cleansing really change the culture of our dominant political parties, ensure intra-party democracy and nominations for candidates of integrity who have given loyal service to the party? The answer to these questions obviously lie within the parties themselves and should be answered by the leaders, those around them, their MPs, and by their rank and file, but, above all, by those who vote for the respective parties.



AMIRUL RAJIV

If the major parties could reconstruct themselves into organizations which are fully responsive to the concerns of their constituents it would be the best option not just for the CTG but for all those who have invested their faith in the democratic process. But what if the major political parties are in no mood to reconstruct themselves and simply aspire to return to business as usual once a free and fair election restores the political process? The two major parties may calculate that a CTG will have to hold elections sooner or later and once they do so then they are the only two major players still in the field, of whom one will be elected to power again.

There may be some truth in this assumption of the parties since a CTG cannot stay forever and nor can the powers that be behind them. There may be elements within the powers that be who are motivated by the Ataturk syndrome of reconstructing the country. However, in this day and age, there is no great future for such missionaries, particularly for countries with low strategic value and a global reputation to sustain within the international community as responsible peacekeepers. To assume any longer term responsibilities to reconstruct Bangladesh many thus be contrary to the corporate interests of the powers that be.

If the powers that be cannot provide any long-term guarantees of durable political change and the political parties cannot be persuaded to reconstruct themselves, then there is no assurance that the current measures to detain apparently corrupt political elements, *mastans*, and economic criminals will be a sustainable proposition. For those, like myself, who have in our lifetime witnessed four military interventions in the political process, covering the Ayub, Yahya, Zia and Ershad regimes, it is observable that all ended in disaster for their progenitors. Military regimes, in our part of the world, who aspire to stay in power, feel compelled to politicize themselves. When they do so they embrace many of the corrupt political elements, against whom they justified their original intervention, which leads to corruption and disrepute of the regime of the politicized generals. In such circumstances, a military intervention which aspires to go down in the history books as well as retain its international prestige cannot afford to overstay its welcome.

Housecleaning of corrupt elements from the body politic is not the same as sustainable institutional reform. Such reform has to emerge out of a democratically mandated political process and will need to be carried through and politically defended by a political party or parties. In the absence of a revolution within the major political parties, an alternative political force will be needed to institutionalize political reform.

Unfortunately, no third political option appears on the horizon to sustain the reform which is desperately sought by the citizens of Bangladesh. Is it possible for such a third force to emerge in Bangladesh? The historical record does not hold out much promise. Sundry attempts to build such a force have come to grief because none of the attempts could find leaders and workers with the message, charisma, stamina, and financial resources, to challenge the deeply embedded hold of the established political parties, at that time, over the electorate. What would be needed for such an alternative political force to emerge?

Let me itemize some of the preconditions needed for an alternative political force to emerge:

1. A clearly defined agenda which can capture the imagination of a broad segment of the voting population and generate confidence that the party is sincere in implementing this agenda.
2. A charismatic leader, who enjoys immediate name recognition throughout the country.
3. The leader must be surrounded by associates of established integrity and competence who have not been compromised by charges of corruption and criminality.
4. A party organization, led by a general secretary, who has proven organizational skills and an understanding of the workings of the political process at the local level.
5. All those identified in (2-4) above must commit themselves to work full time (this means 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year) in building such a party. Party building, particularly of a new party, is not a task for part-timers.
6. Adequate financial backing, transparently obtained, not just from