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“Minus two” formula



I am getting used to reacting to your editorials and news items as I have already got "ad-dicted" to The Daily Star. You will be pleased to know that many professionals of my generation are opting for your internet addition. Very soon, I will embark on a trip to Egypt to try to understand Rise and Fall of one of the most ancient civilisations. I tried to understand the British, the Romans, the Germans the Turks, the Thais, the Russians, the Greeks in the past. I am misplaced in the World of Medicine, I love history and thanks to the Almighty he gave me the opportunity to read books.

Egypt with its rich history, woke up under Gamal Abdul Nasser, tried to assert Pan-Arabism and Non-Alignment. Egypt under Nasser, joined India, Indonesia, Yugoslavia....to challenge the neo-colonialism

but alas! It has now given in to the pressure of the colonialists and stands reduced to a vassal state of a superpower.

I am tempted to react to that "minus two" formula. I pray and hope that this does not succeed in my motherland. People will decide as to who should be their leaders. It must not be decided by anyone else, never!

I pray that all the political parties will keep their ranks and files united and will not be vulnerable to manipulations. Because, that will be a grave hindrance to our nation's march toward democracy.

Why should they get rid of Hasina and Khaleda?

**M. Hussain**  
On e-mail

A unique country!

So many good things were happening in Bangladesh that I feared that they were too good to last. My fear has come true as leaders known for political and financial crimes are being allowed to flee the country without being tried. Bangladesh is undoubtedly a very unique country. Every country wants corrupt leaders fleeing the country to be extradited. Bangladesh is allowing them to flee.

I am surprised that the wise people in the CTG do not realise that this step is a deathblow to faith, hopes and aspirations of Bangladeshis. Only a few people in the CTG have no authority to make such deals. I am yet to see a criticism of this move by any of our newspapers including The Daily Star. The next foreseeable situation will be back to the conditions of pre-emergency days.

What have we Bangladeshis done to deserve such a fate?

**Iqbal Mahmood, Ph.D., P.E.**  
Associate Engineer  
Petra Geotechnical, Inc.

Welcome changes

Bangladesh has had relief at the tough actions taken by the interim government with great élan and alacrity.

The reforms are welcome. The rest depends on how the political parties view these changes.

**Roney**  
On e-mail

Intrusive activities of political parties

This refers to the letter "Change election laws" by Fatema Chowdhury, 6 April.

I agree with the excellent suggestions forwarded by Ms. Fatema. The interim government should take its time and implement (not only pass laws, but put in practice) the ideas we are discussing here. We are sick and tired of only hearing about, but never seeing in practice, the "democratic" politics in Bangladesh. Politicians and some ruthless political parties have invaded every sphere of our

life. Roads, halls and public venues are to be used by the citizens of the country first, not political parties. Schools, colleges, universities, libraries, national TV, radio, cinema, our history, even our vegetable markets have been invaded by political parties. Everything we do in Bangladesh seems to be controlled by a few political parties. Why? Everywhere we go we see political parties and their programmes taking priority over even the basic rights of the people. Why should we go through a 2-hour long torturous traffic jam for a political party's rally? That is unacceptable. There should be no political rallies or slogans. There should be no politics in our college and varsity classrooms.

It is time to limit the intrusive and totally arrogant activities of political parties.

**Azad Miah**  
Oldham, UK

Analysing the situation

(April 5, 2007). It has been a while that this caretaker government has come to power. We welcomed this government and it did some good things too. Now for the last few weeks, I am noticing a change of tone of different advisers, CEC and also the Army Chief. Let's first come to the comments of the Army chief. He said that Bangladesh will have its own form of democracy. Is he entitled to express his opinion while he is holding his position? I know that government officers cannot have any political bias or views. They are the servants of the Republic and their goal is to serve the state, no matter whoever is in power. Now it's one thing to clear some misconceptions about the role of the Army and it's a totally different thing to say what kind of democracy this country should have. If he were a politician I wouldn't object a bit. But being at his position he cannot and should not dictate policies of the state.

The second observation is that the CEC has said today and I am quoting from your news article "We

will simultaneously prepare a voter list with photographs and national identity cards. Once the massive task is done, we will think about holding election." And then he said, "The question of election may come after it (after voter list correction)." I am shocked not at the content of what the CEC has said but at the tone he delivered it. He said, "We will think about holding election"! Is he doing a favour to us by thinking of holding elections? Isn't that his primary job to do?

Now let's look at the third observation. The Law Adviser said, "We want good leadership to emerge instead of the old ones (before holding the election)." Is that a precondition for next elections? We can prosecute the corrupt politicians, we can create new rules to make sure people with money and muscle power cannot influence elections results, we can give honest candidates a fair chance to compete at the election but how are we going to define old leadership and make sure they are excluded, provided they are not convicted of any crime? Are we going to engineer the elections now?

Probably, I am just being a pessimist here but haven't we been burnt too many times to question these things? My understanding is that if you let un-elected persons to run the show for too long, they will be susceptible to feeling that they are all-powerful and can do anything.

**Saiful Alam**  
Austin, Texas

EC and election

The election and the Election Commission are again in the lime-light. Lots of ideas are floating around for and against early or delayed election. The EC is yet to come up with concrete plans for holding the election. Its announcement that 18 months might be needed to start the actual process of the election has received some soft, mild and tougher comments from the political parties. We have also heard experts with international repute in

the subject not disagreeing with the EC's tentative time plan, and thought it might require 24 months to hold a creditable election.

As ordinary citizens we expect the reorganised Election Commission to set out a clear picture to the people, and give a reasonable explanation as to why they need 18 months to complete the preparatory stage. Why not do the complete homework and then sit with the CTG and finalise it and announce to the people a concrete time plan for the general election? Whatever constraints they might have, the people will appreciate to hear those things.

I am expressing my opinion reading the editorial of DS on "EC's 18 months plan" and comments from the politicians and eminent educationist on our satellite TV channels and the BBC Bengali service. We are hearing about the "black money"; but what about the force and influence of the "white money"?

I have some worries about voter's photo, that is, whether our social barriers will make the plan difficult to implement. Let us wait and see and hope for the best.

**A reader**  
On e-mail

Cricket and politics

Not long ago, after Bangladesh, in England, had beaten Australia in ODI cricket I was talking to a friend in Sydney. I commented that given a year or two, Bangladesh will start asserting its place among the top nations of world cricket. My friend, from Bangladesh as well, laughed and ridiculed me saying that winning against Australia was a fluke and he expected Bangladeshi cricket to fall on its face.

Today, after beating New Zealand (in the warm up), India and South Africa in the World Cup, the same friend joyously mentioned to me that he expected Bangladesh to be contending for the top position in the next World Cup. It was good to see that he had lost his negative attitude recently.

A similar "poison" exists in the political psyche of the nation. A large number of politicians, like my Sydney friend, believe that Bangladeshis are - too poor, resource-less, have no integrity, not hardworking enough, living in a too small a country, not educated enough, without adequate logistical support, no friends to rely on, etc. etc. - to attain any worthwhile position among the nations of the world. This kind of attitude has to go, if necessary along with those who do not have faith in this country.

There are innumerable reasons to believe that Bangladesh is destined to shine. By taking just its location into consideration, we can safely say that Bangladesh is an incredibly lucky country. On the east is Asean, one of the most vibrant regional economies of the world. On the North is China one of the biggest economies, on the west is India one of the fastest developing countries and finally on the south is the Bay of Bengal, a huge resource in itself. The very positioning has put Bangladesh in a dynamic region of economic participation. That it will rise as a nation, there is no doubt.

But this is not going to be easy. It will be very hard, as was hard for our cricketers to prove themselves with all kinds of innuendo and unjustified demands being thrown at them.

**Jamal Haider**  
Macquarie Fields  
Sydney

**Tigers fail in Super-eights**

We were ecstatic as the Tigers won their last group match against Bermuda and entered the Super-eights. Everybody thought our team could compete against any team in the world.

But they gave a poor account of themselves in the Super-eights.

**Tausif Choudhury**  
Segun Bagicha, Dhaka

Caretaker government

A new morning for our Bangladesh! Thanks a lot to our caretaker government. Our independence was won after sacrificing blood and life. But we failed to take care of it properly. Corruption and injustice replaced integrity and justice all over the country. Enough is enough! Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, chief adviser to the caretaker government, is here to give the nation a new sense of direction. Dr. Ahmed has stood up with all the confidence about reconstruction of the country. His every single move to clean up corruption is appreciated by the people of Bangladesh and the world at large. The CTG should remain in power as long as it is necessary to reconstruct and mould our "abandoned" nation. Majority of our population is looking forward to the changes and relying upon this desperate move of the government to create a new nation.

We want to see our nation as unique. And after the reconstruction we all will have to take oath to rebuild the country.

We have been dreaming all of our lives of such a great nation. God bless our Bangladesh.

**Afsan Chowdhury**  
USA

Some suggestions on EC's plan

Let me first admit that I am neither a political analyst, nor am I qualified to make any comment on the political culture and election in Bangladesh. However, as a citizen of Bangladesh I have certain observations. The reforms proposed are important prior to any election. We, including the politicians, know it very well that election by itself is not a solution to the current political crisis.

However, the issue of National ID should be taken more seriously. National ID Number may serve many purposes including updating all voter lists and issuing Voters ID cards only if it is done will the following objectives.

1. National ID Number : the government should enact a law that requires all citizens (children to adults) to register for National ID number. Law should require that this National ID Number be used for every purpose-- right from birth registration to death. That means this number will be required for admission to schools, colleges, universities, acquiring all kinds of licenses (driving, trade, business, professional and initiating organisations), for personal tax returns, hotel accommodations, visiting doctors and hospitals, buying and selling properties, for getting passports, opening bank accounts and soon.

Once law requires this number for all those purposes, citizens themselves will take responsibilities for registration and thus the process can be relatively flawless. This database should be kept with a defined repository. The Election Commission may request the data repository to sort and send them the list of all eligible voters with relevant information. The EC then may ask the eligible voters to register for and get Voters ID.

2. To stop mushroom growth of political parties, all registered political parties must participate under its own ticket at least once in three consecutive national elections, otherwise their registration

will be revoked.

3. Any political party failing to secure 10 percent of the votes cast in a national election will have its registration cancelled.

4. Term limit should be introduced. A two-term limit for the prime minister's office and three-term limit for the MPs should be introduced. This will help change the attitudes of the political leaders. This will also, hopefully, initiate democratic practices within the political parties to develop and nurture a new generation of leaders.

**Mohammed K. Islam**  
On e-mail

Air pollution

Air pollution in the country may lead to an environmental disaster. Anemia, childlessness, respiratory illness, pulmonary disorder, deafness, severe psychological and psychosomatic diseases and hyperactivity are increasing alarmingly as after-effects of pollution. This air pollution is mainly due to vehicles, high pitch music systems, use of mobile phones and industrial wastes. We must take some adequate measures today so that we could prevent the pollution. Firstly,

we can do something to reduce pollution by vehicles. There are many old commercial vehicles seen on the roads of Dhaka. These should be scrapped as they heavily pollute the air through emitting black smoke. The young generation must not be over-exposed to the noise of television, CD players, radio, and high pitch music. Industrial pollution should be controlled within the premises of a particular industrial unit.

Silence zones should be created near hospitals, academic institutions and residential areas. More and more trees must be planted for ecological balance to sustain life.

**R.A. Shukla**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Losing democratic rights?

Two news items drew my attention. One of them is that Sheikh Hasina has been barred from entering her own country. The second is Khaleda is going to leave the country. My view is that if they are really involved in corruption they should be locked up in prison.

Are we losing our democratic rights? Are we losing the same way

as Pakistan?

Though still now I appreciate the government's steps against corruption, I must say people of Bangladesh do not expect the state emergency for such a long time.

At the same time, I will say we should not treat all the politicians in the same manner. Some politicians are really competent.

A good government should take care of them.

**A Mamun**  
Student, University of Huddersfield  
UK

Sheikh Hasina

They cannot bar a politician from entering the country. Democracy cannot be protected through any undemocratic means.

It never happened anywhere and it will not happen in Bangladesh. I denounce the efforts being made by the caretaker government to keep Sheikh Hasina out of the country.

**Razul Mollah**  
On e-mail

Our education system



Since all of us know that education is the backbone of a nation, it is essential to ensure education for all. We achieved independence in 1971. After liberation, various governments changed and modified the education structure several times in this country. The government of Bangladesh made primary education compulsory for all children (between the ages of six and ten) and launched free education for girls. However, still any government of Bangladesh could not accomplish the coordination of the entire education infrastructure. At present, the Bangladeshi education system is divided into three different branches which are the Bengali medium, the English medium and the Religious branch (the religious branch of education is known as the madrassah system). A significant number of children in our country receive Bengali medium

education whereas only well off families send their wards to English medium schools and the poor students go to madrassah. So, the children in our country are receiving education in three different mediums. The environment and the syllabus of the mediums are not same. It is obvious that different mediums teach students differently.

A student from English medium studies British history whereas a student of a madrassah studies Arabic stuff. However, both are supposed to serve Bangladesh. I believe the government should introduce a common syllabus for all. It is GoB's responsibility to provide equal opportunity for all the children to serve the country. If education creates discrimination, it cannot serve the nation.

**Santunu Mukharji**  
West Rampura, Dhaka

American female soldiers

Helen Benedict, columnist for Salon magazine, recently wrote an investigating report about how the American male troops are systematically brutalising female American troops in Iraq. After interviewing many American women soldiers, she wrote: "As thousands of burned-out soldiers prepare to return to Iraq to fill President George W. Bush's unwelcome call for at least 20,000 more troops, I can't help wondering what the women among those troops will have to face. And I don't mean only the hardships of war, the killing of civilians, the bombs and mortars, the heat and sleeplessness and fear. I mean from their own comrades -- the men."

She talked to many female veterans of war and all told her the danger of rape by other soldiers is so widespread in Iraq that their commanding officers told them not to go to toilet alone without another woman for protection. Mickiela Montoya, a young 21-old woman soldier, who was in Iraq with the National Guard in 2005, told her that she took to carrying a knife at all times. "The knife wasn't for the Iraqis," she told Helen Benedict. "It was for the guys on my own side."

With more than 16,000 women soldiers serving in Iraq, the dangers they faced from their own comrades are becoming increasingly evident. Last year, Brigadier

General Janis Karpinski, the senior most woman commander in Iraq, caused a stir by publicly reporting that in 2003, three female soldiers had died of dehydration in Iraq because they refused to drink liquids late in the day. They were afraid of being raped if they walked to toilets after dark. A most shocking case of military sexual assault was that of Suzanne Swift, a 21-year-old female soldier who served in Iraq in 2004. Unable to face her assailants again, she became a deserter during a leave at home. She was arrested and put in jail for desertion. At first the Army offered a deal: it would reduce her punishment if she signed a statement that she had never been raped. She refused and the Army court-martialed her.

As Helen Benedict writes: "Women told me the military climate is so severe on whistle-blowers that even they regard the women who reported rape as incapable traitors. You have to handle it on your own and shut up, is how they saw it."

US President George W. Bush wants to bring peace and stability in Iraq by increasing the number of troops in Baghdad, but with the American female soldiers being raped by their own male comrades, America may be losing its soul in Iraq.

**Mahmood Elahi**  
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Discrimination against college teachers

The Chief Adviser, Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, along with his council of advisers have come out victorious! The head of the CTG has recently called upon the people to build up a just and knowledge-based society. We have come to know that this caretaker government is going to take steps to bring about reforms in the education sector as well. We are ready to welcome any drive of this government.

Here we would like to draw the attention of the CTG to take up the matter of sheer injustice to the private college teachers done by the past governments. We (from a sweeper to a principal) enjoy only Tk. 100 as house rent per month by which even a place in the footpath cannot be found. Again we get the increment and medical allowance according to the national pay-scale of 1991! Promotion and placing in higher scales of the teachers have been stopped for the last two years.

So in order to promote quality education in the private colleges, the CTG should come forward to remove the discriminatory treatment meted out to us.

**Shafiuzzaman Khan**  
Senior Lecturer in English  
Janab Ali Degree College  
Habiganj

END TO TERRORISM?



The most popular theme of the day remains the so-called terrorism, described by the anti-Islamic forces in the West as well as East as an extremely violent action by the so-called Islamic fundamentalist extremists, or the militant Muslims. A tentative analysis of the routes of global terrorism points to the fact that the purpose of the whole thing is to malign Islam and slam the Muslims the way they want. Since the superpower, the US, has successfully led the campaign around the world by targeting the Muslims, there is no way the Muslims can escape the atrocities against them by the ruling circles in every country. Let me put the record straight. The Taliban in Afghanistan, unknowingly, terrified the anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim forces across the continents with their Islamic agenda. Even the Muslim nations that are not serious about Islamic way of life found themselves threatened by the developments in Afghanistan. The US-led West effectively frightened the Muslim nations about the dangers of Islamising the countries. There is hardly any doubt, therefore, that September 11 was worked out and meticulously planned and engineered by the US (CIA-Pentagon-Bush administration) to enable itself to invade Afghanistan, ably supported by the UNSC and Nato. The rest is already history. Now the entire strategy of wars in the Middle East is defined, determined and controlled by the US.

The end of the entire tragic episode of terrorism will also be decided by the US. Let us wait and see! Will the White House throw some light on this, please?

**Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal**  
JNU, New Delhi