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Initiate a political dialogue

It is becoming a fashion to blame the politicians for any failure in the affairs of governance, although the country is under the rule of the military-backed caretaker government for the last one year, and not any political party. The politicians and the political parties are showing full respect to the state of emergency rules and obeying the order of the government. The most powerful political spokesperson of the government, the law and information adviser, and the so-called popular talk show hosts of TV channels



very often express their opinion that there is no change in "mon-manoshikota" of the politicians which is the biggest hurdle for positive thinking in granting political freedom to the politicians and the people as well. I was so amazed to hear a TV talk show host asking a question to a politician guest: "You talk about every problem of the country, why didn't you protest the government decision to send the artefacts to a French exhibition?" The inherent message is: if you had protested, this could have prevented the situation that has arisen, as if the politicians are responsible for what happened to the stolen artefacts. The ball shall always be in the court of the politicians, and the government is not accountable and will not take any responsibility. This was well demonstrated by the statement issued by an Adviser to the press that the government had nothing to do with regard to rising prices of rice, and the people will have to accept this.

We think time is ripe enough for the government to change their "mon-manoshikota" and take the responsibility of failures and not successes only. The resignation of Mr Ayub Quadri is a very rare example in our political and bureaucratic culture--accepting the responsibility and leaving gracefully with dignity and honour. I do not know how much responsible he was when the artefacts were stolen from the custody of the civil aviation authority, and none has considered resigning so far from that organisation.

I think it is not at all clear to the politicians and the people of Bangladesh what the government means by "change in the mon-manoshikota of the politicians", and even what reforms they want in the political parties. Be explicit, and tell the bottom line of the government's political plan and agenda to the nation.

The uncertain behaviour of the Election Commission and the blame game of the government need to change. The politicians should be taken into confidence to initiate a dialogue with them to fulfil the government's promise to hand over power to an elected government. Kindly avoid listening to the motivated academicians and political pundits. Be politician-friendly, and give them a chance to cooperate with the government to overcome the impending political and economic crisis in the country. Kindly do not impose any precondition in the name of honesty. You need their support to lay the path of honest politics--already emerging as a political slogan of the government. Kindly do not forget that the politicians mean people of the country.

By the way, I am neither a politician nor a member of any political party. I'm just discharging my responsibility as an ordinary citizen to advise the government which I believe can contribute towards creating a positive atmosphere in the affairs of governance.

A reader
One e-mail

pool of ICT graduates with about 4,000 fresh students joining it every year. The ICT sector is different from any other typical service sectors. As the industry matures with time, the revenues increase manifold with its maturity as evident from the recent experiences in India, China & Singapore. The sector does not require intense mobilisation of resources, nor does it put heavy pressure on national energy reserves. It requires a steady supply of skilled human resources, which we already have, and uninterrupted Internet connection, which can be considered as the backbone of the total system. Joining submarine cable and then keeping it idle serves the purpose of none. BITB should take lessons from the recent revolution taking place in cellular companies in Bangladesh. Revenues can be earned from scanty users and a high service charge or from a huge user base and an affordable service charge. Since BITB is the lone player in this service sector, we hope it will choose the latter voluntarily, unlike in the cellular sector which needed a host of competitors to make that happen.

Md. Shaifur Rahman
Department of Computer Science
Buet

Dhaka metro subway

I have read with interest the proposed Dhaka Metro Subway route plan. The plan confirms that the dead ends in the northern part of the metropolis are the places that need further attention. A 7th subway route connecting Gabtoli, Pallabi and Airport would cover the metro more effectively, providing faster services and allowing leverage for potential rail-traffic congestion in near future. This new route can again be part of one or more northern loops.

Let us not make the subway a replica of the present Dhaka Metro roads system which lacks the East-West connections so poorly.

Mohammad Rezaul Bari
AUB

NRBs

NRBs were telling us: "Shun path of the West, be proud Bangladeshis." It is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard! Who are you to say this? For God's sake, look at yourselves, probably a lot of you were born and initially educated here, and many of you went to a public university--at our expense. Off you go to some other country and serve that society for years and then come back here, hold a high profile conference and tell us to be Bangladeshis! If you really want to do something, come back and show us that you really care, otherwise go back to your adopted countries and stay there and don't bother us with your advice!

I think the CTG has given this conference more importance than was due as have other important RBs.

Fuad Mallick
Gulshan, Dhaka

Thrust sector, but...

Our government has declared ICT as a thrust sector. But the irony is that the whopping tariff on Internet bandwidth contradicts the government's position. Just as the central bank devaluates our currency periodically to discourage import, so has BITB set such a high tariff line giving the impression that it also discourages Internet usage. BITB's current capacity is 24 Gbps but utilization is merely about 20%. Undoubtedly, it is the high tariff rate that is holding back the entrepreneurs in the software industries from leasing bandwidth from BITB resulting in such a poor utilisation. It is to be noted that foreign investors will not invest in ICT sector if they find cost of supporting infrastructure more than those in the neighbouring countries. We have a talented

What's going on in Lebanon?

The presidential election in Lebanon has been postponed again. Again would be an understatement as it is now the 11th postponement of the election.

The Lebanese had been waiting for two months for a new president. A candidate has finally been agreed upon after the 7th postponement and weeks of bitter stipulation. Now has begun a fight over how to elect him and who to elect for the cabinet.

What is going on within the country, one might ask. Why can't they just elect a president, and if they can't, why does it matter anyway? Lebanon's position, neighbouring the two opposite poles of the Arab world--Syria on one side and Israel on the other--is borderline bizarre, to say the least. The predicted class of civilisation is currently being played out in proxy in this tiny piece of land.

Both Syria and Israel actually had soldiers deployed in the country until recently, while the Shiites and the Sunnis of the country were fighting the 25 years long civil war. Israel withdrew the final troops

as late as 2000, except from the disputed Sheba farm area. Syria left only in 2005 following a popular movement originating from the assassination of the prominent anti-Syria figure, Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. But they have left Lebanon widely divided into two blocks.

The anti-Syria block is headed by the 14 alliances, protagonists of which were in the forefront of the army withdrawal movement. The pro-Syria block is headed by ever so powerful Hezbollah. This militant turned political group has both Syria and Iran as its allies; according to some, as mentors.

So far, Syria has allegedly been using the former president Emil Lahoud as a political remote-control to manipulate the country's politics. Now that this term has ended, especially as a UN tribunal prepares to look into the matter of Hariri's assassination with the help of the anti-Syria prime minister, some assume it even more necessary for Syria to have control over the goings-on in Lebanon through a new president.

And that is where the trouble begins. Although March 14 has a major-

ity in the parliament, it's insufficient to elect a nominee of their choice by themselves. The parliament itself is barely standing after the walk-out of Hezbollah and allied MPs last November. March 14's scant majority, too, is under threat as the anti-Syrian parliamentarians show a movie-like inclination to follow the footsteps of Rafiq Hariri. There has been eight such assassinations in two years, the responsibility of which is vehemently denied by Syria. Still the threat is so real that the March 14 MPs are residing with their family at a high security hotel near the parliament building.

Even if the current impasse is broken, it still doesn't resolve the core problems of the country. The physical proximity of Lebanon with Israel would not let it rest in peace minding its own business. Iran and Syria try to pull Lebanon into their alleged 'axis' for obvious strategic reasons, with Israel and USA pulling it in the opposition direction to prevent exactly that. Meanwhile, Hezbollah is reportedly stockpiling and improving communication network in case of another battle with Israel. Apparently, all it needs to ignite a

war in the region is one or two soldiers dragged inside the Lebanese side of the border!

So, what's really going to happen in Lebanon? A tricky question! Fahima Durrat
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Dhaka University

Assassination of Benazir Bhutto

Political assassination is a professional hazard for politicians. It has happened from time immemorial in history of all civilisations and many notable and apparently insuperable leaders have suffered this fate. Julius Caesar, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Liaquat Ali Khan, John F Kennedy, all these come to mind.

In recent years the murders of JFK and Robert Kennedy in the USA, Indira and Rajib Gandhi in India are notable. The killing of the father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family and the four political leaders in jail were not assassinations in normal sense. There have been many attempts on the life of Sheikh Hasina, and although she survived, many others close to her in her political party have been killed.

The killing of president Ziaur Rahman was similarly not a political assassination but a by-product of an abortive military coup.



Benazir's father ZA Bhutto (who incidentally was one of the key players in the breaking up of Pakistan) was not assassinated but hanged by a judicial process for ordering the murder of a political rival.

Although murder and assassination are rife in the sub-continent, it would be wrong to dub such fate as "the curse of the Gandhi family", or the "Bhutto family" or "the Sheikh family" etc.

This is just a normal hazard for those who attempt to establish political dynasties in any part of the modern world.

Engineer Shafi Ahmed
London, UK

The assassination of Ms. Bhutto is a severe blow to the democratic fabric of Pakistan. This might lead the nation to the following consequences.

i) The nation will never see a sustainable democracy.

ii) The faithfuls will turn into radicals.

iii) People will lose their faith in the politicians--a prelude to civil war.

Syed Muhammed Azim
Chittagong

Benazir Bhutto has left a will which seems to have solved the problem temporarily though of PPP leadership. This is clearly South Asian politics at its most dramatic a leader gets assassinated and while emotions are still raw and people are not thinking straight, a member of the next generation of the leader's family is pulled into the ring. Past instances from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and even Pakistan are all too vivid. The family halo glowing around the poor sacrificial lamb's head, all disparate elements in the party are intended to remain together to prevent the disintegration of the fabric of unity!!! Even the family surname is changed!

Clearly Benazir did not name Bilawal as her successor. We simply cannot believe that she would thrust her young son into such a volatile situation a situation where she herself feared for her own life! She had named her husband Asif Zardari the chairman of the party. However, Zardari is a controversial figure and might not have been acceptable to all elements in the party. Also with an election looming ahead and with his 'Mr Ten Percent' reputation, he would hardly be an appropriate choice to lead the party to victory. So it was probably a hurried decision by core party members to come up with the present arrangement son as titular chair and father as co-chair and de-facto leader!! You could see the apprehension on the faces of party officials at the press conference and the way they reacted to questions and random slogans that rose from around....

It has been said that Bilawal will go back to studies he has to, as he needs to be a graduate to contest elections but at what risk! Surely, security will be a constant issue. And most importantly, this dynastic handling of the PPP leadership will only contribute to tarnish Benazir's image which in the aftermath of the assassination was assuming saintly proportions.

Her death has been a real tragedy. The party succession charade is yet another tragedy!

Prof. Arifa Rahman
University of Dhaka



Bangladesh 2008

Last year was a surprise year for Bangladesh. Many impossible things became possible in the year 2007. It will be a memorable year in our history. As a nation we have many historical events that we can be proud of. We have 1952, we have 1971 and both of them have their permanent places in history.

Similarly, 1990 could have a special status for the rise of the democratic sun. But the sun was covered by clouds of confusion and irritating conflicts between the two major political stakeholders. Thus 1991-2006 became the worst example of democratic era. We do not want that kind of democracy anymore in Bangladesh. Instead of that, we better live in a disciplined autocratic rule!

Of course, 1/11 changed many things in Bangladesh. It changed our thoughts and

beliefs. We must learn a lesson from the pre-1/11 period. Needless to say, it's not an easy task to clean 36 years' rust from our minds, from our life style. We understand the difficulties, but that should not be an excuse for failure. We have seen some efforts to clean it but the success rate has not been good enough.

We don't know who will rule our country during the next 10 years. Regardless of democracy or autocracy, Bangladesh needs a positive change for its economy, education, law and order, social security etc. We want no more promise, we want action!

Haroon Rashid
Agrabad Access Road
Chittagong

Voter list

I have become a new voter for the first time in my life. After 36 years of our liberation war, I have registered my name in the voter list. Now I shall exercise my franchise as I wish. In 1978, I became eligible to cast my vote, but no government gave me a chance to be a voter. No enumerator came to enrol me as a voter.

I was not available at home but the enumerator came many times to my place this time around. All who are adults in my family have been enlisted as voters. The initiative of the present CTG for preparing a flawless voter list is extremely commendable.

Md. Golam Mostafa
Senior Executive Officer
Prime Bank Ltd
Uttara branch
Dhaka

Hasina and Khaleda

As an expatriate Bangladeshi I am concerned about the future of the present anti-graft drive of the interim government. I doubt the honesty of its purpose and sincerity in its execution.

How would you expect someone with minimum intelligence to believe that the Awami League or the BNP would reform under the existing leadership of Hasina and Khaleda?

If memory serves us more than a fish, we should remember that it is under the leadership of these two that we became champions in corruption; that people like Lala, Falu, Hazari, Osman became

rulers of the country and were able to amass fortunes that you or I can only imagine with all our high employability and qualifications. These two led from the front the graft friendly politics of Bangladesh and now the AL and the BNP are telling us that reforms will be done under their leadership!

Please stop taking us nearly fifteen million people as congenital idiots. The mothers of corruption should learn from our history which is replete with examples of how we dealt with the people who never thought that their power would ever be challenged.

Afzal Z Syed Ali, London, UK

Inflation



Inflation in any country has some characteristics of a market economy, is quite normal. But when prices of essentials like rice and edible oil soar three or four times in a couple of days and the people's income remains the same as that of five years ago, we have reason to doubt how efficiently our administrators are running the country. An adviser could not make things better by uttering that the government had nothing to do to reduce the prices of rice. People are quite disappointed; a government that can easily incarcerate corrupt politicians with or without substantial evidence is periodically failing to keep prices of essentials from soaring out of people's affordability. It doesn't seem that the market is always plagued by a lack of supply, some unscrupulous traders are pointed as the main culprits every time and the task of bringing them to justice and restoring normalcy in market prices seems to be a daunting one, at least for this government.

To fulfil my daughter's desire to complete higher education, I sent her to Sylhet but failed to protect her life.

This news was published in different national and local dailies. I wonder for what reason such a devastating event happened to my family. Why did the culprits kill my beloved daughter?

I seek the cooperation of all concerned in identifying the killers and bringing them to justice.

Shah Nurul Afsar
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West Subidbazar, Sylhet