

FROM PAGE 16

**Lt Gen Hasan Mashuud Choudhury**  
The basic point was do we want a better election, we have an opportunity, and how do we have it. Let the EC be set up and then put the nuts and bolts to it, then have a good election. And do not have the claim of election engineering by the parties losing in the election.



this interim govt. It would not be proper to think anything beyond this. Now, why these restrictions? Because, it is a democratic society. The 90-day time frame is a reflection of the democratic feature. Whether it is under a ruling govt or between the two elections or under the interim govt the time frame has been agreed upon. The whole idea is this should not be a long term arrangement before an elected govt comes to run the affairs of the state.

As for the emergency, it can be for an unlimited period but when there is a parliament it is for 120 days. This govt will continue as long as the elections are not held. That is why the provision of 90 days is there. But it is going to be extended. Therefore this should not be allowed to happen. My opinion is, this govt should have only one agenda under the constitution. They will run the day to day works. They will not formulate any policy. They will assist the EC for holding the election. For that they will have to chalk out a time frame. My opinion is election can be held in three months. If I think of an ideal election then I think it may take more than five years. But that would not be practical. It will not be acceptable. The Election Commission should be reconstituted. You don't have to discuss with any political party. Appoint an honest and courageous person. He does not need 10 or 12 commissioners. Maximum 2 commissioners will be enough. This should be immediately constituted and let them ask the interim govt what assistance they would require.

About the voter list I can say that there never was so much of controversy about the voter list. During all the previous elections a fresh voter list was created. This is for the first time that they went to High Court and it required an interpretation. But this time Supreme Court said no fresh voter list but work on the basis of the 2000 voter list. That means we have to accept whatever defects are there in that voter list. They have to update it only. Here it is written that even with ID card it will take maximum 75 days to prepare a voter list. If you can do ID card in 3 months then it is good. But if you cannot do it then on the plea of doing that the tenure of the interim govt should not be extended and election date should not be pushed back.

About reform, if you can do that by tomorrow, within 24 hours then reconstitute the Election Commission. Because their only agenda is to see that the elections are held. Now, this emergency and democracy cannot run in tandem. It is opposite to democracy. Some of the initiatives taken by the caretaker govt are praiseworthy. For example, about the separation of judiciary, I have congratulated Barrister Mainul Hossain. I could not do it myself. It was not possible on our part for various political reasons. The Bill is in their parliament and now it can be turned into an ordinance. There is an order from the Supreme Court therefore this can be done by this govt.

They are doing their best with law and order. I could not do the Humans Rights Commission for political reasons. It is ready and will need only 24 hours to proclaim the ordinance. I could not do the Ombudsman. As for weekly holiday I feel it should go back to one day. Bangladesh cannot afford to have two-day holiday.

**Mahfuz Anam**  
There is a proposal to declare Sunday as the weekly holiday.

**Moudud Ahmed**  
Personally I have no problem with Sunday being weekly holiday. My opinion on corruption is that the Anti Corruption Commission has failed and it should be reconstituted immediately. Unless it is headed by competent and honest courageous people, they will not be able to catch people like us.

Political govt cannot take many steps that an interim govt can because of political reasons. Neither Awami League govt nor BNP govt could do it. There are all sorts of opinions, there are vested interests that come into play.

About black money we all will go for it. But in no way it should disrupt the electoral process. Take all steps to stop black money. I could not finish the work regarding Anti Corruption Commission. This UN Convention on Corruption can be signed anytime. We have created law in this respect. Normally, law is created after signing of the convention but we did it before that. Then what should stop them from signing it?

There is no problem with the law. The sanction has been lifted. ACC can file case on their own initiative after doing their own investigation. They will be able to prosecute cases. We have amended criminal law act. So ACC corruption act has been amended. Many things could not be done because of bureaucracy. But let ACC work now.

Lastly, I want to say that if the interim govt plans to stay for a longer period then some basic questions will be raised. First question would be accountability. Who are they accountable to? For politicians there is continuous scrutiny, media is free, parliament has sessions, public can criticise us. But to whom this govt is accountable? It will be difficult for them to solve the economic problems. Then there is the question of investment. People will soon start to ask about elections. Finally, if the interim govt continues to perform then there will be the question of ratification. All the works done by this govt will have to be ratified in the parliament. In that case the question of two third majority will come up. So, who is going to take the responsibility? That's why this govt should work towards holding an election and hand over power to the representative govt. Ultimately problems will have to be solved by the politicians.

**Mahfuz Anam**  
Today there are a number of problems and you have just said that an election should be held as soon as possible and power should be handed over to an elected govt. But you have to admit that political parties have failed in the last fifteen years. Don't you ever think that there are flaws within the political parties for which we are failing again and again? We want to see an elected govt, but an elected govt gives many promises in their election manifesto but never keeps any of those. There was widespread corruption in this country and many incidences of violation of law were there. Has there been a question in your mind regarding reforms within the political parties?

**Moudud Ahmed**  
I would say that we have both success and failure. But for the last fifteen years political parties ran the govt. If you look at the records of economic growth of last 15 years it never happened before. In social sector, in economic sector, in social indicators, overall economic progress there have been achievements.

**Mahfuz Anam**  
You do not consider the failures as something very significant.

**Moudud Ahmed**  
I do agree about failures but I think there have been more achievements than failures.

**Mahfuz Anam**  
But we think there was more failure. Because of the failures today there is a caretaker govt in power. And the failure of a caretaker govt. will also reflect your failure.

**Tofael Ahmed**  
In every country a govt has success and failure. For the last fifteen years the country has been run by political governments. Politicians should think of doing good work for the country, whether in power or not. But we start to think about how to come to power in the next election and that's why today we are faced with this situation. Yes, politicians have failed on many counts but if the interim govt continues for long they will also fail in many ways.

**Sultana Kamal**  
I would like to come in here and respond to Mr. Moudud Ahmed. What is the index of success and failure? If there was growth then I ask whether the growth has been equal. Was there any distributive justice? Yes, I agree politicians must run the country. But the people must have freedom of choice to elect competent and quality candidate. Do we have the freedom?

**Badiul Alam Majumdar**  
The voter list has to be authentic and it has to be ensured that no one can cast false vote. The court directive is we have to prepare the voter list on the basis of 2000 voter list. We have to prepare a permanent voter list on database basis. We feel it should take maximum three months. The method of doing it is - firstly it must be done in a decentralised manner. Involve the local bodies. Secondly, the process must be transparent. It must be inclusive of political party representatives. Civil society members can also get involved in it. Our proposal is, the hub of this work should be upazila. There will be a committee in each upazila under the leadership of the UNO and the election officer will act as secretary. Members will be taken from civil society. This committee will oversee the work. There will be similar committee in every union with the chairman heading it. Political representatives will be members of the committee. Also a committee will be there at ward level. A group of 3/4 people will collect information. One will have a digital camera. They will go with the 2000 voter list.

**Moudud Ahmed**  
There is an interim government in place at the moment. It is a temporary govt. Article 58 Gha of the constitution says how the constitution can be amended. The article says other than doing the day to day affairs of the govt it will not take any policy decisions besides those needed to run the day to day affairs. The caretaker govt will extend all sorts of help to the election commission as would be required to hold a parliamentary election. This is the function of

every ward there are 2000 voters. It is possible to collect their names and prepare an authentic voter list. The committee will sign it as authentic then it will go to union level and the union committee will give clearance. Our proposal is for 30 computers at upazila level. We can use the software already prepared by Suzan and include the names of 2 lakh voters in each upazila.

The whole thing will need about 45 days. And since political workers will be involved, since it will be done with transparency and accountability it can be an authentic voter list. A duplicate voter will be easily identified in this way. This will also prevent casting of fake vote. This will cost about Tk 175 crore.

**Mahfuz Anam**

Do we have so many computer operators in the country?

**Badiul Alam Majumdar**

That is the challenge at the moment. But it can be managed with the help from all sectors. This will be a voter list containing photograph of each voter.

I want to say that what has been left out in your list is disclosure issue. Through disclosure we may have meaningful choice. Under 44A, disclosure of some information are mandatory. But we are facing great difficulty in getting those.

**Moudud Ahmed**

First of all it is going to be decided by the Election Commission whether they will do it with ID card or voter ID card. It is their jurisdiction. Secondly, it is purely theoretical. My opinion is that 51 per cent of voters are female. Now there are many women who do not like to be photographed.

**Mahfuz Anam**

So, we may all accept that 20 per cent of the women voters will have no photo.

**Moudud Ahmed**

ID card or voter list with photo is an unending process, even if we want it eventually. For this only the reason election date cannot be pushed back.

**Atiur Rahman**

So far we have discussed about the challenges of the caretaker government that it would face in the future. But right now we are faced with a number of challenges on a day-to-day basis. We could not give attention to the problems of the administration.

The first challenge that this caretaker government of Bangladesh will face is electricity crisis. There will be ten new Kansat in Bangladesh in next two months unless we address this issue. I think immediately a national taskforce should be formed with all the relevant stakeholders to solve the problem. Otherwise all the good steps taken so far will become meaningless. That's number one issue. Number two issue is the syndicates and we have to address that problem. Unless prices of essentials are brought down to a tolerable level, if toll collection is not stopped, then that would lead to crisis. Thirdly we always talk about national elections. Strengthening of other democratic institutions will be possible only through the election of local governments.

governments. We hardly talk about local governments.

To make democracy meaningful we have to pay attention to local governments. Therefore, shall we hold national, district and upazila elections on a single day? Or shall we hold national election a month after holding the local level elections so that we may find out what went right or wrong. I think we need to consider these issues.

Another point is - politician alone are not responsible for the criminalisation of society. Bureaucrats, businessmen and many others were also involved in the process. So, if we want the wealth statement of politician then why should not the joint secretaries and additional secretaries also declare their wealth, because they are the ones who are guiding the politicians in unison with them? Lastly, about the window of opportunity, let's now go and review the rules and procedures of each and every ministry which we started in 1990 under the leadership of Prof Rehman Sobhan.

Some institutional innovations are required after thorough reviewing the crisis surrounding the caretaker govt. He said an institutional mechanism could be developed regarding who would join the caretaker govt. Former advisers may from a panel to suggest names of people who could become advisers in the future. Similarly, I would like to propose a neutral commission to address the problem of the Election Commission. A similar neutral panel could be created with the non-controversial chief election commissioner, other respected people in society. This panel may suggest the names of people who could become EC commissioners. Can we think of such an innovation? And same goes for the Public Service Commission. We have not talked much about this organisation. Actually the Public Service Commission has done the most damage.

A neutral panel may also suggest names to be given for appointment as chairman and so on. Don't leave it to the political government, because a political government usually appoints people of their choice. PSC is the largest den of corruption. Then comes the question of who will become chairman of a nationalised bank? Who will decide this? A political government will do it according to its interest. There was a proposal regarding whether a blue panel could be created. There could be certain rules and guidelines regarding this so that just anybody could not be given appointment. I believe that we may form a strong Election Commission.

We have not talked much about this organisation. Actually the Public Service Commission has done the most damage.

A neutral panel may also suggest names to be given for appointment as chairman and so on. Don't leave it to the political government, because a political government usually appoints people of their choice. PSC is the largest den of corruption. Then comes the question of who will become chairman of a nationalised bank? Who will decide this? A political government will do it according to its interest. There was a proposal regarding whether a blue panel could be created. There could be certain rules and guidelines regarding this so that just anybody could not be given appointment. I believe that we may form a strong Election Commission.

Then we may prepare a voter list in 3 months in a transparent way. We

may prepare a draft voter list and hang it at the union council and then we

call a meeting and present the draft. It can be possible. The crisis is not so

much in the rural areas as much as it is in the urban areas. Therefore the

real emphasis should be given in the urban areas. Let's prioritise the

problems. One tendency scares me. Maybe we are expecting too much

from this caretaker government. They should not be too distracted from

their main goal - the Election Commission because otherwise that will

come back as a boomerang.

**Lt Gen Haroon-ur-Rashid**

I shall talk about voter ID card first. A lot of research has been done in the

last one year on voter ID card by a number of organisations. Some of them

said it is possible to prepare voter ID card in three months. I feel it is

possible and the armed forces can play a very positive role in this regard.

Since the armed forces are deployed in all parts of the country, from union

to district level, they can be in the advisory group in the committee. The

resources of the armed forces like computers and operators can be

utilised, and they can also work as supervisors. They are talking of 75 days but if support from

the armed forces comes then the credibility will increase.

With this support it will be possible to prepare a voter list with ID in 75 to 90 days. For

the ID card a national database should be

prepared now which can be utilised later for

preparing national ID card or for any other

purpose. If it is done only for voter list then the

money will be wasted. So I want to emphasise

that the database could be used for many other

purposes.

Regarding the challenges, I want to say that I agree with the comment

that we are expecting too much. First of all I want to ask what is the mandate

of the present government? My understanding is - the first and foremost

mandate is to hold free, fair and acceptable election. But since they will

have to govern the country till the holding of the election they will have to

prioritise their tasks. We are asking for too many reforms - Election

Commission, Public Service Commission, and Anti Corruption

Commission. Well, all things can be done, but in what time frame? How

much time will you give them? If it is expected within say 4 to 6 months then

I think we should not wish them to do too much. If you want to give five

years, then I have to say that the political parties come for five years with

some political agenda?

**Mahfuz Anam**

Can we think of a 90 days time frame and by then reforms of EC, Public

Service Commission and Anti Corruption Commission are done?

**Lt Gen Haroon-ur-Rashid**

The present government is run by 10 individuals whereas the previous

government had 65 ministers. Now every human being has limitation of

output.

My suggestion is whether 90 days or 120 days, if you have a priority of 5

to 6 items, is it possible to look after 5 or 6 committees to advise the CTG?

You need some core people to come and give advice to the CTG. Ten men

are not enough. You need more people to address the issues. Now let's talk

about power. To my understanding no government can solve this problem

in next three years. If you start today by the time you finish the job it will take

3 years. That's my understanding because in 1995-96 I was deeply

involved in power crisis when the army was deployed. So it is not possible

to make a miracle.

About democracy I have a question. Our MPs have to spend lots of money. I feel the reason is when you become MP you are a de facto administrator of the