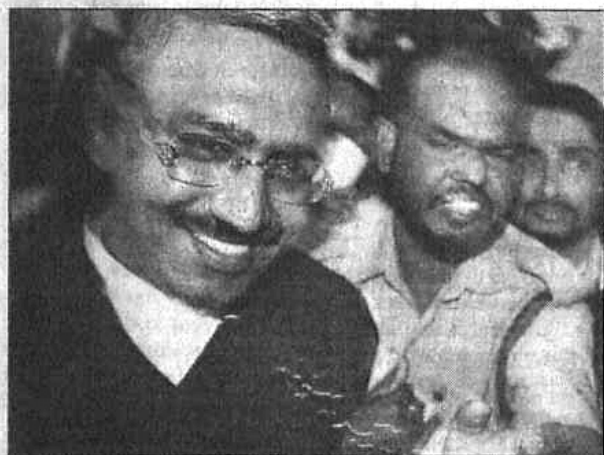


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Crackdown on politicians



The caretaker government led by Dr Fakhruddin must be applauded for its efforts, including the most recent detention of top politicians from both the BNP and the AL. The Chief Adviser has lived up to the promises he made during his address to the nation and has surely earned the goodwill of the general people in a short period. The two major parties have divided the nation down the middle and seemed to have successfully adopted a 'divide and rule' policy for the last 16 years, alternating

offices every 5 years. I agree that these politicians have been untouchable under the protection of the major alliances and that it is a highly commendable initiative by the interim govt. to crack down on these politicians. These politicians shrouded their misdeeds in rhetoric while shamelessly abusing the mandate of the people. The news media has also played its role effectively in the recent months, exposing the unchecked corrupt practices of the politicians.

This is a rare tide of good news for



the common Bangladeshi amidst a frustrating decade and a half of undemocratic rule under the BNP and the AL. However, Dr Fakhruddin must be cautious as he steers towards a credible election. He must ensure that these detentions are not mere eyewash; alongside, he must see through proper judicial inquiry into the corruption of the detained politicians. He has to remember that the support of the people is not open ended and neither is the goodwill of the international community. He



must proceed in the most transparent route to try these individuals, reconstitute the Election Commission and the Anti Corruption Commission and finally hold the national elections as soon as possible. The timing is crucial here - he must not hasten and initiate an election, which may lack credibility, but neither must he defer it for too long, lest critics at home and abroad question his governance as unconstitutional. Safwan B Shabab
Colgate University, US

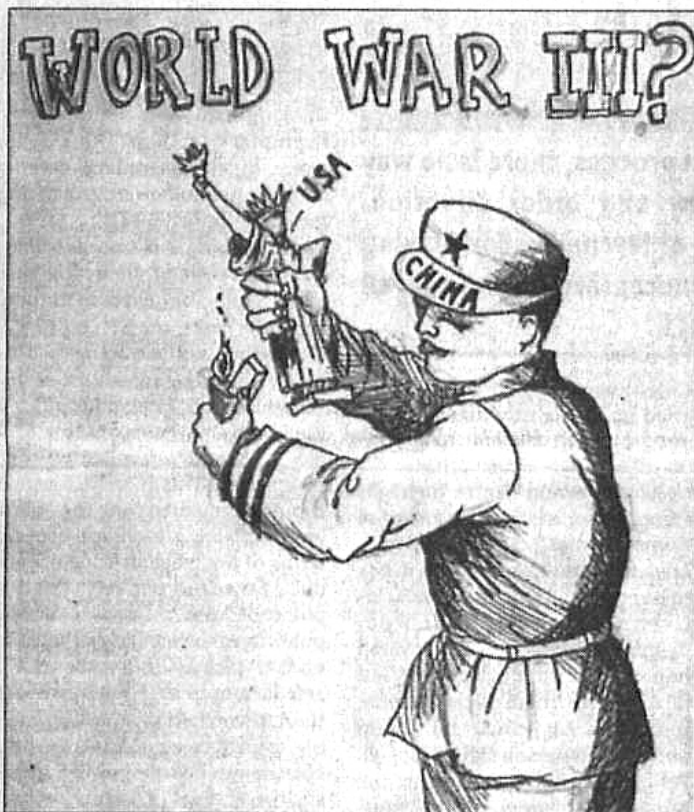


It's about time that the criminals are apprehended and brought to justice. I strongly recommend that these elements be tried in their individual districts in front of their constituencies.

All I want to say is, the time for meting out justice has come and our leadership should be steadfast in their deliberation. No more sympathy or humane treatment for these criminals!
SR, Dallas, Texas, USA

As an NRB, I can definitely say that the government has 110% support of all the NRBs and I also believe the majority of the population will stand by the caretaker government. Bangladesh always had the opportunity to be one of the most prosperous emerging nations. Alas! Because of the hooligans calling themselves politicians and their associates we are lagging behind.
M Baten
Toronto, Canada

US role in East Asia



US policy failure in West Asia has badly affected the US fortunes in East Asia as well, where China continues to surge ahead of other great powers competing for business, while image-conscious Japan, a close ally of US has also reassessed its sovereignty in its domestic as well as world affairs, especially in East Asia, its own bastion. East Asian countries, bracing for economic cooperation, are slowly relegating the United States to the margins of the region. However, the APEC, where it is a leading member remains the main terrain of the US to control the region quite effectively.

China is keen to display its space power and successfully carried out its first test of anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons and is escalating expertise in space activities to prove its global competitiveness as an established military force. With this test, China joins Russia and the US to obtain the capability of destroying spacecraft. The ramification of this test can cause an anti-satellite weapons arms race or a diplomatic push by China to force the Bush Administration into negotiations on a weapons ban. The long-term Chinese objectives are to establish a strategic balance among the larger nations like the US and Russia, and to break up the monopoly on utilization of space. This test helps China to establish itself as a space power with offensive anti-satellite weapons system.

The current eclipse of the US in East Asia is far more evident behind the scenes than in the public domain. Japan and Australia, allies of the US, are privy to its latest marginalisation by the East Asia Summit (EAS). The "future direction of the EAS" spelt out after its summit in Cebu (Philippines) in mid-January, does not mention the US as a potential member of this one-year-old forum.

Mr. Abe, the Japan's prime minister said that he would seek to "reconstruct our legal basis for national security that fits the current times. The post-war regime is the Constitution that the United States imposed on Japan at the end of the Second World War. One of the centrepieces of that statute is Japan's pacifism or the renunciation of the sovereign right to declare war to meet an emergency. He said Japan would press for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council and follow a proactive and assertive diplomacy. On the "assumption" it possessed nuclear weapons.

The PM's primary "mission is to draw up a new national image for Japan" that could withstand the tides of history in the next 50 or 100 years. Mr. Abe, who had already made a campaign pledge in this regard, said he would strongly hope for the quick passage of a bill that could activate procedures for the revision of the Constitution. As Japan's first Prime Minister to have been born after the Second World War, he would endeavour to make his country a role model for other nations in the 21st century. The inculcation of a greater sense of patriotism through education reforms in Japan was another dimension.

Washington, however, considers that an unproven EAS may not be better than the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation network, which includes the US as a key member and spans a wider area than East Asia. As a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum that focuses on strategic issues the US hopes to play its role in the region. Should the US go for disengagement from East Asia now, that would leave the wide field open for China to further engage itself in the affairs of the region and Russia to enter the region with a claim of legitimacy, as an Asia Pacific power. Naturally, the US might find the going in Asia even rougher in near future.

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
JNU, New Delhi

Great initiative

Recently, I watched news on the TV channels that Unilever organised a ceremony to honour ten honest people from different parts of the country. And they were awarded with monetary prize and high recognition for the work they have done. Hats off to Unilever for such an initiative. I earnestly hope that this will stand as an example and an inspiration to all our corrupt politicians that they do not need to spend crores of taka before election, if they do good work, people will automatically support them.

One of those ten honest people even begged to people for money to help the society, and on the other hand, our honorable political leaders do beg to the developed nations in the name of helping our country and fill their own pockets. How long will this go on?
Arman Khan
Farmgate, Dhaka

Weekly holiday

The FBCCI has put forward a proposal for one-day weekly holiday on Sunday cancelling the current weekend of Friday and Saturday to keep pace with globalisation in its special meeting held on February 3, 2007. I humbly disagree with their proposal for the following reasons--

1. Two-day holiday is justifiable for reducing fuel costs.
2. The world has many time zones - when it is daytime in Bangladesh, it is night in the US. So the weekly holiday is immaterial, especially in this age of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) when communication is possible round the clock.
3. The total working hours will be the same whatever the holiday is. If the employees are motivated to work two weekly holidays are more convenient for them.

So there is no need to have just only one weekly holiday.
Saif Tinku
One-mail

Get the election process right

Not only does a free and fair election, which is the mandate of the caretaker government, include the requirement of faultless voter ID cards, but also within its definition includes the guarantee that only honest candidates run for election.

Since there is no point in just fixing the electoral system from one end of the stream, by excluding false voters, the caretaker government has to ensure a holistic solution by excluding 'false candidates'.

The chance that we have right now may not return in the next five years, after a government is elected. Now we have the benefit of hindsight, so by screening the candidates carefully and taking care of flaws in the process, we can avoid further instability.

We will have no one to blame but ourselves. So, the bottom line is, if you are going to hold an election, get the process right, however long it takes.
Khurum Siddique
Uttara, Dhaka

Why this delay?

It is very upsetting that after a period of long 36 years today we are thinking about getting our administration overhauled from top to bottom. Why this delay in addressing a very important issue?
Md. Sharif Talukder
Banani, Dhaka

'Think and think tank'

What the 'think' really is, I am yet to discover. The synonym of it may, however, be close to an idea, a thought, rising in one's mind. Whereas a "Think Tank", quoting Oxford dictionary, means 'a body of experts providing advice and ideas on specific political or economic problems, myself being not an expert would rather prefer to refer it to a "Think Tank".'

God has created human being with the capacity of thinking of doing right or wrong. So, these creatures are the best of all the other creatures of His, on this earth.

Men having this power of thinking, use it in two ways, the positive and the negative thinking, depending on their attitudes.

The success wheel runs well on a positive thinking rail, while the negative one derails it. On the whole, as I have mentioned in the foregoing paragraph, everything boils down to a point called attitude, the most important factor to think about.

Alas! Fortunately or unfortunately, it's the attitude of our present political leaders that makes them blind with a unique democracy design or culture. While doing so, why do they forget the simple fact that they cannot fool all the people all the time?

Our hearts bleed in agony when we see both the parties failing to play their part in their race for the next general election in a fair way. I mean with sportsman spirit. On the contrary, the losers, in total disregard to the rules of the game, don't accept the defeat on the plea

of election being not fair, and thus refrain from cooperating with the winner. Now, a time has come when a silver lining in the cloud is seen on the horizon. The generation-71 is on the scene raising the "voices of the future".

Things will change! It is heartening to note the roles being played by various print and electronic media. We watch these days many interesting and impressive features called "Talk shows" where deliveries by very many Think Tanks enrich our knowledge to form opinion of our own and to think what has gone wrong with our system. And this has indeed inspired me to write this letter.

As we have a chance, now or never, by installing a neutral interim government to set things right, so we should not just hit, run and miss on the plea that the time is short, but avail of it in all seriousness.
Engr. Shaheedul Islam
Former member of Bangladesh Water Development Board

A case for National ID

There is a controversy whether to go for the voter's identity card or the national identity card. Since both are major national tasks involving heavy expenditure and as national identity cards have many times more utility than the voter's identity card, I would like to suggest that authorities consider this option very actively. National identity card should be issued on the basis of one's permanent address but present address must also be mentioned whether that is at home or abroad. All citizens of the country whether voter or not, must be enumerated and in the voter list voter's national identity card no. must also appear. This will help ensure a correct voter list and there will not be any duplication of voters in the list.

This job of preparation of the national identity card can be taken up in stages. In the first stage we should appoint one enumerator

for each of the eighty four thousand villages. The enumerator could be the village matbar, headman or union council member or any educated man from the village. Our villages have on an average population of approximately 1,800 people considering a population of 150 million people and the number of villages to be 84,000. To collect the relevant information about 1800 people will not take more than a month.

There are about 450 upazilas i.e. about 190 villages per upazila. Each upazila will have an office for this job that will be responsible for ensuring correctness of the information collected by random sampling of the villages under their jurisdiction. Each upazila will have a three-digit code no. and each village will also have a three-digit code no. and four digits kept reserved for the voter's identity number. So each citizen will have a ten-digit national identification number.

This way we will have an accurate count of population of the country with the national identity number ready within the next 2 to 3 months. The correct voter list can then be prepared on the basis of the national identity card no. Gradually, identity cards may be issued to the citizens over the age of 18. Citizens under the age of 18 will be issued with the national identity card with photograph on attaining the age of 18. The village enumerator will send a report every three months giving a list of new births, recent deaths and persons who have left the village on a long term basis with their new address. The national list will accordingly be updated. Our embassies abroad must also have a section dealing with national identity card.

They should issue national identity card to Bangladeshi citizens living in that country after verifying the facts from the central population office at Dhaka.

There must be heavy penalty for forging national identity card so that there is no false card.

Election may be held with the correct voter list with national identity number. The national identity card with photograph can be issued at a leisurely pace so that there is no error or duplication.

Considering a population of 150 million of whom 100 million are voters, average size of constituency should be 300,000 to 350,000 voters and keeping this in mind the constituencies will have to be redrawn in order to make it fair and rational.
Salahuddin Ayubi
Indira Road, Dhaka

Fantastic work

We can safely deduce that culprits belonging to all major parties are being nabbed. Unlike the BNP regime where they were just confined to terrorists/alleged terrorists belonging to AL or similar parties, no one and absolutely no one is being spared at the moment.

Now all-out efforts should be made to recover illegal arms and money.
Washimul, Montreal, Canada

Canada-Bangladesh relations

Canada recognised Bangladesh and established diplomatic relations with it after our independence in 1971. The Bangladesh High Commission in Ottawa started its function in May 1972. During the early days of liberation Canada assisted Bangladesh through reconstruction, and subsequently in agriculture, management of water resources and rural economic development.

Bangladesh has been one of the largest aid recipients of Canada in the last three decades. So far Canada disbursed billions of dollars through CIDA. Assistance in water management, rural electrification, agricultural diversification, health and population programmes, non formal primary education has helped Bangladesh in achieving self sufficiency in rice production, and millions of rural

Caretaker government

The present caretaker government has taken a firm stand against corruption. That is what the people of the country wanted to see all the time and I hope that these people will open up the nation's eyes and let them analyse and reflect on the plundering the previous government has done. If the caretaker government can do what it is doing now within such a short span of time, then what were the so called elected governments doing during the last five years?

Let us see how many parties we have. Yes, at last we are watching what truly educated politicians can do for the country. The other day I was watching the news on ntv and even those with little or no educational background welcomed the steps taken by the caretaker government. Why didn't they say such things about the government we elected? This is a major setback and a moment of embarrassment for the other political parties and no wonder they are now thinking. "Why didn't we go for the elections on the 22nd January?" And, at the same time, this is a time of wakening up for the people. If only these people stayed in power for another five years, maybe we would be fortunate enough to witness the Golden Age of Bangladesh after 35 years. But alas! There is something in our constitution called election. Syed
On e-mail

women could come out of poverty.

Canada considers Bangladesh as one of the 25 development partners in the world and its second largest development assistance programme implemented through CIDA is located in Bangladesh. It is the fourth largest bilateral development partner of Bangladesh. It also provides development assistance to Bangladesh through contribution to international organisations and institutions such as the World Bank, ADB and UN organisations.

Bangladesh has traditional and historical connection with Canada. Presently quite a large number of Bangladeshi immigrants are living in Canada and every year some Bangladeshi students arrive there for higher studies. At present many Canadian companies are operating in Bangladesh. Canada always emphasises the democratic characteristics and governance issues of Bangladesh, its development process and its contribution to the peace-keeping operations of the UN.

Granting Canada's open market access to Bangladesh in 2003 significantly increased exports from Bangladesh to Canada. Canadian companies are engaged in gas exploration, telecommunication, and management and consultancy in Bangladesh. Canada exports wheat, peas, lentils, canola seeds, animal feed, cereals, iron and steel to Bangladesh. On the other hand, Bangladesh exports fresh and chilled vegetables and RMGs to Canada.

Both Canada and Bangladesh share common views on various international issues and work together in the UN, the Commonwealth and in other international forums. They have maintained and developed close and friendly relations in a wide range of field.

Closer relationship and cooperation between them will benefit both the countries as well as the world.

Khan Ferdousur Rahman
One-mail

Political impasse



The political impasse that made our lives horrible is over and we wish it wouldn't happen again. The people are cheering the axe on top leaders who claimed to be lawmakers (though law breakers and godfathers in reality). We want everyone to be equal in the eye of law. The government should be strict on their decision of creating a situation where godfathers, loan defaulters and mastans will have no chance to compete in the parliamentary election. Foreign missions will not interfere in our domestic matters if politics becomes stable. Independence of Judiciary and Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) must be established by all means. All parties and their members should be registered with the Election Commission (EC). Only after disclosing their assets with the mandatory clearance from NBR, the candidates should be allowed to seek election. We, the 14 crore people, are looking forward to a bright democratic Bangladesh, with no place for godfathers, criminals, loan defaulters and adulterated food traders.

W Islam, On e-mail