'Political parties must work together to save democracy'

participation, like the recent city

corporation elections. They [AL]

want to form a government through

walkover, as they know their grand

alliance will not get a majority if the

four-party alliance takes part in the

But the EC did say that it will not

make any more changes in the RPO.

I don't think there is any scope for the

government and the EC to stick to

their prior decision as they have

already changed their position on

several issues several times, due to

lack of experience. It is their respon-

sibility to withdraw emergency and

bring necessary changes in the RPO.

Why are you against the amended

RPO?Willyou get registered with the

I think the government has to give in

to the logical demands of the people.

We are the largest political party as

we had two-third majorities in the

last election. I hope the EC will realise

There are master players, and

what was their game plan? The game

plan is to keep BNP away from the

election process so that they can

bring their chosen person into power

through a one- sided election. They

will do anything to prevent BNP from

taking part in the election.

Election Commission?

this soon.

Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiky is the founder treasurer of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and has been a member of the National Standing Committee since its inception. He was a member of the second parliament and served as state minister in 1980-81. Siddiky was the president of FBCCI in 1979 and DCCI in '76-'78 and worked as director of former National Bank of Pakistan and Janata Bank. He was born on February 14, 1939, and is currently chairman and managing director of Baliadi Siddiky group of commerce and industries. Rakib Hasnet Suman and Rashidul Hasan took this interview.

Till now BNP's decision is not to participate in election until its fivepoint demand, including lifting of emergency, is met. Why is BNP opposing polls amidst emergency? There are two important requirements for holding a transparent and meaningful election -- one is a level playing field and the other is an environment where voters will not feel fear. These are not possible under emergency.

Besides, everyone wants a transparent election, and the chief adviser himself said before the nation that the emergency would be withdrawn, if necessary, to hold a credible election. Even the CEC also told us that he also did not want emergency during the election.

Though held under emergency, the recent city corporation elections showed a huge voter turnout, and many voters said they felt safe due to presence of emergency.

The city elections were a one-party game because only Awami League nominated candidates. It was not a party poll but a one-sided game. Had there been an election contested by both BNP and Awami League, things could have been different. I can say that we could win in maximum cities if we could participate in election.

The government has already announced that the upcoming elections would be held under emergency to ensure security of the people. Do you think BNP won't participate in that poll?

Fundamentally, it is a wrong concept of both the government and the Election Commission. It means the government has no faith in the people. They don't believe any political party, and it's a defamation of the

We can follow India. There is chaos and anarchy there, but they didn't hold any election under emergency. If holding election without emergency is possible in Kashmir, why not in Bangladesh?

BNP demanded scrapping of the amended RPO but the CEC said there would be no more changes, which means the amended RPO would be effective. What will your party do now?

The Election Commission is an independent body. But it has to consider the suggestions of the political parties if it wants to hold a credible election.

Why did Awami League say that they have no objection if some emergency power rules continue? In fact, they want an election without BNP's

the new provisions.

Those who are working on registration related issues are looking into it. BNP is an election-oriented party. There is no alternative to election to save the people from this suffocating situation, and we have to play a responsible role. But BNP will not accept any stage-managed election.

But we want to draw your attention

to the point that there is no problem

for BNP to be registered according to

You are asking me about registration. All sort of efforts are being made to keep BNP away from the election. Why did they hold city corporation elections? Why do they want to hold upazilla elections? Many questions arise. What is happening behind the scene? What is the game plan, and who is carrying it out?

Many political observers said that you are against registration due to Jamaat-e-Islami's stance ... is that

Whatever you think about Jamaat, they are a very logical and systematic party. Jamaat is aware about its

If you do not accept the amended RPO or take part in the election, then will you not help to implement thegameplan?

We have a lot of experience in running the country, which is why we can understand the position of the government. If you see the activities of this government over the last two years, then you can see that there were no coordination centrally ... so who is in power? Who is doing what ... wedon't know.

You have seen the contradiction between the Election Commission and the chief adviser. Now the time for making preparations is very short, but BNP is an electionoriented party. But we have to protest if there is any attempt to keep BNP out of the election.

You have said time is very short for election preparation, has BNP started its election preparation? We are working on it regularly. I think if the coming election is fair then the result of the 2001 election will be

Have you prepared your election

manifesto? Yes, we have started working on it. We are working for everything but we are ourideology.

What is the party position on the persons those who have been accused and convicted on charges of corruption?

The party position is clear, that we can't term anyone as corrupt until the appellate division of the Supreme Court confirms it.

But the BNP constitution says a person cannot stay in the party if he is known as corrupt in the society.

The party constitution is clear. You cannot brand anyone as corrupt before the verdict from the Appellate division, even if a lower court convicted him. We will not do anything against anyone if he is not convicted by the highest court. He/she will lose primary membership if the highest court convicts him/her. Until the Supreme Court confirms it, we are not bound to take action against

Some of your party leaders proposed bringing changes in the party constitution to curb the powers of the chairperson, do you agree with

It might be considered if someone placed the proposal to the party council in the future. There is every scope for improvement. But, before any change in the constitution is made through the council, all the provisions of the existing constitution will continue. The major allegation against BNP in

its last tenure was corruption. Hawa Bhaban became known as symbol of corruption. Do you agree Hawa Bhaban tarnished the image of

Much ado about nothing. 1/11 has happened, but what has been proved? I am demanding a white paper about corruption. We have seen things in the media that cannot be accepted. Whatever you say must uncompromising on the question of be supported by logical arguments and documents.

Hawa Bhaban played a master role as an election office, and helped the four-party alliance win the poll with two-third majority. It worked as athink-tank of the party.

But what was the role of Hawa Bhaban after the 2001 election? You know what happened after election, what was published in the newspapers. But what did we get over the last two years? You have to prove every allegation

What is the party decision regarding those former lawmakers who were known as reformists?

logically.

All except two (Mannan Bhuiyan and Ashraf Hossain) will continue their activities from their respective positions in the party, as the chairperson

What is your evaluation of 1/11? Is there any lesson that the politicians can learn from it?

The proper time has not come to talk about 1/11. Efforts had been made to humiliate the politicians and to tarnish their image and character on a wholesale basis.

However, I want to quote Winston Churchill the great, "You may forgive the criminals, but do not forget their crimes and their names." I just want to say I could have been an owner of a television channel or a bank if I wished to be, but I did not do such a

Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiky

But there are allegations that some BNP leaders became proprietors of television stations, banks and industries through illegal means -does this not damage the party image?

There are a thousand mangoes in a tree, thirty of them are rotten; will you cut the mango tree considering that all the mangoes are rot-

There is no alternative to democracy, election, politicians and political government. Those who have love for democracy, self-dignity,

ening implementation of existing

safety, clinical waste disposal,

decontamination and sterilisa-

consciousness, will have to realise that we will be in trouble if we do not save democracy together.

Holding an election and sitting in parliament is enough? Will the corrupt politicians and ministers be untouched?

How does corruption begin? Who is the beneficiary of corruption, who is behind this? A bureaucrat gets 50% of the benefit from corruption while a minister gets five percent. Could you put them behind bars? They are travelling from country to country and enjoying themselves.

Curbing political violence

Patronage of political activists by political leaders makes the job of law enforcing agencies extremely difficult, and compels them to accept all the blame for politically motivated crimes. In some cases, the police are forced to accept bribes to save themselves from the wrath of the party in power.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

RDINARILY, violence means unjust or callous use of force or power. Till 1857 (the year of the Sepoy Mutiny), Bangalees were regarded as timid. By leading the Sepoy Mutiny, they proved that they were in no way inferior to any other Indian in courage and fortitude. Bangladeshis showed their indomitable courage under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Bangalees are basically peaceful and dislike violence. Because of political and economic restlessness they started changing since the 1960s, and at the fag end of the 1960s they saw political violence throughout the country.

This caused huge damage to public property and victimisation of a large number of non-political people, irrespective of religion. In fact, the steady growth of violence almost turned the country into a "failed state" before 1/11.

For the last 20 months, we have heard much about elimination of muscle power from politics. Both the CTG and the EC are striving hard to find some effective way to control political violence in the future.

However, to be reasonably successful in this venture, effective understanding and cooperation among the government, politicians and the common people are ers of the trade in illegal firearms in

needed. The politicians should be fully convinced about the need to bring a reasonable level of honesty and integrity in their thinking and behaviour.

In a parliamentary democracy, political activists are needed to disseminate the ideas of political parties to the common people. These activists survive on the payment from the concerned party.

Such payment has to be collected from the people (not always people supporting the party). When these activists are not paid adequately and regularly, they have to resort to violent practices like extortion or

Due to easy availability of service from these activists some politicians mainly concentrate on using force in obtaining votes, and pay less attention to the welfare of the people. This results in damage to the image of the party, creates the wrong impression about democracy, and reduces respect for the government, which ultimately has an adverse effect on governmental efforts for accelerated develop-

Political activists, because of strong support from their patrons, go for extortion in the name of the concerned leader or party. This changes their lifestyle and they go for ease, comfort and violence. In fact, they are the principal promot-



Violence is no solution.

the country. Needless to say, the ready availability of firearms results in deterioration of law and order.

Patronage of political activists by political leaders makes the job of law enforcing agencies extremely difficult, and compels them to accept all the blame for politically motivated crimes. In some cases, the police are forced to accept bribes to save themselves from the wrath of the party in power.

The CTG, instead of trying to solve the increasing trend of political violence, regularly advises the police to be more vigilant without giving proper attention to the implementation of suggested measures in the Police Reform Commission Report.

We do not expect that the return of democracy under an elected government will ensure a decrease in political violence. In fact, as the date for national election is drawing near, all the top Bangladeshi terrorists inside or outside the country are busy organising themselves to be used by the political leaders in the

It is learnt that immediately after the establishment of the CTG a large

number of these terrorists took shelter in neighbouring countries including India. It is not clear why the government doesn't conclude an extradition treaty with those countries to obtain necessary assistance for capturing the terrorists from the concerned countries Needless to say, such a move by government will be welcomed by

the people. Hardly two months are left for the parliamentary election. Unless there is some sort of understanding between the government and the political parties, there is a strong possibility of an increase in political violence to an unacceptable level. This may affect the voting of minority communities and women voters It may happen even in relaxed

To hold the parliamentary election credibly and peacefully, all-out efforts are necessary to maintain a peaceful atmosphere. We have to control the heinous activities of the terrorists as much as possible immediately before and after the election.

A.B.M.S. Zahur is a former joint secretary.

Battling HIV/AIDS

If we start immediately and in a logically planned manner, we can stop HIV in Bangladesh. Our social, cultural and religious environment has kept us safe so far. Now it is for us to take the initiative and drive back the HIV epidemic from our motherland.

ISHTIAQ SHAHRIAR JOARDER

THEN the world first learned about HIV/AIDS in the early eighties there was confusion, stigma and little scientific information. At first, many thought it was a disease of homosexuals because the first identified cases were from that group. Almost everybody in the regular society thought the new infection posed no direct threat.

However, this turned out to be a myth and, like a bush fire, HIV swept across the globe affecting every single country. Doctors and scientists embarked on rigorous studies and researches for discovering a cure, but a horrible truth emerged -there was no ready cure because the virus continuously changed its physical structure!

So if one element controlled or cured one particular strain, it was ineffective on many other varieties

For the first time since the bubonic plague of the medieval ages, mankind faced another similar situation of the same magnitude and the only way out is though prevention. The public health specialists from all over the world joined hands and initiated preventive measures on both national and international scale.

Even then it took decades of concerted efforts to slow down the onslaught of HIV because like the many shifting physical shapes, HIV also has many routes for spreading and some of these routes are less known or considered for interven-

The social and economic burden of HIV epidemic on a nation is devas tating and one has just to look at the African countries to get an idea!

HIV infection was detected in Bangladesh around the nineties and, to date, the prevalence in the general population is less than one percent -- meaning there is still no general epidemic. This is no reason for complacency on our part for a number of reasons:

• The countries surrounding Bangladesh -- India, Mayanmar China, Thailand -- have either HIV

epidemic or very high prevalence; · Some Most At Risk Groups (MARG), like Intravenous Drug Users (IDU), in Bangladesh show much higher prevalence at certain sampling points -- the experts call this a "concentrated epidemic;"

• The national serological and behavioural surveillance systems are not comprehensive or concurrent, leaving large gaps through which HIV epidemic may enter;

· National HIV interventions are not consistent or comprehensive-- for example, last year, there was a drop in the HIV interventions by the NGO network, which implements the bulk of community interventions because there was a drop in donor funding. Most of the interventions cover the most accessible and the most popular locations and target groups; · The government is not strength-

tion of surgical instruments, blood transfusion, special protection acts for women and children, So, what can we do about HIV pre-

vention in Bangladesh?

First of all, we need to pool all available resources and initiate a national policy for coordination and collaboration for HIV interventions. This will immediately improve outcome and reduce wastage of increasingly scarce resources.

Secondly, we need to standardise

all critical HIV interventions for maximum effect -- for example all messages on condom use, no matter by whom, should say the same thing in exactly the same way. Then we need to prioritise our national HIV interventions so that

they will produce maximum effect in minimum possible time. In order to do this we can look at Thailand, which has managed to bring down the HIV infection on a national scale.

It is best for us just to copy the two focus areas that the Thailand government acted upon -- consistent condom use and regulations for commercial sex.

safety policies regarding needle • Strengthening of STI/RTI case detection and treatment,

· Strict implementation of existing blood transfusion, and surgical instrument and needle safety regulations, with high penalty for

The other focus areas would

noncompliance, · Formulation of national clinical

waste disposal standards, Formulation and strict implementation of HIV policies regarding migrating populations and

Strict implementation of existing women and child protection laws. The last relates to national HIV scene because, in almost all cases of exploitation or abuse of women and children, there is every possibility for HIV infection. We can use existing women empowerment and adolescent programs in this regard.

If we start immediately and in a logically planned manner, we can stop HIV in Bangladesh. Our social, cultural and religious environment has kept us safe so far. Now it is for us to take the initiative and drive back the HIV epidemic from our motherland.

Dr. Ishtiag Shahriar Joarder is a national HIV specialist in the second urban primary health care



The real reason for the war in Georgia



urgent redistribution of vowels words such as gubrdyunis. Even we across the world.

"Sources on the ground inform grab," a spokesman said. "The tragedy is that Georgia is already drastically short of vowels. The shelling started in vowel-short Tskhinvali, then the action moved to Tbilisi, and fears are growing for only two vowels to start with."

Grigr Mzdzhy denied having any interest in their neighbours' vow-

S the war in Georgia had els. "Why would we? Georgians haff vowels a day." hardly any vowels," Cmdr Mzdzhy Nations has called for an said. "Their language is full of cannot say them."

us that the Russian incursion is meeting tomorrow to discuss actually a thinly disguised vowel- whether to replicate the famous air-drop of vowels over Bosnia in 1996, sponsored by The Onion

not enough vowels for everyone on the city of Mtskheta, which had true," a World Health Organization name Aotearoa. spokesman said. "Some places

The conflict has highlighted the world's drastic vowel shortage. The WHO has designated a minimum of two vowels a day as a minimum The UN Security Council is for health. Anything below that is impossible." classified as being "under the poverty line" henceforth to be

Last week, the UN strongly "Many people believe there are condemned New Zealand, normally a neutral party in conflicts,

New Zealand diplomats them, whereas in others, people traditional Maori word for the land, have to scrape by on less than two but the UN's Croation ambassador and member nations are anxious to for sheep, made entirely of vowels: Visitour columnist at: www.vittachi.com.

dismissed the excuse out of hand. "In Croatian, the word 'supplying' is opskrbljivanje," he said. "Most arrests were made last night. A business people cannot say it, so economic activity has been made

A Slovak diplomat added: known as the pyrty line, to avoid such as styrt and zmrzlina and zblnknutie. Can you imagine the hardship suffered by our children, having to grow up with words that an hour. cannot be uttered, even mentally, the planet, but it is simply not for frequently using its alternative without complex lip-maneuvers spots, with nations donating that take years to master?"

use came into force at the weekend,

be seen to be enforcing them.

In connection with this, three literary scholar at the Sorbonne in Paris was charged with excessive ing "little sister." use of "Rousseauian," an Australian feature-writer was "Slavic languages are full of words detained for writing "pharmacopoeia," and a warning was given to a London railway station manager for using "queueing" four times in

But there have also been bright vowel-rich words to the belea-New super-strict United guered Georgians. The Italians sent However, Russian commander have an obscenely large number of pleaded that the name was the Nations rules on excessive vowel over their word aiuola, and the Romanians dispatched their term

oaie. The Singaporeans have sent

over a surname, Ooi, and the Chinese have offered mooi, mean-Aid workers hope these will

provide some relief until next week,

when freight transport from Finland is due to arrive bearing a large shipment of the archaic 12vowel Finnish word for dating, riiuuyöaieoionta. The Georgian Minister for Vowels, Radze Vzdzhe, said: "When

I heard about the Finnish offer, I had tears in my eyes. Or as we say in Georgia, tyrzh in my yrzh."