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Fair election, but...

By all accounts, the election of 29 December can be regarded as free and fair. But the outcome of it is so one sided that the winning party may take the result as the 'Mandate' for them to do anything they wish not that they will but it is within their right. This is where Bangladesh is sadly lacking the benefit of a second chamber as in India, the USA and in the UK who can 'Moderate' the actions of the elected prime minister and the cabinet. A strong opposition also helps but here the opposition has

been routed so completely, but still has the audacity to have already shouted 'foul'. That is really laughable, but worrying nevertheless.

I therefore wait with an anxious heart to see what happens after the much-needed euphoria that the country and the people needed dies down. What price do we have to pay for peace, tranquillity, fairness, transparency and a government free from nepotism?

Hazra Awal
Cambridge, UK



An open letter to Sheikh Hasina

Happy New Year and many congratulations on this historic victory. While you surely know the peoples' aspirations, as you prepare to assume the vast responsibility in the New Year, we would like to briefly reiterate what we, the ordinary people of this country, expect from the new prime minister and her new government. We would like to declare in very clear terms that we do not expect your government to fulfill all election pledges. Let it be very clear that neither we expect to receive free fertilizers and rice for Taka 10/kg, nor do we expect you to flood the country overnight with electricity and build all those highways and seaports in immediate future. We are much more realistic than the architects of the Awami League Election Manifesto are and we know that much of the pledges are over ambitious and it may take decades for a government to attain those goals.

Having said the above, our expectations are too little but very fundamental in nature and overwhelmingly irresistible.

First of all, we expect you and all Awami League leaders to always remember what caused the Awami League to lose the election in 2001. Undeniably it was the free reign of godfathers like Joynal Hazari, Shamim Osman, Taher, Hazi Selim, Alhaj Mokbul, Dr Iqbal, Maya, Dipu and so on that made the Awami League pay dearly in 2001 election all over the country. Our first expectation is that we do not want to witness the comeback (and showdown) of those people and emergence of similar people in politics and this first wish (if not a demand) is non-negotiable and inflexible in the mind of the voters.

Secondly, we made it clear that we do not want free fertilizers or rice for Taka 10/kg. However, this is a must do for your new government to cut back prices of essential items in line with declining international prices and fundamentally break those local syndi-

cates down that Dr Abul Barakat has been referring to for years now. Not only in words, but breaking down of those syndicates must be reflected in prices of essential items. Any failure to do this within the next 6 months or so will make people believe that the Awami League leaders are the new beneficiaries of such syndicates, as was the last caretaker government, according to Dr Abul Barakat.

Finally and more fundamentally, if we were to identify one single commitment which made voters (new voters in particular) to vote for the Awami League on 29th December 2008, it was a clear and unambiguous commitment to trial of war criminals. This one promise can not be kept pending for the next term as you did during 1996-2001. Now the Awami League (without any allies) has over 3/4th members in the parliament and they can do and undo anything with the Constitution. A whole lot of a new generation is there with you to witness the trial of war criminals in immediate future.

The Awami League cannot relax a single day to prove that "promises are made to be broken". We can surely wait for years for new elevated highways, sky and metro trains and deep sea ports, but we can hardly accept any relaxed mood (if not reluctance) on the part of the new Awami League government on this front. The trial must begin as soon as possible and we become really hopeful when Mr. Muhiit says, while talking to a reporter from ETV on 30th December 2008, that a tribunal and a prosecutor will be there in place within six months. We have started counting days.

You may find our words a bit too emotional and pressing, but we could hardly be any less emotional and demanding, at least on these three points. You will surely agree with us that all three hopes are easily attainable as none of them is resource constrained. No extra taka is needed to (a) stop the godfathers' return, (2) break the price syndicates down, and (3)

implement the trial of war criminals. These all are dependent on the political will and the truthfulness of Awami League manifesto. You badly need to prove immediately that you did not lie to our freedom fighters, to the families of our martyrs and to a hopeful new generation.

Raj Rahaman
Gulshan, Dhaka

EC's failure

The Election Commission had earlier announced over TV and radio, that provisions would be available at polling centres for the elderly and handicapped voters, however this was just a hollow statement from the EC, as I could not cast my vote at our polling centre at BIT School in Gulshan. Because of a spinal injury I cannot climb stairs, though I can slowly walk unaided!

Unfortunately, the polling booth for ladies at BIT was located on the first floor with only access by a narrow stairs with many steps. It is impossible for me to climb these steep steps. Despite my husband and my daughter who voted there appealing to the returning officer and to the officer at the temporary EC camp office at Road-40 at Gulshan, nothing was done. It prevented many like me who are physically challenged, and those who cannot walk, but use a wheel chair, from casting our legitimate vote; which is our fundamental right! The returning officer at the centre regretted that he could do nothing as he was bound by the EC's directions and could not make any changes whatsoever!

All it needed was to have a polling booth at the ground floor level for the elderly and physically challenged persons, and all those who are in wheel chairs to enable them to cast their votes.

Unfortunately, the EC's indifference and inaction on this matter was unexplainable! Instead of helping voters, their rigid stand prevented many legitimate voters like me from casting our votes and it seemed that the EC couldn't care less!

To sum up, while the EC publicly stated that facilities would be provided for meeting such needs, the fact was that the simple provision of a polling booth at the ground floor was not made! It only reflects that they were totally indifferent to the needs of the elderly and physically challenged voters.

Can the EC say why this simple arrangement was not made?

Suleha Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

Mandate against misrule

The grand alliance triumph is a historic and unprecedented landslide win. It is a clear mandate against corruption, plundering, killing, violence, terrorism and ineffective and incompetent running of government. It is also an outright rejection of the war criminals. This election sends strong and clear signals that the days of ignorance are over and the electorate is conscious and aware of its environment and wants to be a partner in the development of the country. The voters want the politicians to know that they are watching and will not hesitate to respond whenever they deviate. This election is a backlash against misrule.

But for the victors this is not only a time to celebrate but a time to take stock and realize that the people have reposed on them a huge responsibility of putting the country back on track and restoring the lost vibrancy, strength and confidence. The new voters, who are voting for the first time and amount to 33% of the total voters, are trying to shake the politicians from their slumber and arrogance to take the course, which will stop the downside. Poverty, backwardness, unchecked population growth, lack of technological progress, power failures are retarding the country's forward march. The new government has to seriously address these problems and restore the country's lost potential and build a healthy and sound social, political and economic environment. It has to take the opposition as their partner building a culture of consensus and partnership. It must move away from the days of hatred and violence, political vendetta and hartals. This is the beginning of the New Year and with that a new government with huge mandate is going to take charge; they must not dither and miss this grand opportunity.

They must seize the moment and start the work on the road to a new prosperous Bangladesh.

Ali Hamid Khan
Sector 14
Uttara
Dhaka

Intransigent Khaleda

As expected, Khaleda, true to her intransigent nature, did not accept the results and came out with various unfounded allegations of voting irregularities, despite the nation's and the world's total acceptance of the election being free and fair. Minor irregularities and mismanagements compared to the magnitude of the total operation will hardly make any impact on the overwhelming verdict. Though her non-acceptance of the election result did not matter, had she accepted the result gracefully,

her image before the nation and the world would have been brightened. An honest soul searching perhaps would help her and the party to identify their misdeeds and mistakes and help reorganize for future. But she preferred to defy the verdict of the nation. Perhaps she had sensed her inevitable debacle earlier. That is why throughout her election campaign, instead of offering countrymen better governance, she remained busy in delivering negative speeches which had no value to the general public. Therefore the public overwhelmingly exercised their franchise right and clearly spoke against her and her party through ballot. The misdeeds and lust for money of her sons and close aides allegedly under her direct protection and patronage knew no bounds. Crores of taka was allegedly siphoned out of the country through money laundering, by none other than her son, apparently with full knowledge of the administration as evident from the disclosure of the foreign governments which ultimately confiscated those illegally earned and transferred money.

It is strange that despite all those misdeeds Khaleda did not apologise to the nation which otherwise would have salvaged at least a part of her lost credibility before the nation and the world.

Mohammad Ataul Hoque
One-mail

Trial of war criminals

The much talked about election was held with the AL-led grand alliance's historic victory. So, of course, the ever-expected democracy has been restored, bringing back the derailed train on the right track. But it may be derailed again if and only if the present AL government fails to try the war criminals working as designers of conspiracy theories.

So, I want to define the issue as a great challenge to the new government. The most surprising and shameful event is that war criminals defend other war criminals, saying that there is no war criminal in the country!

Farhad Kabir (Aabir)
Student
Dhaka University

Free & fair election

The national election of 29 December was a remarkable event in the history of Bangladesh. More than eight crore people voted across the country. Every young male and female, man and woman, even the elderly people were excited and enthusiastic to restore democracy by giving valuable votes. People had to wait for the day for 7 years. So, after 7 years, when the expected election appeared before us, we could not stay at home. People came out simultaneously and went to the polling centres to vote.

The national election proves once again that the people of Bangladesh love democracy.

International and local observers were very happy with the way the election was conducted.

So, as a new voter I would like to thank the present caretaker government for arranging a free and fair election.

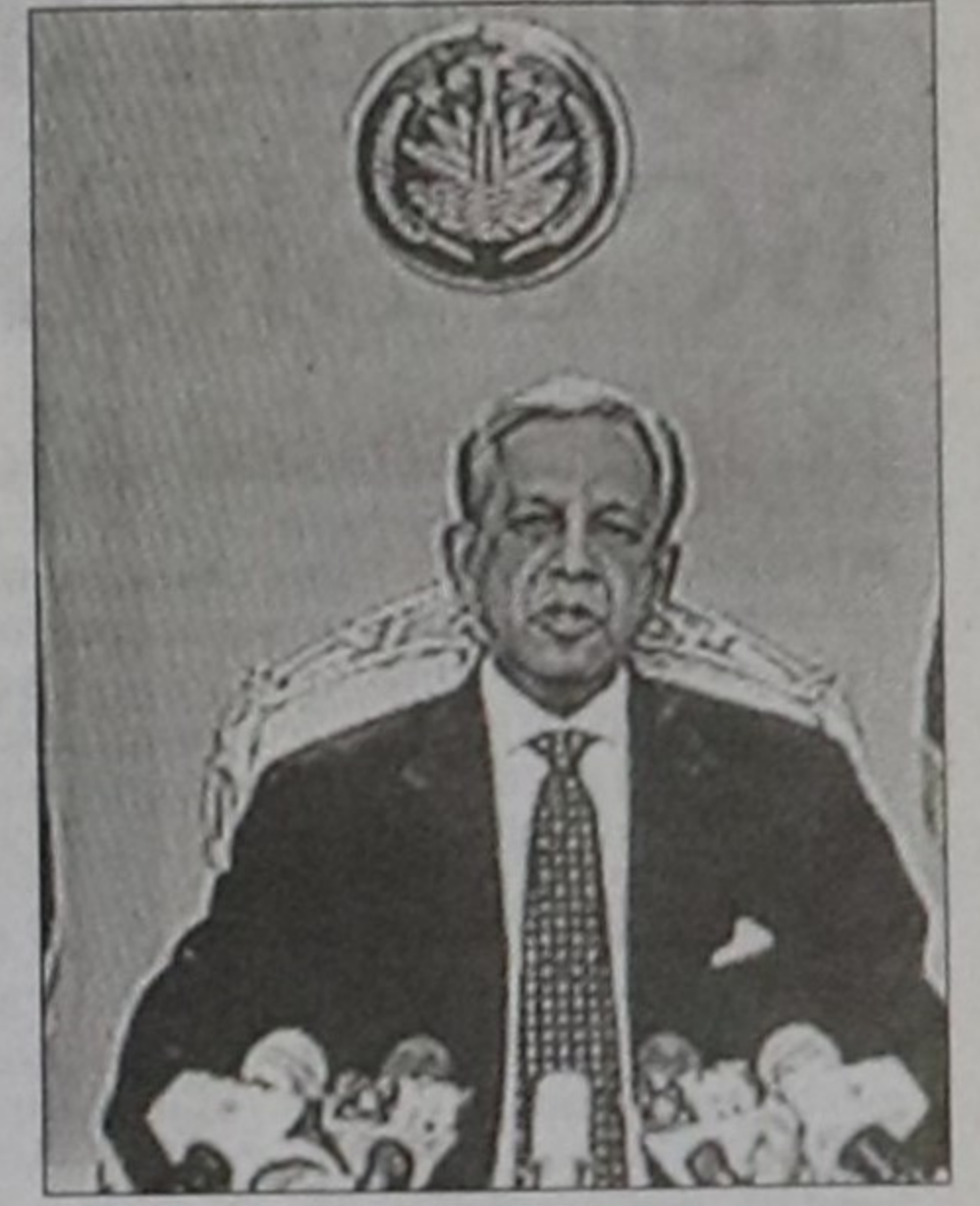
Astudent
Dept. of English
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CTG deserves congratulations

Congratulations to the CTG for organising a nice, peaceful and credible election. According to people, this is the best election they have seen in their lives.

"If the ending is good all steps would be considered good" not only for this phrase but also for taking different reform measures people will remember you for many years. The consequences of most of these reform measures are still not visible and ordinary people are unable to perceive the merits, so your historic role is not appreciated as much as it should be. But one day all will remember as the consequences will be long lasting. I am sure. Our Chief Advisor, in his last speech, gave a brief outline of all the reform measures they took, but there were some good steps he could not elaborate.

Only a section of civil (or evil) society people close to the Advisors are reluctant to appreciate, rather still critical. When they do not get any point to criticize they say you have failed in managing the economy, particularly controlling price hike, and inflation rate. Our Adviser for the Ministry of Finance was so much modesty that he politely admitted his failure in this regard. But as a student of economics I know that in



this front also the CTG did well. If you consider the global, particularly the sub-regional situation vis-à-vis the global recession, you will feel the accuracy of the statement. The CTG had to face floods and Sidr. If a political govt. were there at that time, it is my firm belief that the situation would have been much worse.

S.T.Zaman
Pallabi, Dhaka

Khaleda Zia's options

I was prompted to write after reading Mridul Chowdhury's article "What Sheikh Hasina should do now." In the wake of a mesmerizing election, the article aptly calls upon Sheikh Hasina to make good on the promises she made in the early hours of her campaign and take other steps which are long due in the interest of this country.

While the entire nation watches Hasina with intense curiosity in anticipation of a sweeping change, we should also turn toward Khaleda Zia and ask how she intends to continue to serve the people of Bangladesh, despite a crippling blow.

No matter how smoothly an electoral process goes, a losing candidate receives comfort in labelling the process as illegitimate or biased. But after a long political imbroglio the results of the 9th parliamentary election clearly indicates that the people of Bangladesh have chosen to side with Sheikh Hasina, leaving only a handful of parliamentary seats to Begum Zia. Does this mean that her political career is over? It depends on how she

sees this. If to her the idea of political career means nothing less than securing the coveted seat of prime minister, then she might as well retire from politics. But if the value of public service outweighs the lustre of a seat of prime minister, then she is still in the game.

When the dust from election revelry settles and she has time to think, I believe Begum Zia should take a long hard look at her last administration and how she ran it. Apart from that she should also try to analyse why the voting result turned out the way it did. Her platform was not much different from that of Sheikh Hasina. So, what could have been the biggest negative factor? I believe her alliance with the Jamaat played a big role. When the people of Bangladesh are trying to establish a modern democracy they can't be held back by the theocratic mindsets of the mullahs. To get a better understanding of this we need not look farther than our neighbouring countries of Pakistan and India. A recent attack in Mumbai, allegedly carried out by Islamic fundamentalists, has seriously strained the working relationship of the two coun-

tries. If any lesson she should have taken from this is the idea of not mingling the business of state with religion.

Never in our history have we had an election under such watchful eyes of security forces and of course of vigilant poll watchers. And the voter turnout was also phenomenal. Despite having lost, Begum Zia has much to do for this country if she truly considers herself a public servant. She has two diametrically opposing paths she can choose from. She can choose the path of non-participation and resume the tactics of paralysing the country with violence which may force the country back to what we are leaving behind.

The other path leads to her cooperation and working with Sheikh Hasina in a bipartisan manner. Once she is in parliament, she will have plenty of opportunities to introduce meaningful legislations to bring about positive changes to this country that she so dearly wants to serve.

I hope that as a seasoned politician she will choose the latter path and earn back the trust of the people of this country.

Arif Jamal
University of Washington

AL and its pledges

The landslide victory of the Awami League (AL) is welcome at home and abroad. People of Bangladesh wanted a change with a new dimension in the country's leadership. Most of the citizens gave their verdict against corruption, against sky-high price hike of foods and daily essentials. AL chief Sheikh Hasina should not forget her pre-election pledges.

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Astudent
Dept. of English
IUC



change.

Many of the voters were able to cast their votes for the first time amid peace and harmony.

Sheikh Hasina has to be

careful about the AL student wing, BCL-- as some violent incidents have already taken place on the DU campus.

Anonymous
One-mail

Our president

If I may state it correctly, Dr. Kamal Hossain deserves to be our next president, not Prof. Dr. Yunus, not Zillur Rahman, and definitely not Ershad.

Sheikh Hasina spoke against Dr. Yunus; so we do not want a bitter relation from the beginning.

Zillur Rahman's current health condition does not permit him to take such a ceremonial but hectic job. He has done a great job for the Awami League and it is always best to retire when you are at the top of it, trying to set an example that we need to make room for the new and young ones.

And definitely, we do not want to see a person like Ershad as our next presi-

dent, because he simply does not deserve it. His morals were never high, he was convicted for corruption; and I think these two are simple enough reasons without elaborating further.

Hasina should not forget the contribution of Dr. Kamal Hossain. Without his intervention Hasina would not be where she is today. The political differences were there between the two, and Hasina, with all her maturity today, will surely agree that we need to make some reconciliation in our overall politics.

This could be a great example and it will set our moral on much higher ground.

Sheikh Monirul Islam, Opee
Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

Israeli aggression



The UN has requested Israel to stop the deadly attack but Israel does not care, because there is a strong veto of the USA on Israel's behalf. It clearly proves the worthlessness of the UN. Processions and demonstrations are continuing throughout the world. The world is witnessing once again a large-scale condemnation against Israel's aggression after the end of Iraq war. Palestine does not have any air support, navy and enough arms. So why is Israel still killing hundreds of Palestinians daily? Israel is violating not only human rights but also international laws.

Governments & people of the world have to ponder over this question and how to free the Palestinian people and nation from the clutches of this greedy, hypocritical and self-serving Israeli occupation. The people of this ancient land deserve a honourable, peaceful life and a truly democratic order. Will Palestinians ever get liberty? Will Palestine get rid of

the clutches of savage Israelis? Nobody knows what will happen next to Palestine.

Israel must be forced to stop this aggression.

MD Shehabul Anwar
Dept. of English
International Islamic University
Chittagong

During the last few days more than 500 people were killed and at least 3,000 people were wounded in Gaza. Israel said that it would not stop the military operation before the demolition of Hamas. They also said that they wanted to continue their operation for the next few weeks. Everybody knows what it means to the Palestinians.

Safwan Radi
Dept. of Business Administration
Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet