence and agitation only strengthens those who promote violence and marginalise those who want to establish good governance and sustainable institutions of government. The path of agitation and violence could very quickly degenerate into anarchy resulting in interference by the third force. Since the departure of the last military government in 1990 Bangladeshis can be proud of having gone through three election cycles and the innovation of caretaker government. Clearly, the system of elections is not yet flawless (I don't know of many countries that have perfect systems) but we have been making steady progress. Transparent and fair election is not a product the country can acquire in a few weeks or even 90 days, but it is a process a nation has to refine and build over time. Those who are genuinely interested in establishing democratic institutions and processes should focus on change through peaceful and legal means, public education, peaceful protests, supporting public interest groups, court challenges, and the parliament. The institutions of democracy are to be built one brick at a time and zealously guarding what has already been built. The Gandhian principles of non-violence practiced so effectively over half a century ago is a more certain way to bring about long lasting democratic changes.

The nation hopes and prays that enlightened leaders of all parties as well as the country as a whole stay firmly and peacefully on the long road to genuine democracy. The current crisis is a very good test of each individual leader's commitment to democratic principles.

Khalid Azim
Fremont, California, USA

Criticising the US

Kazi Anwarul Masud, in a recent write-up, wrote on "Going Deeper", concerning the execution of Saddam Hussein, suggesting that President Bush took revenge by having him executed "on Eid day", and by delaying the execution the Iraqi authorities would be flooded with pleas for clemency. He notes that "One wonders whether this inhumane action taken in the name of law (capital punishment has been abolished in most parts of the developed world) as an answer to past brutalities committed by Saddam regime has not firmly established the jungle rule that might is right."

One would think and expect the US authorities would have wanted the execution to be filmed for posterity and as clear and complete evidence that the execution was conducted in a lawful manner to preclude any conspiracy theories. And the US must have been aware of the repercussions of conducting the execution on Eid day. It has been clearly indicated that the US did not seek a rush to execution of the judgment (unlike the write-up suggests).

The statement that capital punishment has been abolished in most parts of the developed world would be a statement to be taken seriously if it weren't coming from Bangladesh. Bangladesh can only criticise the Iraqis or the US regarding capital punishment (noting that it has been abolished in most part of the developed world) if and when it too abolishes capital punishment.

If a Bangladeshi newspaper write-up has to note that the Iraqis and the US use capital punishment, and that it has been abolished in most parts of the developed world, then either admit that we are not developed, that "our" situation is different, or that we can say something in criticism against others but do not follow the same.

M.M. Haque
On e-mail

