

Why blame only the politicians?

When one party was adamant to go ahead with a farce election as per their blueprint and recapture state power to protect the huge wealth illegally amassed in the past 5 years of their rule, more appropriately misrule, and another party was determined to resist it at any cost, how can we put all of them in the same bracket and brand them as power mongers, out to destroy our democracy?

HUSAIN IMAM

EVER since the state of emergency has been declared in the country and the political parties have been barred from carrying out political activities, a section of our elite class, comprising some retired members from civil and military bureaucracy, bankers, business leaders, journalists, columnists and editors of newspapers seem to have embarked upon a special mission to tell the public that it is the politics and the politicians of our country who are solely and fully responsible for the political turmoil and in consequence the emergency.

It is still not very clear what they are up to. Speculation is that they want emergence of a third force to take over the helm of affairs of the country through a newly orchestrated political process. According to them, if I can understand their language, the politicians are all corrupt, selfish, and unpatriotic. They are in politics only to make money.

So, these politicians should no longer be trusted with power to rule the country. The people would better be served by a government of the type similar to one, if not the same, in power now.

The way some of these persons of our so-called civil society talk about our constitution, democracy, politics, and about the politicians, one might easily mistake them for legal experts, constitutional specialists, or political pundits of international repute. When we see a business leader talking about not only our constitution but also that of India and try to suggest that what we have in the name of constitution is nothing but a bogus document worth throwing into the bin, who will believe that he had never been a student of law or political science?

When this business leader says that the politicians as well as the politics in the country are all rotten and filthy, needing complete reform, who will believe that he is one of those fortunate few who have been the principal beneficiaries of what in his language is rotten and filthy. When he points his finger, accusing the politicians of our country of being immoral, he probably does not notice that three of his other fingers are pointing back at him.

When a retired general turned

columnist finds all wrong in our politicians and holds them fully responsible for all the miseries that have befallen on the people of this country, he forgets to mention that this country was ruled by the army generals for almost half the period of our independence and it was one of those generals who said he would, and in fact did, make politics difficult for the politicians.

When an editor of a newspaper tells us that despite all the odds, we had some remarkable success in the different sectors of our national life over the last 15 years of our democratic practice, but credit for all these achievements goes to people and the civil society, not the politicians, he is certainly not fair in his judgment about our politicians.

How can we deny the historic role of our politicians in giving us a free and independent country, a flag, a national anthem of our own, an identity for our future generation? How can we deny the immense sacrifice of our politicians in upholding the democratic and other basic rights of our people whenever these rights have been threatened by the usurpers of power?

Today we all say that for a true and meaningful democracy to take root, a free, fair and credible election is a must, and for that so many things need to be done by the caretaker government — a truly independent and competent election commission, a flawless voter list, if possible voter ID card, transparent ballot box, and reform of electoral laws so that black money and muscle can not influence the electoral process — before announcing the election schedule.

What did the majority of our political parties, the AL-led grand alliance to be specific, ask for? They also asked for almost the same things and took to the streets with tougher programs like blockade and hartal only when all other mild and peaceful programs failed. And we called them rogues, out there to subvert the electoral process and destabilize the country.

When one party was adamant to go ahead with a farce election as per their blueprint and recapture state power to protect the huge wealth illegally amassed in the past 5 years of their rule, more appropriately misrule, and another party was determined to resist it at any cost, how can we put all of them in

the same bracket and brand them as power mongers, out to destroy our democracy?

There is no denying that most of the people we see in politics are corrupt, immoral, and devoid of any political ideology. They are there in politics only to earn money and wield power. But it is unfair to pass a sweeping comment or to say that there are no honest, dedicated, and patriotic people in politics.

The problem is that most of the people we see now in politics are not politicians. They are either businessmen or retired bureaucrats or mafias who have turned politicians overnight by virtue of their muscle, money, or position in the society. It is probably high time that the political leadership took a close look at the matter and redeemed their strategy or else, as per Gresham's law, they might soon see the bad ones driving out the few good ones and take the driving seat. To be frank, the process is already on.

It is heartening to see that the present caretaker government or interim government, by whatever name one may wish to call it, is making an effort to reverse the process. Wishing them all the success, we only hope that whatever they do they do it within the frame work of law — remaining absolutely neutral and impartial and without being distracted from their actual goal of handing over power to a truly representative elected government in the shortest possible time.

Having said that, the question is, how fair will it be for the civil society or government in power to singularly target the politicians and launch propaganda against them for all that is bad in the country, taking undue advantage of the emergency? The politicians are dishonest but are the other groups in our society all angels? The politicians are power hungry, but who isn't?

Professor Iajuddin Ahmed and Justice MA Aziz were not politicians. As non-political persons, people expected them to play an absolutely neutral and impartial role in ensuring a free, fair and credible election and handing over power to a truly representative elected government. Instead, they played the role of a poodle and made a complete mess of the whole democratic process. Can anybody honestly say that they

were less responsible for the situation?

We all want reform of the political parties. The business community seems to be more vocal than anybody else in this respect. But why don't they ask for reform of their own world — trade, business, loan default, labour relations, tax policy, anti-adulteration law and so on — so that nobody can easily get away without repaying the bank loan, nobody can adulterate food, produce fake medicine, import animal feed for human consumption, evade tax or siphon money out of the country by under or over-invoicing, or exploit his employees. They won't. Why would they if they can make the politicians the scapegoat?

We see some retired bureaucrats and police personnel also joining hands with others in condemning the politicians indiscriminately and wanting the caretaker government to go for rigorous political reform. Why don't they ask for reform of the administration also? Nobody will say that they are all clean. Not least those who had the misfortune of going to them empty-handed.

We will probably serve the nation better, if we look at our own face in the mirror first before we point fingers at others.

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vs Bangladesh and Others, required the candidates in parliamentary elections to disclose their antecedents so that voters could make informed choice. Information required to be disclosed included candidates' criminal records, educational qualifications, sources of income, amount of wealth and loans etc. Unfortunately fraud was committed in every step of the way of this important case intended to prevent criminalisation of politics and the election of clean and competent candidates.

The first unbecoming incident happened at the stage of the Mr. Safa's filing the leave to appeal petition. The Supreme Court secretariat noted on the petition that Mr. Safa was not a party to the original writ and as a third party he could not be allowed to file the appeal. In spite of this serious question regarding the maintainability of the petition, for some mysterious reasons he was allowed to swear affidavits for the appeal.

Next fraudulent action took place at the time of granting the actual leave to appeal. The notice for the hearing was not served on the Election Commission even though the commission and the CEC were the only defendants in the original case. The notice for the three original petitioners was sent to them by using an insufficient address, making sure that the notice did not reach them. As a result, a bench of the Appellate Division, comprising of the chief justice and three other senior justices, granted the leave with one-sided hearing. However, no stay was given on the High Court judgment by the bench. But the court raised no questions about the absence of the original petitioners even though the case was of utmost public interest.

The next turn of events was even

United force of media and civil society

The media, besides performing their own duties as disseminators of news and views, have acted as mouthpiece for the conscientious, conscious and concerned community. Vigilant media and vibrant civil society had a definite effect on the development of events in the last few months, including proclamation of emergency. Their active roles could not but have an impact on the attitude and position of the people at large, and on the political parties, law enforcing agencies and the military.

M. SHAH ALAM

THE last hundred days in Bangladesh have been remarkable in many ways. Things have happened which, while frustrating in nature, also give reasons for optimism. Arbitrariness of the government in power immediately before the caretaker government and partisan actions of the then caretaker chief adviser, accompanied by massive agitation and country-wide siege by the 14-party alliance, put the nation to great test. We have seen some of the worst of our times; we have seen some of the best of our times.

The country was caught in a whirlwind of instability provoked by political chaos. However, despite its political institutions and socio-economic infrastructure being fragile, Bangladesh has absorbed tremendous shocks and demonstrated great potential for resilience and sustainability. Reactions and responses of various social and professional groups, specially the media and civil society, to the turbulent events of the last few months merit a searching examination.

For reasons generally known and understood, our politics failed to attract the best sons of the soil. The result has been dismal and disappointing. It has affected all spheres of our life, for politics is all-pervading and all-embracing. We find our politicians discouragingly mediocre, if not worse. Their efficiency in governance would mostly find its peak in corruption. Once in power, their main task is to prepare the ground for coming back to power, not by good governance and good work, but by undermining the opposition and accumulating more power and wealth as tools for self-aggrandizement, and for winning the next elections. Last time, the dose was too high for the nation to swallow. Excesses have their own peculiar way for rectification.

On the other hand, the opposition is no angel. Their sole task seems to be to put roadblocks for the government, no matter how costly it would be for nation's economy. They would not even sit in the parliament, instead they play their own part with whatever they have, violent or non-violent, to prepare their own ground to return to power. This is confrontational politics, which makes the entire nation hostage to the wishes and whims of the politicians.

The forces that contributed to the nation gaining maturity and strength in facing odds, may we specially mention and examine the role of the media, both print and electronic, and the civil society. It is encouraging to note that the media and the civil society have been emerging of late as very positive and constructive forces in the nation-building process. We have seen the media and the civil society at their best during the turbulent days after the departure of the alliance government. The media and civil society have long been expressing their concerns about holding of the upcoming polls in free, fair and credible manner, and about removing the hindrances that threaten fair polls.

The media and civil society are closely interrelated, for we have seen how the media have so strongly conveyed the message of the civil society to the people.

The media, both print and electronic, have their own way of eliciting, moulding and mobilizing public opinion, which they have successfully done, utilizing whatever freedom of press and speech has been in existence in our country. It is encouraging that, despite political and ideological differences and affiliations to different political parties and trends, most of the press and private TV channels broadcast news more or less objectively and do not shy away

from speaking the truth. While it is true that the reach of the media is still very limited in our country, the relative rise in literacy rate and expansion of private TV channels to the country-side have immensely raised the level of people's awareness of the political life of the nation. Considering the total circulation of the dailies and weeklies, the dish channels, and also the multiplier effect of any news and views published or broadcast, the media's role in informing the public and forming public opinion has been proved to be very formidable.

The media and civil society are great allies. The last few years, specially the last few months, have witnessed a very healthy and credible rise of civil society in Bangladesh. Think-tanks, educationists and researchers, enlightened sections of the business community, retired civil and military servants, eminent citizens, and members of the private

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