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The political quagmire and caretaker govt

With reference to the above subject, I would like to suggest that whatever the duration of the caretaker government might be, certain actions should be initiated for better socio-economic development:

As far back as 1986 I did point out amongst others in the Annual General Meeting of BCS (Taxes) Association that President Marcos of the Philippines borrowed from International Monetary Fund a considerable amount of money, paying only service charge of 0.75% interest thereon. This amount was utilised in constructing as many as 10 (ten) bridges across the river near Manila City and thus literally throwing the city on the other side. The same thing could be done in respect of the Buriganga river in order to relieve the awful congestion in the city. Much benefit accrued (which I gladly saw in Manila in 1990, while attending a conference of Tax Administrators). I had only hoped that somebody would take up the issue here.

Secondly, a large number of roads need to be constructed in the West to East part of Dhaka city which would reduce the maddening traffic congestion in the city streets.

Thirdly, a large number of Vagrant Homes should be built at considerable distance from the city, and eventually collect all the beggars from the city roads, etc., house them there, so that they could learn how to produce handicrafts, and finally live a respectable life. I'm fully aware of the physical and financial constraints in the implementation of above suggestions, but a beginning has to be made somewhere.

I have a few more suggestions on which I shall write to you as early as possible.

S.M.S. Zaman
Member (Taxes)
National Board of Revenue, Dhaka

We thank President Iajuddin Ahmed for declaring emergency; it has brought immense relief to the people. Violence, agitation, destruction had become part of life. People passed their days in great anxiety, fear and uncertainty, not knowing what is going to happen next. The country has incurred heavy losses due to blockades, hartals, and agitation programmes.

The new caretaker government is at work to prepare voter ID cards and a correct voter list; it would take time and the expenditure would be huge but will it bring any stability to the



country? We don't think so, there are mainly two political parties, BNP and Awami League. Both the parties disappointed us, people have become reluctant to cast votes in their favour. They are very frustrated and unhappy.

We can easily predict what will happen, even if everything goes as it should. Voter ID cards are prepared, the voter list is flawless, the election is held in a free and fair manner. The losing party will declare that there has been massive rigging (sthoho karchupi). They will not accept the result; make many excuses to refrain from attending the oath-taking ceremony. Then the next phase will start, the opposition political party will not participate in the parliamentary sessions, street agitation and hartals will start again. Blockades will be enforced; public and private property will be destroyed. The vicious cycle will start all over again.

So, what is the use of taking so much pain to hold the general election? Which certainly will not bring peace, the political parties will not become united for the sake of the country, and neither do we want to go through this bitter experience again.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Just 12 days ago the country was politically unstable. This situation was made by the political parties and

the past caretaker government as well as by the president who has made many mistakes. The president appointed himself the chief adviser but failed to hold together his ten advisers.

Then the emergency was declared on genuine grounds. If the emergency was not brought in, a number of people could die during the 22 January election. I believe that the emergency was declared on the ground of internal disturbances.

Now the people of the country are very happy with the continuous drive against the terrorists and corrupt political leaders by the law enforcers and the armed forces. The law enforcers have also recovered a large number of firearms, weapons and bullets. If the drive continues for a long time, then national security will be strengthened.

I would like to request the law enforcers to find out the toll collectors and the godfathers of JMB.

Md. Mostafa Kamal
Kafrul, Dhaka

A few days ago I commented on Bangladesh's emergency via BBC. People of Bangladesh do not care how long the emergency remains as long as the caretaker government gains the confidence by running the administration neutrally and trying to minimise corruption.

After my recent visit to Bangladesh (returned on 11

January), I realised that people really do not want either of the corrupt political parties (BNP or AL) to gain power. The point got proved when people were overjoyed with the imposition of emergency (it sounds funny to a Westerner). In a recent comment, Dr. Yunus illustrated the characteristics of both the political alliances. If there is a provision in the ballot paper to vote for an honest candidate and people can avoid BNP or AL alliances without any fear, people would go for the first option.

Having said that, there are many patriots and intelligent people in the country who, given the chance, would run the country for the benefit of the common mass, rather than for themselves and for a few. I am here to advocate emergence of a third force (only honest), who should get together and formulate policies for the fairness in all aspects (keeping away from controversial issues of race and religion). Only open policies with connotations of realistic check and accountability would get public credibility. This is the time for such a force to rise up. I understand it would not be an easy task; hence only dedicated people should come forward who may have aspiration of self satisfaction, but NOT any kind of financial ambition.

I am willing to sacrifice my comfortable life style and join such a group if there anyone who is willing to take this initiative? Bangladesh has a future if only someone can hold it in the right direction.

Dr. Abdul Qader
Cooperative Research Council
(Greenhouse Gas Technologies)
Melbourne, Australia

There had been a consensus and there is a full consensus that the EC shall be reconstituted before initiating any move for the national election. There is no reason to believe that the present incumbents would voluntarily resign even if requested by the CTG. But the question is why it should not be possible to initiate alternative procedures by the CTG, which now has the full authority to clear the ways under the emergency laws. We have noticed that a number of constitutional rights of the ordinary citizens including political parties and the media have been suspended under the emergency law. Then why cannot they suspend the constitutional indemnity of the election commissioners and other senior staff members under the emergency laws?

The government should not show the sign of helplessness, as was done before, that the position being constitutional they can not be relieved of duties under normal law of the republic. This kind of attitude will only encourage the incumbents to cling to their unpopular decision and create a new situation, which

might create greater barriers for the free and fair national election.

The other issue we notice is the Voter ID card or National ID card. The CTG is definitely aware of their prime objective and responsibility i.e. to hold a free and fair national election as soon as possible. For this, we need a correct and updated voter list, and if considered feasible within a strict time frame, they should initiate action to provide ID card to each voter. That is the only option they can and should consider.

The other important issue is the public accountability of the CTG. We think it would be appropriate for the CA to inform the nation on a regular basis through media his government's plan of action and progress made based on a specific time frame, because the national election has to be held within a definite time frame and cannot be kept in abeyance for an indefinite period. Any delay or hesitation in this respect will only give rise to uncertainties.

A reader
One-e-mail

The reality is that now the country is governed by a caretaker government (CTG) headed by a man of unquestionable efficiency. This time, expectation of the people from the CTG is much more than before. I think this is a golden opportunity for the CTG to ensure at least (a) Separation of judiciary from administration (b)

Smooth functioning of the Anti-Corruption Commission (c) Reformation of Election Commission and election related other issues i.e. preparation of a new voter list, introduction of transparent ballot box, formulation of proper qualification criteria for selection of right candidates & submission of wealth statement etc. Since liberation we have seen the limitation of politicians on the above issues. It seems that most of our politicians are not willing to make their lives difficult, therefore, they are not sincere in addressing the above issues. Now, everybody understands that politicians will not play a proactive role on the above issues due to conflict of interest.

For the greater interest of the nation, unconstitutional steps were taken in the past several times. Peoples' welfare should come first; therefore, any legal or democratic process should be reformed to ensure peoples' welfare. The present CTG can create history by addressing the above mentioned issues. If necessary, the government may arrange referendum to give legitimacy to those particular acts. I strongly believe that the majority of the general people will support the government.

The expected major results are as follows:

(a) Rule of law will be established for all without discrimination; abuse of power in influencing the legal process will be drastically reduced; access of the general people to legal recourse will become easier; miscreants will be punished for misdeeds and unlawful acts will be gradually diminished.

(b) The corrupt people will be identified without discrimination; cases against corrupt people will be initiated without fear or favour and corruption will be gradually minimized.

(c) The electoral process will become more transparent; possibility of rigging will be minimized; mistrust among the political parties will be reduced; an environment for free and fair polls will be created; use of black money will be difficult and qualified persons will be encouraged to enter politics.

Consequently, the quality of politics will improve.

A reader
North Circular Road
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

In support of

Dr. Yunus

Dear Mr. Jali, I am compelled to respond after reading that you held a news conference condemning Dr. Yunus' recent comments about the corrupt Bangladeshi politicians.

Such is the case with names. Ever since I can remember, people usually don't ask just names. "What is your name?" is usually followed by "And what is the meaning of that word?" The answer to the second question is literally just so much more meaningful. Once a guy I knew whose name was Nur told me, "I am the light, and I shall illuminate the darkest corners of the earth." He may have been sarcastic at times, but his sarcasm may just be the true desires of his parents: they didn't name him Nur (heavenly light) without any corresponding expectation. Names are the primary modes of expressing ourselves. It's the first joy of creation. It's the most important proof of belonging. A writer will never relinquish the power of naming his book to his publisher, such pleasures are unique and few.

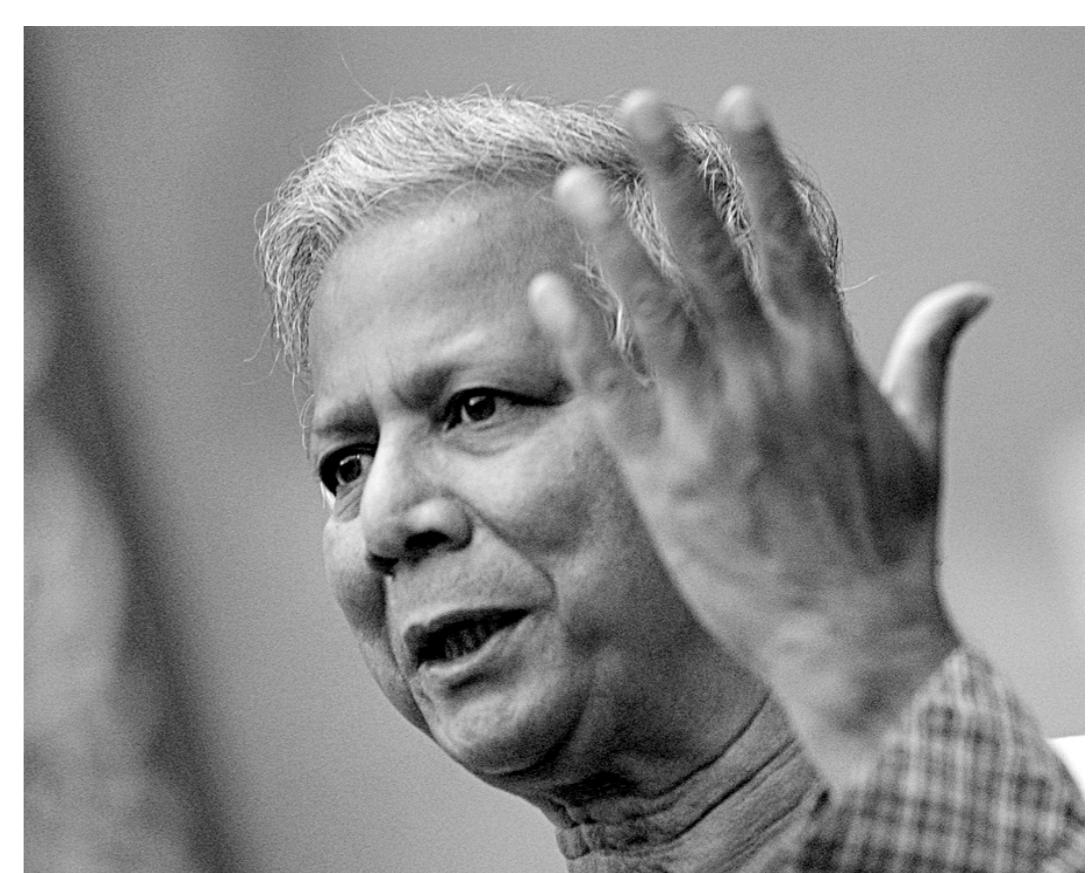
Parents love naming their children in regard to how much they love them, or what they expect them to grow up to be, which is always something outrageously positive. That's just how much our parents love us.

At a distance, a book's cover creates the primary impression about what the book holds. When it is close enough, its 'name' gives us the first determinant of whether we will read the book or not. Not to judge a book by its cover, but have any of us ever read a book without liking its name? If you really think about it, names show more to the inquisitive mind than a hundred-word description. "Twin towers": just the name used to say so much. It used to create an image in the mind, which would fit the physical entity completely. Two towers, side by side, equal in every dimension like an object and its mirror image, identical in every respect.

Names bring out the overall and clustered societies' mindset of certain times and certain places. Why else were a major group of children born in Bangladesh during the few years after 1972 nicknamed Mukti and Joy?

Last but not the least, there is that one and only special name in everyone's life writing which, over and over again in different fonts and sizes never tires our fingers; saying which over and over again never burns us out.

Zahidul Naim Zakaria
East West University



and the AL to drag Ershad into their party (as published in a largely circulated Bengali daily 4-5 days ago) reflect the total lack of idealism in politics. These are, however, only the tip of the iceberg. The actual situation is much more serious.

Therefore, introduction of transparent ballot box will not help us to get anything better than the previous political governments unless the candidates who would be contesting in the election are compelled to be transparent to their voters in terms of their wealth, source of wealth, educational level, credibility and past performance.

Similarly, introduction of ID cards to the voters will not achieve much unless the candidates' true IDs (whether

they were the godfathers to the criminals) are projected to the voters.

By fair election, we mean an election process through which fair people can be elected through a fair process. We noted, just a few days ago, how the AL and the BNP gave nomination to many "Black money holders" again (with certain exceptions of course) disregarding people's hopes and aspirations.

We can change the label of the bottle, wash the outside of the bottle ten times with clean water, but unless we improve the inside contents, the ultimate product will remain the same.

The present caretaker government can play a significant role in fulfilling the expectation of the people by

formulating proper rules to eliminate the participation of black money holders in the next election.

It is to be noted with interest that only the political parties are shouting to have an early election so that they can grab/ share power quickly. The vast majority of the people are in no hurry to see a quick election. They are very happy with the present caretaker government and will not mind to wait for a year or two to see an election process in which they will be able to choose fair and honest candidates who in turn will form an honest, transparent and accountable government that they have been dreaming of for years.

W. Rahman
Canada