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suggestions give me the impression that one hand we want the present interim government to have a limited timeframe on the other hand we have enormous expectations almost as if we want them to waive a magic wand and turn us into Singapore overnight. That's the kind of list of demands put forward not only here but in all the other venues where discussions on the interim government are held. Obviously that's not possible. Even expecting the ten advisers to run the routine business of government and devote a lot of time to a list of acceptable, achievable list of goals within a specific timeframe is not a very practical idea because each is looking after 4 or 5 ministries and considerable time required to deal with the problems there. My suggestion is a very practical one. Being a schoolteacher and working with children I take baby steps, do one thing at a time and then go on to the other.

My advice is, set up a very small, six or eight member national task force - one or two representatives from the political sector, one or two advisors and one or two very eminent personalities. Let them present a doable, achievable plan linked to a specific timeframe. That timeframe can be discussed with the political parties and presented by the task force. The prime terms of reference of the task force should be to suggest doable reforms but not micro-manage. Lot of the discussion here is about micro management of the EC, or the law ministry, or other important tasks. It should not be something that should be discussed at the national policy level. At the national policy level the list should be brought down to three or four important points. One, definitely strengthen the existing institutions, and implement the existing laws, set up one or two important issues like disqualification commission. I think that would be an excellent reform. Local government is very important and also decide the order how the election will take place, like local government first and then the national election. And of course, one or two administrative tasks which should be of very high priority. So, I would say, reduce everything to six or eight doables, link it to a time frame, present it to the caretaker government. The committee of the task force should be given a very clear time limit to place the suggestions.

## Rehman Sobhan

Well, lots of suggestions have come forward on doables. But I think part of the problem at the moment is that we are not sure in our minds as to the mandate of the caretaker government. Obviously, if you restrict the mandate to the holding of a free and fair election that is a very specific mandate and a lot of interesting suggestion have been put on the table.

Listening to the remarks that were made here in terms of suggestion what immediately came to my mind is - how many countries that call themselves democracy would actually be having such a discussion. How many countries would need Badui Alam Mazumdar to give this kind of long and detailed talk on how to organise voter list and so on and so forth. I would like to ask a specific question to Mr. Moudud - what is all this about? Why are we going through this process? Obviously while all these part-time civil society members are trying to find ways and means of holding a free and fair election, there are a large number of full time activists who are engaged with strong incentive involved in trying to frustrate this process. Now what is their problem? Why can't you have a free election? What I don't understand is that you have run a govt. for five years, you presumably think that you have done a pretty good job. Then what is the problem? Why did you have to play the fool with chief adviser, why did you have to manipulate with the chief election commissioner? Now, what was your interest in doing that? Why should everyone has to be spending so much time and attention to see how we can have people go and give their votes without the danger of

getting beaten up, without the ballot box getting stolen, without the electoral list being falsified in one way or the other.

In any civilised country voters will go and cast their votes, votes will be counted, whosoever will have the majority vote will go to power. One who does not get majority will sit in the opposition. Could you not face up to an election run on such a process by a caretaker government that is not your puppet?

You come to an election with a goal that let the election process run its course as it is meant to do in any civilised country and then face up to the consequences. We talk of reform of political party, depoliticisation of administration but you spent five years to politicize the administration. You also did the same thing with the security forces. Now, what institution is left intact? You have manipulated everywhere so that at the end of the day you have some sort of election which will then bring to power people who have invested crores and crores of takas so that they can then utilise the administration to violate the law or escape the consequences. What is the problem with the political parties? Why can't you go about running a political party in a decent way in which you seek election, do good performance, you succeed, you from a government. You fail you go to the opposition. Basically what we are addressing over here is how can we change the internal structure of the political parties, so that you can function like normal human beings in a normal democracy. We want to know what is the problem here.

## Moudud Ahmed

Let us take the institutions like EC, Anti Corruption Commission, PSC, Judiciary and office of the president and speaker. The speaker should be neutral but he does not work that way. Even about the concept of an interim government there is question whether it will work in the future or not. The problems can be solved in two or three ways. First, the constitution will have to be amended. A consensus has to be reached in parliament. Secondly, it can be done without such amendment of constitution; if there is enlightened leadership that does not interfere. One of the major weaknesses of the democratic government in our country is interfering in everything - political interferences. Let's take the example of a judge. One with five years of practice can become a High Court or Supreme Court judge. We take advantage of it and give those loyal to us appointment. There is a suggestion of selecting candidates by a committee, which the ruling government would accept. These are some of the alternatives. But to do so what we need are political culture and maturity and enlightened leadership. There lies the main question. This cannot be done through simply creating laws. For example, the EC - it is the prerogative of the president and he does it in consultation with the prime minister. Let us take case of ACC. We created a committee of six persons but ultimately the president gives the appointment. I agree that today all recruitments are done by the PSC. But after giving appointment to a person full authority should be given to him to function without any political interference. About registration of political parties I have written about it in my book. Today I say it for the record.

## Shafi Sami

We have observed that without the support of the opposition EC cannot be functional. I want to take the power from the state to the parliament. It would be ratified by parliament. Another important point is administrative neutrality. There has been a tremendous erosion of culture because of reckless politicisation of bureaucracy. This has to be stopped. A culture of neutrality has to be built up. To do that I have some specific proposals. Retirement age has to be increased. No extension or contract to be allowed. No bureaucrat would be allowed to come to politics within three

years after retirement and seek any kind of election. Promotion process has to be depoliticised. Prime minister will have the power to accept or reject. If the collegial body sends a proposal for a promotion then prime minister can send it back with queries but if the collegial body says the person deserves promotion then it should be accepted.

## Tofael Ahmed

I believe reform is needed in every political party. We are gradually doing it. It is not true that there is no democracy in our party. There is conference. It is not possible to dissolve all the affiliated bodies.

Each and every political party has to think deeply where have we failed today. People expect many things from the political leaders. People want to see people who run the government as honest, principled and dedicated people. Now there is a crisis of such people. It is because politics is no more in the hands of real politicians. We have come through a political process since our student years. Now, no one needs to go through that or need any political background. Therefore, I believe there is need for reform in political parties. In the last five years all the institutions have been destroyed through politicisation. How can there be an Election Commission as the one we have today. There should not be a Public Service Commission or Anti Corruption Commission like the one we have now. We have to take lessons from today. Politics has become difficult since 15 August 1975.

Today people have little faith on us. So let us take lesson. We must put competent and honest people in important positions. This is the honeymoon period of the caretaker govt. They will face tough days ahead.

The caretaker govt has to set priorities. Holding a free and fair election is their major work.

## Moudud Ahmed

It has been said that in last five years all the institutions have been destroyed. But the process began much before that. It began with the 4th amendment. Political crisis in Bangladesh started from the day an autocratic regime took over power. I have mentioned about registration of political parties. And I support that. But I believe no student body should be involved in politics. There can be student organisation but they should not come to national politics. Another public statement of mine is hartal should be stopped in Bangladesh. This cannot be implemented through law but there has to be a consensus among all major political parties.

## Sultana Kamal

I feel the way the caretaker govt has used the emergency people are happy about it. But now they should give a clear idea how long they want to keep the emergency and why so. As soon as emergency is lifted it would be good for democracy. If they can correct the voter list under emergency then it will be better. But lifting of emergency would be my suggestion. BTV is a propaganda TV and it does nothing else. Let political leaders take slots and give their speeches on BTV. That would help avoid costs of organising huge public meetings. That is an idea.

About eviction of slums or stopping extra judicial killing the caretaker govt will have to set examples by doing. Let the process begin. They can also set example of better resource utilisation in this regard. My last suggestion is the chief adviser should from time to time let us know their progress of work. The caretaker govt. should feel accountable to the people. About reconstitution of the EC it should not be delayed.

## Lt Gen Hasan Mashuud Choudhury

The agenda of the caretaker govt has been clearly spelled out by the chief adviser. I think mostly they will go by that. The primary challenge for this

govt would be a balancing act between demand and expectation of the political parties and others to have an election quickly and the other aspect of people's expectation to set things right. The other challenge is to maintain the impetus or the momentum on the activities they have taken on such as the reforms. And we should see the results. They should come up with a time frame. They should ensure that all the stakeholders are positively engaged. They must not forget there are sectors that would like to know what they are thinking and doing. Too much of pontification should be avoided. We have already declared our trust in them so we should leave enough space for them to proceed on with the agenda and show us the result.

## Akbar Ali Khan

The EC has to be constituted. Reforms have to be done under people's representation order but in consultation with the election commissioner. Political party registration can be compulsory or optional. No national election symbol will be allocated to an unregistered party. Annual audited balance sheet can be asked for. Another important reform could be anyone having less than three years primary memberships then he/she will not be given nomination. This would reduce the influence of black money.

Anti corruption commission must be reorganised. If you do not have a strong ACC then you will not be able to control the musclemen in election. I think it is linked to the mandate of the caretaker govt so it has to be made functional. Public Service Commission has to be reorganised because it relates to the moral of the public servants.

## Dr Kamal Hossain

Now those who do not play by the rules, those who play foul, no red card is shown to them, no whistle is blown, no law is enforced. Law enforcement is the most routine function of a government. Now that we have a caretaker govt. to create conditions for a free and fair election - laws must be effectively enforced to do that. Law enforcement capacity is a limited resource, especially at the highest level it is very limited. Let us get the biggest violators, those who abuse the constitution those who have done major corruption to the knowledge of people. There should be instant punishment and instant disqualification before the election. Those who want to serve the nation as public representatives should face up to this test. I'll appeal to the political parties for consultation regarding appointment of neutral people at EC, PSC and judges. The present caretaker govt should also consult.

To use public power for private gain that's the definition of corruption. So abuse of power for private gain should be recognised as a major crime. There should be severe punishment and disqualification. We have seen people doing corruption for massive terms and now looking forward optimistically to serving the nation.

## Asif Nazrul

Right to information act has not been included here. A draft has been prepared by the last govt. so the caretaker govt. can take this up and it would not be a new policy decision. Right to information will lead to accountability.

## Mahfuz Anam

This has been an enriching discussion and obviously we have realised that there are other points to be discussed also. We as a newspaper would like to reflect what you have just said so I thank you most sincerely for giving us such generous portion of your time.