Whatever the complexion of our next overlords, we will have to change course. As usual, I expect the victors to ignore another piece of advice.

If I were they, I would move to an agenda of the Left, centred on the farmer, the landless, and the small town. We need to ask questions and find answers for the survival of the majority. That means recognising the small farmer as a key component of the engine of growth. For those scared of all things left of centre, they should understand that the business sector would benefit if domestic demand for goods and services could be increased. The last year or so has put paid to the notion that only the right wing can get things correct with the economy. The regimes before this one showed that only big corrupt business got the lion's share of the spoils.

Crucially, I would ignore the phony war about religion.

Pakistan's recent elections clearly show there is very little political support for religious parties, despite the media (and US think-tank) attempts to divert us into that debate.

I do not claim to have any great insight in to what makes tens of millions of rural voters tick. Then again, if I were wrong, I would be in exalted company.

Many intelligent people in Dhaka like to read magazines such as The Economist. Read their take on the Nepalese elections (before the election results were announced). In conjunction with the US, UK, and Indian diplomats, they got it completely wrong. They underestimated the feeling of the Nepalese for fundamental change and their support for the Maoist party. They assumed the two long serving political parties would return and enjoy being manipulated by diplomats and aid agencies.

(This should make you wonder why we should believe that diplomats in Dhaka know any better than those in Kathmandu -- they do not, despite sounding good in front of our TV cameras).

Our middle classes can relax: there is no significant Maoist force within the territory of Bangladesh. The steady decline of the nation state will continue for a few more years, in parallel to apparently rising prosperity in urban areas.

The middle class should also ignore the inexorable advance of Maoists (Naxalites) in India. That is being fuelled by farmer suicides, indifference to the farmer and landless, and an unfair economic model that does not care to distribute the fruits of wealth created.

Bihar, Jharkhand, and now Nepal are a stone's throw away but, so what? Our middle classes are more concerned about Hillary than Prachanda!

For those who have greater ambitions for this country I would suggest minimising the debate about who will be PM in Dhaka come March 2009.

Rather, I would ask for a radical overhaul in the terms of the debate about national development. For those exercised about protecting resources such as gas and coal, an equivalent "committee" to protect the small farmer and landless is needed.

While some doubt where the money will come from, I prefer to ask, where is the money going?

With remittances at record levels, who is deciding how those billions are being used? How much is being used to import products for the urban consumer or subsidise the city? What proportion is being invested, if at all, and how much in rural areas?

Has anyone talked about setting up a rice procurement fund for the small farmer?

Would it not be just if the uprooted labourer-turned-migrant were to support his compatriots by sending some of his riyals, euros, and dollars into a Fund for Small Farmers?



SHAFIQ ISLAM OF DRIKNEWS

When I hear the phrase "New Politics," what enters my mind is the need for new political alliances between millions of migrants and the tens of millions dependent on farming. I stand guilty of believing in a pipedream.

I would humbly suggest you are, too, if you believe everything will be just fine and dandy after yet another election. While I do not support what we have now, a return to what we had before that is not much good either. We have to change the debate, radically.

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