

## Those convicted taking part in election!

The question is of morality and clean politics

We are flabbergasted at the airing of a demand by BNP joint-secretary general Nazrul Islam Khan to the effect that those convicted by lower and special courts be allowed to participate in the polls pending appeal to the higher court. Something on similar lines has also been advanced by AL acting president Zillur Rahman.

We find the argument for the convicts' participation in the election expedient, and even disingenuous.

From a legalistic point of view and technically speaking, their claim may have a basis as a convict has a natural right to appeal. But what about the question of morality? Here are men who have been found guilty of the charges levelled against them through a legal process in a court of law. And what is the background it was set against? We all know that it was corruption, more than anything else that brought about the present state of things. When people are longing for a better future, something that is not *status quo ante* at the very least, such a demand is disquieting. Rather than allowing them to take part in the election while we await disposal of their appeal in a higher court, we would like to turn around the argument to say that it's morally repugnant for them to seek vote from the people till they are exonerated by the higher court. Political parties owe it to the voters to appear before them with a clean image in contrast to an encumbered, blemished one.

Apart from the question of morality, BNP leader Nazrul Islam's argument is also untenable on practical grounds. He says, "we have nothing to say if a higher court upholds the verdict of a lower or special court". If that be the case, why can't political parties take the position that until a convicted person is not cleared by higher court, he/she will not get party nomination. Such a stance will show their commitment to "clean up" our politics and also strengthen the effort to fight corruption.

The leaders of major parties miss no opportunity in vociferously claiming how dedicated they are to clean politics and a new political culture in a bid to chime in with popular mood and expectations. But when the chips come down they seem to slide back into their old box again. The question is: do the political parties have none others than the convicts to field? Don't they have any new faces to offer? For all we know, they have plenty of perfectly deserving clean candidates in their ranks.

## Changing of the guard in Male

Maldives' new leader has a unique opportunity

HISTORY has clearly been made in the Maldives. Three decades after he rose to power in the island nation, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has conceded defeat to a young politician who has just beaten him at the country's first openly contested presidential election. Mohammad Nasheed, the 41 year-old former dissident who has just defeated Gayoom, has promised that there will be no witch hunt once he forms his government in Male. That is certainly most commendable. And equally commendable is the grace with which the fallen Gayoom has accepted the verdict of the electorate following the second round of the voting. These are big things to note and absorb from a small country that has set an example in political and electoral probity.

The expectation now is that the new president will move quickly into giving Maldivians a new administration based on democracy and human rights. There cannot be any denying that when a politician serves a long time in power, a degree of atrophy sets in everywhere. That to a significant extent has been the case with the Maldives, where over the years Gayoom has exercised power in an authoritarian manner. Opposition has repeatedly been suppressed and even the newly elected Nasheed has been in and out of prison for years on end. Anti-government agitation has been violently suppressed and politicians suspected of being behind the disturbances have been carted off to prison. Even the respected Ibrahim Zaki could not escape Gayoom's wrath. The result was an atmosphere of intimidation that naturally led to growing discontent in the country. That discontent has now proved to have been purposeful. The people of the Maldives have spoken and by electing their new leader have demonstrated their readiness to join the club of democratic nations.

We wish the people of the Maldives well. Under their new president, we expect, they will move on toward building truly democratic institutions and thereby promote the principles of good governance.

## Friends in need

Until that happens, according to some sources, Pakistan had hoped that China would improve upon its earlier largesse and deposit anything up to \$ 3 billion in our coffers. The Chinese and their hard-earned dollars are not so easily parted. A Chinese official explained: "We have done our due diligence, and it isn't happening."

F. S. AJAZUDDIN

I reflected all the forlorn hope of a tall-end, a twelfth man, the last of a dozen protocols signed between the Pakistan and China at Beijing on October 15. The final document was a Memorandum of Understanding between China's Cricket Association and the Pakistan Cricket Board.

That the Chinese should wish to learn the game from us -- once World Cup victors -- is understandable. They learn from the best and then outstrip their teachers. Just count the number of medals they won at the Beijing Olympics: 51

gold out of 100 at the Olympics, and 89 gold out of 211 at the Paralympics. Such laurels are not won by simply resting on them.

In the 1960s, we were an economic role model for the South Koreans, and our national airline PIA taught others (including the now unstoppably popular Emirates) how to fly. Our Tarbela Dam was the envy of developing countries for being the world's largest earth-filled dam. We played hockey and cricket better than the inventors of the game. Today, we have been relegated to a position of geo-political irrelevance, and geo-economic bankruptcy.

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