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# Saifur Rahman and BNP

I have learnt that the reformist BNP (Mannan) requested Mr. Saifur Rahman to take over the party. I was really hoping that the reformists truly believe in reform. The reason we are where we are as a nation is because we have no accountability. Under the Finance Minister's rule, the whole financial administration became intellectually bankrupt.

We are disappointed with the selection process. Mr. Bhuiyan, if you are a reformist, why are you inviting him?

Alam Jahan  
On e-mail



## Iraqi civil war

The American civil war was the nation's bloodiest war in which Americans slaughtered fellow Americans in much bigger numbers than the combined American casualties in two world wars. In the Civil War, 400,000 Americans were killed and maimed by fellow Americans from North and South. But instead of bringing total disintegration of the country, the United States emerged a much more united and powerful country after the civil war.

Several factors were responsible for such a transformation. One was the realisation that the Americans were slaughtering their fellow Americans who were mostly whites and Protestant Christians. The second was economic as the slave states in the South realised that slavery had become a burden rather than asset. With industrial revolution sweeping the North, the Northern demands for Southern cotton and other raw materials were growing and the conflict with North was actually undermining South's economy. This brought South and North closer to the realisation that in a united American Republic with enough state's rights would be in their mutual interests.

Also in the civil war, there was no significant outside intervention. Although Britain initially provided arms to the South, including naval ships such as highly effective commerce raider Alabama, it quickly withdrew further assistance to South when the U.S. Secretary of State William Seward issued a stern warning. The British took the American anger extremely seri-

ously. They saw the North's ultimate victory over the South in 1865 as an indication not only of the triumph of one section over another, but also of the emergence of much more powerful nation in North America. The British felt that had to concede American supremacy and stopped further interference in the domestic politics of the United States.

Similarly, Iraq is now going through the first phase of a civil war and the American interference may only be prolonging the conflict. Like the North-South Civil War in the United States, a Shia-Sunni civil war in Iraq might act as a catalyst for unity in Iraq provided there is no outside interference. After a period of bloodletting, the Shiites and the Sunnis will have to answer the question: Whether they should continue to kill each other until one side is completely eliminated or they should reach to each other and find a common ground to live together? After the bloodiest war in the American history, Abraham Lincoln declared: "With malice towards none and charity for all, we will work together so that the government of the people, for the people and by the people will not perish from the earth." If after such a bloody conflict Lincoln could promise such a future, it is not naive to hope that the Iraqis will one day come to the same conclusion.

The American military occupation of Iraq is preventing the Iraqis from coming to terms to each other. In fact, the Iraqis are killing each other in the name of fighting the Americans. The Sunnis think that by ousting Saddam's Sunni-

dominated regime, the Americans have installed a puppet Shiite government that must be destroyed. The Shiites think that the Americans are not allowing them to dominate Iraq as the majority. As result, "surge" in American troops is only postponing the day of reckoning, prolonging Iraq's agony. The Americans should take a look at their own bloody past and let the Iraqis sort out their intramural conflict.

Mahmood Elahi  
Ottawa, Canada

## Latest developments

Bangladesh has been in the midst of a serious political crisis since early this year. The signs were all over, not only within the body politic of the country but in the region as well.

Current developments are, of course, a matter of serious concern to the citizens, but more so to its market expansion and price hike control policy, which is deeply influenced by the *rigor mortis* that has set in, in the conduct of economic policy. This is evident from the "freeze" in the normalisation process with businesspersons, the reduced levels of local and foreign investment and the lack of initiative on other fronts.

In democracies, the formulation of reform policy is the preserve of the political leadership, which in consultation with the elected representatives, determines the nation's goals both at home and abroad. Thereafter, the advisers' offices are given the task of preparing the policy options. Once decisions on these have been taken, the profes-

sionals are left to ensure their execution. Of course, other stakeholders, such as defence, commerce, the intelligence agencies, are all involved in the decision-making process.

In the case of Bangladesh, the situation has however been different. Its legitimate security concerns, arising from the hostility of political parties on both its flanks, irredentist claims by civil societies, foreign community group and its desire to play a role far beyond its capacities, have combined to enhance the leadership's interest in and focus on the conduct of its reform policy.

All these have adversely affected the nation and its institutions.

But nothing could be as demeaning as what we have witnessed. Foreign countries were not confining themselves to merely monitoring domestic developments; nor were their representatives in Dhaka seeking Foreign Office's briefings. Instead, they were involved in actual negotiations with the country's leadership about a future political dispensation.

In all this, the people of Bangladesh and their national institutions are mere spectators, while the professionals in the public sector service offices are in growing frustration as the country's image takes a beating and its influence gets further eroded.

Gopal Sengupta, Canada

## Reforms

"Reform, reform and only reform" was once uttered by one of the central leaders of the 14-party alliance. This was one of the most talked about subjects in the recent past. Today when I am writing this note, the word 'reform' is still the most talked about topic. But only the meaning of it has changed. What started as a movement to reform a single institution (Election Commission) is now being designed to touch virtually every institution of the country. The funny thing is that a 'Selected Government' is now doing the work which should have been done by the elected government long ago regarding 'reform'. After 1971 and 1990, I think it is the third time the government is getting the full support of the people.

Every day when we go through the newspapers or the news of the TV channels we can find out how the persons, who were given the power to lead Bangladesh, have robbed us without showing any

mercy. Each day we can see how the people who were appointed to serve the nation as Government Officers have efficiently served themselves. Seeing this, I wonder it would not be wrong if we call ourselves the modern day Frankenstein. The word 'reform' which started as a demand from the 14-party alliance has now touched everything even the 14 party itself! This government under Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed should be given a pat on their back for the brave moves and is reminding us once again that there is no such word as 'Untouchable' in a democratic country.

I have seen that this government is very keen on restoring the history of our liberation movement and war. I am a son of a freedom fighter. I cannot express my anger or my parents' grief when we have to see those 'Rajakars' waving our pride, our national flag. It is time to bring these enemies of humanity to justice.

The government should avoid the balancing act. Today they arrest leaders of one party or alliance, the next day you can see they are arresting leaders of the opposite party or alliance. Please stop this.

I think a dialogue with the politicians should be started immediately. Not every politician has tried to sell out the country, not everyone wanted to make a fortune from the people's wealth. After all, the country is to be run by politicians.

It will be wrong if I say all the points that I have mentioned above are a 'must' for the government or these are the only things right. I belong to the group of many people who think Bangladesh has a great chance now to make an 'U-turn' from the road of destruction and corruption. So we are afraid that if we fail this time to rectify, we would not be able to put ourselves back together again. Finally, I have to say I really oppose the group who are constantly saying there is no chance for us if we cannot execute the 'Minus Two' theory. Their words I think really oppose the very concept of democracy and offend me as a citizen of Bangladesh.

Now it's time to 'Reform', the time has come to believe and to show the world that Bangladesh is not about only 'Two'.

Shomit Ashfaul Haq  
Software developer  
Dhaka



# Coal mining options

I believe we should take up the coal mining issue dispassionately. The Barapukuria blunder is there before us, yet some (so-called intellectuals) want us to repeat the exercise elsewhere! Not true to the popular saying "once bitten twice shy", we tend to mislead people.

Unfortunately, they (the know it all) despite their limited background, knowledge or experience, or for that matter, awareness about coal mining have turned the open pit vis-à-vis underground shaft mining into an unnecessary emotional and cheap political issue; instead of a realistic, logical and pragmatic economic or operational based subject, ignoring cost-benefit oriented options that the country can adopt! They cite old historical matters without publishing any current data and technical or factual based writings from established authorities in support of their viewpoint. In contrast, those who

have seen the modern application of open-pit mining in Germany are presenting their opinions based on practical observations; and one should appreciate what they have to say.

May be our government should appoint a team with intelligent and open minded people with no baggage about past mining background, to study and observe the open pit mining in neighbouring India and may be also

Germany, and present their pragmatic viewpoint which can be the important background study for our national policy.

In addition, I feel that yours being a premier daily with interest on this important national issue along with interested local media and others should hold a day-long seminar to take up the subject in detail. Discussants however should be monitored to ensure that the matters presented are backed up with authentic documents and

published writings, not theirs but outsiders' (from other countries) of the last ten years; not earlier, as open pit mining is a new method of extraction of underground resources.

Possibly, the CTG can take up this proposal after sending a selected fact finding mission as proposed earlier and have it done by November or before

Eid if possible. This will bring out the realities, without emotions or partisan alignments on the subject and determine this vital national issue in the interest of the country without any political baggage attached.

I would earnestly request the Energy Adviser to take up this crucial national issue at the earliest. We Bangladeshis have wasted enough time; in line with the popular saying "Argumentative, thy name is Bengalee". Let us conclude this issue once and for all!

S.A. Mansoor  
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