

TALKING POLLS AND BEYOND

'We crave for a healthy parliament and good governance'

Former adviser to the caretaker government **Rokia Afzal Rahman** was born in Calcutta in 1941. She studied at the St Joseph's Convent and St Joseph's College in Karachi, Pakistan. She obtained her Masters in English from Karachi University, and Post Graduate Diploma in Banking from the Institute of Bankers of Pakistan. She also studied at Tufts University in Boston, USA. She started her career in a commercial bank in 1962 and became the first woman bank manager of the country in 1964. She later became a Sponsor Director in Midas Financing Limited and Director in Reliance Insurance Ltd. She served as a Director in the Central Bank of Bangladesh. Rokia Afzal is the founder president of first Women Entrepreneurs Association in the country (1994). She is the Chairperson of Presidency University Foundation and Chair of Bangladesh Board of Advisers, Asian University for Women. She received many awards including Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World in Monte Carlo in 1999; Businessperson of the Year-2003 by American Chamber; Priyadarshani award, India, and Deshbondhu award for Women's Empowerment. She is the Chairperson of Mediaworld Limited and director-shareholder in Mediastar. **Shamim Ashraf** and **Wasim Bin Habib** took the interview.

What is your evaluation of the existing political situation?

The existing environment is not normal. We hope the political parties should say what they would do for the development of the country and the country people if they come to power. People, at this moment, want to know what the political parties would do, but the parties are not saying anything about their future plans although they are raising their demands. They should come forward and say how they would deal with the development issues and economic crises going on worldwide-- what they would do for the farmers, women and everyone and what would be their strategy for financial stability. But they are not doing so.

Why are they doing that?

Politicians may have some uncertainty over the polls but we don't have any uncertainty about it. We are sure that the elections will be held and the caretaker government convincingly told us that they will hold the election. The government has taken well preparations as a voter list has been prepared and the timetable for the polls has been rescheduled as per the demands of the political parties.

A major party is yet to announce clearly that it would participate. Do you think there is any uncertainty over election due to the stance of the major parties?

It is unfortunate if any party says like that when we have only a month to go for polls. I think we need the political parties to cooperate to overcome the crises in the country. We have been going through a political crisis for quite a long time and only the parties can solve the crisis. I am quite hopeful that the election will be held.

My personal feeling is that a country runs well when it has good governance, a good business community with the activ-

ities of the non-government organisations. But in our case the business community and private sector have been struggling for the development of the country amid political instability. Every sector is moving ahead except politics and everything will be fine if we have mature politics. All the political parties whether they are in government or in opposition they have to be mature.

How much qualitative change can we see in the coming years?

I think the party whichever comes to power should not behave with 'winner takes all' attitude. They should not think that whatever they dictate will be right since they have won in the election. It will be the government's duty to attract opposition to come to the parliament and we will call the government successful when the opposition parties participate in the parliament. It will be the repetition of the past if the opposition does not come to the parliament to debate the national issues. This time we want that the government should bring the opposition to the parliament and make it healthy.

Do you support the proposal of electing deputy speaker from the opposition in the parliament?

It would be better for all of us if the deputy speaker is appointed from the opposition. I think that political parties should bring the young people now because the old politicians have the experience and the young people have new ideas. The young people are exposed to have lot of information and thus the names of the young people should come instead of the questionable ones. There should be a bottom up system at all levels. We expect all the political parties would forget the party politics and think of the people and the country as we have gone through a lot of problems. We became politically bankrupt due to the political

crises.

How do you see nomination of women candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections?

The names of women should come more for nomination. I think women do well when they get the chance to do and we see women did well in different professions including the micro-credit. So I think we need more women to come as they did good jobs in different sectors.

We have long been demanding direct election for women where male and female candidates can participate in the polls directly. It has often been told that it is tough for a woman to contest in the polls from a huge constituency. But the respective parties will support the woman in the campaign and finance.

How do you evaluate the reform measures undertaken by the CG?

In the beginning they were doing well in bringing in the reforms. People welcomed the government when they started the anti-corruption drive and, in fact, we came to know about many big corruption cases at that time. But the government could not implement the process due to weak laws and we found compromising positions of the government in some cases. I think the government could have taken a strong stand. Many corrupt suspect were arrested but later they were freed and now they seem eligible for elections. I think they should have done a good homework before taking such steps. The intention of the government was good and it started off on the right footing but they could not implement many of the things they wanted to do. Something went against them like the worldwide food crisis and the natural disaster like floods and Sidr. The government could have been stronger in its position.

What are the achievements of the government?



Rokia Afzal Rahman

The government has moved to address corruption and brought some reforms in the political parties like it said that the political parties not to take corrupt people, hooligans, black money holders and loan and bill defaulters into their folds. People and the political parties have become aware of it and the parties are now careful about nominating the questionable persons, as the people now want good politicians. But, I think the government could have taken stronger steps in different sectors including power sector. Things would have been better if the government took the politicians with it while carrying out reforms. The government is now seeking politicians' supports but it should have been sought the support earlier like in January.

What can be done to make the parliament effective?

We want all the parties to go to the parliament. I hope the next government and opposition should go to parliament and hold their debates there. The caretaker government should have made the political parties pledge that the parties would not do any *hartal* in future and

they should increase reserve seats for women.

Do you think the politicians have realised their failures which led to 1/11?

Yes, of course. As a nation and country we went down to such a level that is unthinkable though we had a strong unity after we achieved our independence. We had to be embarrassed by the attitudes and activities of the political parties. They did not behave like human beings. The political parties should have asked their workers why the situation was so created, why they went so unruly. Instead of doing so they started to blame each other for the cause of the situation. The parties don't have the political conscience though they should have been so. They should have found out their own faults behind the reason of the changeover of 1/11. Instead of doing so they blamed each other.

How do you see the reform activities?

Reform is always a positive word and it is basically done for improving things, but the political parties made it negative. In any healthy organisation people ask for reforms and look for self-criticism. The political parties also need to do self-

criticism. Governing a country is a big responsibility and the parties should think whether they have the management capacity and preparation to take the huge responsibility to govern a country which has financial constraints and so many poor people. So, naturally they have to bring reforms to prepare for the next elections and they have to tell the people about the reforms they have made. They have to tell the people that what they will do for improving gas, water and power situation as the countrymen want to hear from them.

Do you support the idea of debate among the top leaders of the political parties?

It would be very interesting if such debate can be arranged. Political leaders are seen very friendly in different occasions but when they attend any meeting they become unknown to each other. Why can't they break the ice? It is unfortunate. The confrontation that we have been witnessing for the last couple of decades will not be solved easily unless the parties bring young people in. There must be a debate on the television channels as the people have interest in it.

Should the political parties give nominations to those who are accused in graft cases?

The party who wants to win and make a long-term plan to run the country will try to avoid such questionable candidates.

Would you identify the caretaker government's major mistakes.

They have tried their best but they have failed to implement what they had told us two years ago. The political parties did not support them and may be they could have done better had the parties supported the government. Since they are not 'political' they could not handle it politically.

How do you see Article 70?

It should be abolished. The lawmakers should be vocal if they see that their party is turning into a dictator. The government becomes weak since provision exists.

How do you see Article 91 (E) of the RPO?

The election commission should have the discretionary power to cancel someone's candidature as defined in article 91 (E) of the RPO.

Do you have anything more to suggest?

Politics is the most powerful platform form which a country can move up. Therefore, we need good people in politics so that the country can move towards a correct direction. The political parties have the duty to invite good people and there should be training within the parties for good governance. Both the next government and the opposition have to play a strong role and the people will also have to play a strong role, to have good governance.

Attitudinal deficits in our fledgeling democracy

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

CYNICAL observers of the current Bangladeshi political scene entertain grave doubts about a real change in the style and substance of politics in so far as desirable democratic governance scenario is concerned. Their continued pessimism is not without ground as hapless Bangladeshis sadly watch their guardians unmoved despite the combined onslaught of logic and reason, law and fact.

Politically speaking, the current scene is not the first instance when otherwise responsible and erudite people have talked irreverently and irreverently. The tragedy is that we are forgetting that democracy, with freedom of opinion and opposition is not the normal way of organizing society but is a rare human achievement. In our environment, many citizens may appear un-dimensional but our political leaders have no excuse for being so perilously un-dimensional. They have to act as catalyst. The responsibilities, which today lie on their shoulders are far greater than at any earlier time in our history.

We seem to be oblivious that law moves on a unique plane and that a lawful society reflects man's sense of order and justice. Such society embodies rules and traditions that have a binding effect and provide the enduring element, the dimension of permanence, in history. We cannot have a government without order and there can be no order without law. Viewed in the above context, there is no doubt that the country is in the midst of a serious crisis and the premonition is that the downward slide to dangerous uncertainty may have commenced.

The country is now sharply and dangerously polarized with political adversaries bent upon maligning each other. The language of reason and moderation is absent while there is hardly any trace of tolerance. This, however, does not come as a surprise as forebodings of a perilous polarization were there for any keen observer to realize. One feels constrained to comment that the country is held hostage to the partisan ambition of an immoral and acquisitive class whose kleptocratic instincts are no secret.

The defenders of the constitution would not admit the manifest reality that during the last couple of years institutions like general administration, police, election commission, public service commission and judiciary have been politicized and made partisan thereby rendering the holding of impartial election extremely

STRAIGHT LINE

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difficult. One has to find out why desperate attempts are still being made to somehow return to political power. The unfortunate reality is that while sinister politicians have gone full speed on the self-defeating course of sabotaging the state institutions to serve their selfish interests, the saner elements have miserably failed to inform and activate the polity about the real threats to our fledgling democracy. The enormity of the issue has not been realized and appreciated. Altruism has hardly been the virtue of our politicians.

Even the pessimists have to admit that the commendable reform venture of the present government has brought to the fore the large scale deviations and malfunctioning that have taken place in our body-politic. Irregularities

and waywardness have been so deep and corrosive that unless sustained efforts are continually made to restore normalcy and propriety, in at least the domain of public affairs, it may not be possible to ensure decent living in a civilized society.

Paramount importance needs to be attached to the repair and rebuilding of vital institutions that nourish and nurture a democratic society. Collapse will overtake our country if our institutions, particularly the political ones do not acquire durability through experience and tradition.

Successful democratic experience indicates that we cannot be truly free without doing away with ignorance. We have to realize that our leaders have to rebuild and also produce the

required institutions for doing the needful. In course of time, those institutions will produce the leaders.

One may reasonably ask as to what has happened to our nation-building institutions, particularly the educational institutions that will generate excellence? Some say that in Bangladesh, instead of establishing excellent educational institutions, we have downgraded and devalued the fine universities, which existed when we became a republic. It would only be stating the obvious to comment that meaningful democracy would be impossible without literacy and education and that the absence of earnest efforts in this regard will help the vested quarters to continue to benefit from public ignorance.

The politicians and the media had complained that higher judicial appointments have been given to persons who are suspected to subscribe to the notions of the ruling party. Therefore, it would be prudent to recognize the underlying moral, political and constitutional implications of such gross indiscretions. It is perhaps time to initiate corrective measures to effectively halt the irregularities and hold aloft the majesty of judiciary in public interest.

In fact, the present government has already effected key personnel changes in sensitive regulatory institutions. The staffing pattern, entry qualifications, domain of responsibilities and related matters in constitutional posts require scrutiny before formalisation.

What, however, should engage our thoughts in the wake of the present efforts of transformation, is the nearly all pervasive attitude of tentativeness in every establishment effort to innovate or contain or arrest systemic deficiencies. Without doubt, such tentativeness has an adverse impact on the staying power of democracy.

Sadly, politics has been debased to low ends and has unfortunately become a mean pursuit instead of a high adventure. It has been used as a means of livelihood instead of being pursued in the grand manner so as to afford opportunities for a full and fulfilling life. Since our major political parties are not desirably committed to share principles of constitutionalism, we may have to wait for the working class and the peasantry to organise political parties and stronger social movements to push for social equality and justice for ensuring true progress.



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Of moon sighting and Eid dates

PROF. DR. ANWOARUL KARIM

NEW Moon is the lunar phase when the moon's unilluminated side is facing the earth; the moon is not visible from the earth. The moment is unique and does not depend on location: The new moon at the moment of conjunction in ecliptic longitude with the sun is invisible from earth.

The specific dates and time of future moon phases are already known or can be calculated. According to internet claim, future moon phases to the year 4999 are already available whereas actual visibility of the new crescent moon is not accurately known even for the next month! The time interval between successive new moons is 29.5305882 days. This number is called the synodic period or "lunation" and is relative to the sun.

Scientists have not yet been able to set a standard by which one can be certain of the evening when a new crescent moon will appear. "It is not possible to predict accurately the dates on which the new crescent moon will first be seen each month..." : Royal Greenwich Observatory, England.

Thus there is no scientific way in which the requirements of Islam, i.e. the beginning of each lunar month with the first appearance of the thin crescent of the new moon after sunset over the western horizon, can be met at the moment, ahead of actual visibility.

The earliest astronomical criterion for ascertaining the crescent's first visibility goes back to Babylonian era. The simple criterion based on the observational data was used by early astronomers. The Babylonian criterion is more a rule of thumb which may be stated as follows: 1. At local sunset, moon's age must be more than 24 hours i.e. from the time of conjunction to the time of evening of observation. 2. Moonset should take place at least about 48 minutes after sunset.

New moon for Zil Hajjah 1429 from the date of the phases of the moon (from 2008 Yearbook of Astronomy edited by Patric Moore, Macmillan, London N1 9RR) occurred on November 27, 2008 at 16:55 GMT i.e. 22:55 Bangladesh time. Using sunset and moonset data at Dhaka on that date, one finds this conjunction took place only 5 hrs and 45 mins after sunset and the moon set 28 mins before sunset, as such new crescent moon's visibility at Dhaka on November 27, 2008 did not arise at all. And according to the moon sighting report of Islamic Foundation, Dhaka, the corresponding date happened to be 28th Zil Qudah, 1429. For two days the moon's age and moonset lag time at Dhaka are shown in Table I.

TABLE I: LUNAR DATA AT DHAKA FOR 2 DAYS AFTER NEW MOON

MONTH	DATE	DAY	MOONSET	SUNSET	MOONSET LAG	MOON'S AGE
NOVEMBER	28	FRI	17 29	17 10	19 min	18 hr 15 min
NOVEMBER	29	SAT	18 19	17 11	68 min	42 hr 16 min

Thus the new crescent moon for Zil Hajjah 1429 is to be visible at Dhaka on November 29, 2008 and therefore the month of Zil Hajjah is to begin on November 30, 2008 Sunday. And in that case Eidul Azha will be celebrated in Bangladesh, Insha Allah, on Tuesday 9 December 2008.

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