

## JS body on amending constitution

*The process of it raises a few questions*

A fifteen-member special committee of lawmakers has been formed by the Jatiyo Sangsad to study the ways and means of putting the country back on constitutional rails in light of the judicial judgement nullifying the fifth amendment to the constitution. A nation's constitution is a crucial document responsible for helping it chart its course to the future. That is why we believe that the move to bring about the necessary amendments to the constitution vis-a-vis restoring its original form is a serious task that must be approached pragmatically. In its essence, the 1972 constitution, for all the changes that have been wrought in it over the years, remains a fine document for the country. The liberal democratic principles it enshrined through its various articles have by and large given us reason for hope about our future.

That said, today we would like to focus not on the substance of the proposed constitutional changes but on the process underway to bring about these changes. We will, of course, speak on the substance in due course and in the public interest. Where the process is concerned, we commend the ruling party on its decision to have an all-party parliamentary committee go into studying the proposal for the constitutional changes. However, we also note that with the BNP's unwillingness to be part of the committee and with the exclusion of the Jamaat, the body has now essentially turned into a grand alliance committee. We think that by refusing to play its due role on the committee, the BNP has clearly abrogated its responsibilities to the nation and has only demonstrated once again all those symptoms which have undermined a strengthening of democracy in Bangladesh. The party should have played a proactive role in a matter of such far-reaching ramifications as a constitutional amendment.

If the BNP has adopted a negative posture on the issue, it must also be said that the manner and modalities of the ruling Awami League's approach to it does not quite meet the standards of respect and decency that democratic politics demands. Giving a party a 24-hour period in which to come up with the name of its representative smacks of a lack of seriousness on the part of the ruling circles. And assuming that the BNP has been asking for clarifications on the matter only as an excuse for it to stay away from the whole exercise, the Awami League would have lost little by giving the explanation it was asked for. Most importantly, in such crucial matters as constitutional issues, it is customary for the Leader of the House to personally approach the Leader of the Opposition either verbally or through a formal letter. In the present instance, that procedure was not followed. We think that having the ruling party chief whip contact the opposition was not the proper move.

The committee, as it has been formed, leaves a few questions to be answered. A more judicious selection of members would have served the country better. Besides, we believe that the chairperson of the committee ought to have been an individual fully cognizant of legal realities and armed with constitutional expertise.

Finally, let us say that as it goes to work, the committee must make it a point to consult the foremost constitutional experts in the country in order to make the entire exercise properly satisfying for all. Of course, the government could have avoided rushing into the matter of constitutional amendment in such a hurried manner and instead could have waited for the BNP to link up with it. As for the BNP, it must now rethink its position on the issue. Boycotting the JS or refusing to cooperate with the government on every issue is not doing the party any good.

## Deaths during diagnostic test or treatment

*There should be proper enquiry to find out the truth*

DEATH of a woman while undergoing diagnostic test at a private clinic in the Dhanmondi area of the city has again raised the disconcerting question of safety standards in our hospitals. The mayhem that the unexpected death of the woman set off among her relatives leading to vandalism of two clinics in the area and beating up of doctors was, however, an undesirable sequel to that tragedy. But there is also little room here to make light of the attending doctors' responsibility to come up with a satisfactory explanation for the unwarranted death.

Death of a patient during the course of treatment is not quite an unlikely eventuality. In fact, relatives of such victims often accept it as a stroke of bad luck unless of course something untoward happened about it.

Why did the woman in question die after application of part of the drug in the ampoule through injection, while another person easily passed the test without any fatal consequence? If that drug had any potential for adverse reaction or side effect among certain groups of patients, should not the attending doctor have carried out a sensitivity test on the patient in question before applying the injection in the first place? However, the hospital authority is yet to inform us if any such routine procedure was followed.

In the newspaper reports, however, we have somewhat conflicting versions of the tragedy and its aftermath. What keeps one worrying is why had the doctors of the private hospital where the woman was brought to undergo fertility test and which is known to be a very modern and well-equipped hospital, sent the patient to a second hospital instead of treating her themselves once the patient's condition turned critical after application of an injection? Whatever might have been the reason, the hospital authority is yet to supply us with a satisfactory answer.

We are however against any knee-jerk or mindless reaction from the relatives or well-wishers of a person meeting with any kind of fatality during treatment or test, since there are the laws and the law-enforcers to look after such eventualities. At the same time, the hospital authorities need also to be clear and transparent about any untoward fatality during the course of treatment so that it may not create unnecessary suspicion in public mind.

We cannot be forgetful here of the fact that, of late, instances of fatality have occurred in another private clinic in the city under questionable circumstances leading to arrest of doctors and police investigation into it. So, to reassure the public, the government should carry out a proper investigation into the case to find out what really happened during the test in the private clinic concerned.

## Blackout inside blackout



The power outage is, therefore, blackout inside blackout, a nation playing hide and seek with itself. Now you see it, now you don't. Peekaboo! Everything vanishes in the darkness. Peekaboo! Everything emerges in the light.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

A three-hour movie takes up to five hours to watch. Clothes must be ironed at least one hour before one is ready to go out. The microwave doesn't always work, so a hot meal is as chancy as a roll of dice. Between power cuts, favourite television shows are rare to catch. The last charge bar blinks on the mobile phone, while the user is worried sick about recharge. Tide may still stick to its guns, but time has lost its place in life. Now, even time has to wait for its hour to come.

Generators grumble and the IPSs stumble, but the ultimate joke has become a

fact of life -- the nine o'clock train hardly leaves at nine. Here you see it, here you don't. The loadshedding has changed our world. Turn on a computer; it turns off. Switch on a fan; it switches off. Procrastination is the new order of life.

Many things get pushed back lately, and other things get delayed. But then many things are also being brought forward so that those will be ready when needed. One has to plan ahead of time if one has to manage. Fill up the water tank the night before. Charge your laptop whenever electricity has its lucid moments. Go up and down in the building while the lift is running. Forget the idea of punctuality. Time doesn't run on time.

We have tried to fix it. The clock was turned backward. Then it was turned forward. But tinkering of time didn't do the trick. The daylight saving initiative bombed, because it could neither save the day nor the light. As a matter of fact, it could save nothing.

As we sweat through the days and as we sweat through the nights, we are living through a nightmare. Power supply has rendered us powerless. The hours are being stretched while the days are being squeezed. If you wish to make tea, the electric kettle goes dud. The computer conks out when you are ready to write. This hour's work shuffles to the next. Modern gadgets lie around like useless toys.

Now a good night's sleep is a luxury of life. Lucky if you don't have to wake up floating in sweat in the middle of the night. Electricity is more unpredictable than weather. Nobody can tell when it will be on and when it will be gone. All the arrangements for light keep us in the dark.

If you think, our life is a musical chair of light and darkness, a chiaroscuro of the

modern and the medieval, switching back and forth between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When the power goes out, it as if it peels away a layer of this civilisation. When the power returns, it puts that layer back on.

"Electricity is really just organised lightning," said American stand-up comedian George Carlin. In that sense, one can say loadshedding is organised darkness. What can we say when untold number of lampposts were bought and sold, when wires were laid out mile after mile, but nobody bothered to ask when electricity was going to come. This was organised mischief; politicians, businessmen, engineers, bankers, consultants, bureaucrats and mediamen were in cahoots to make money at the cost of keeping this country in dark.

Even worse, nothing happened to nobody when that scandalous mischief was unearthed. Our minds live in self-imposed exile. We know what we know, but can get convinced as quickly that we know nothing. Remember 1/11, that extravaganza of ethics, the holy festival of national cleansing? It was much ado about nothing, forgotten as fast as frantic it was.

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Eskom, a South African electricity supply company, has these humorous words written in its web page: "In a drive to save on electricity consumption, the light at the end of the tunnel has been switched off till further notice. Kindly postpone all hopes and dreams."

That may be a fair assessment of our own situation. Every day, the light goes out of our life for half its time. Every day, the light at the end of the tunnel switches off for us at least half a dozen times. Every day we return to light and wait for darkness. Every day we are immersed in darkness and long for the light.

Those who know about electricity also know that it always tries to find the easiest path to the ground. That seems to tell the story of our life. In our penchant for the shortcut, we don't care if we are losing the light or the light is losing us. Let there be light!

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## The real failed-state risk



Ugandan officers inspect the scene of a bomb blast in Kampala, Uganda on July 12.

Somalia highlights the complexity of almost every approach to failed states. If Washington goes after the militants aggressively, it polarises the political landscape and energises the radicals, who can then claim to be nationalists fighting American imperialism.

FAREED ZAKARIA

"WHAT happened in Kampala is just the beginning!" So warned Abu Zubayr, the leader of al-Shabab, which claimed responsibility for the bombings in the Ugandan capital that killed more than 70 people who had gathered to watch the World Cup soccer final.

In the bombings' wake, al-Shabab has drawn renewed attention for its murky links to al-Qaeda, and analysts once again are warning that failed states are a mortal threat to American national security. In fact, though, the case of Somalia and al-Shabab proves precisely the opposite.

That Somalia is a failed state is beyond dispute. *Foreign Policy* just published its annual *Failed States Index*, and for the third year running, Somalia ranks No. 1. Somalia has had no functioning govern-

ment since 1992, longer than probably any other present-day state. This is a tragic situation, but US policy-makers seem convinced it's also one that poses a grave danger to American national interests. "Dealing with such fractured or failing states is, in many ways, the main security challenge of our time," Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said.

Hillary Clinton has voiced strong support for this view and has taken steps to help tackle the problem. It's not a new concern. Condoleezza Rice, when she was secretary of state, used to call failed states the worst threat to American security, as did a host of scholars, UN officials, and pundits.

The chief exhibit for this far-reaching claim was, of course, Afghanistan, which descended into chaos in the 1990s and became a staging ground for al-Qaeda as

it prepared to attack America. But Afghanistan's story is actually a bit more complicated.

The Taliban came to power there with support from the Pakistani military, which had long supported radical Islamists. The group also received private and public support from Saudi Arabia, which viewed it as a convenient dumping ground, far from home, for its own radicals.

Today, there are very few Qaeda members in Afghanistan -- between 60 and 100, says CIA head Leon Panetta -- and al-Qaeda operates out of Pakistan. As the scholar Ken Menkhaus has pointed out, global terrorism seems to profit less from failed states and more from weak ones, like Pakistan, where some element of the regime is actively assisting the terrorists. After all, there are many drastically failed states (Burma, Congo, Haiti) that pose no global terrorist threat.

The trouble with trying to fix failed states is that it implicates US in a vast nation-building effort in countries where -- by definition -- the odds of success are low and the risk of unintended consequences is very high.

Consider Somalia. In 1992, after the government's collapse, US troops were

sent into the country as part of a UN mission to avert famine, but they soon became entangled in local power struggles, ending in a humiliating withdrawal.

About a decade later, worried by the rising strength of a radical movement called the Islamic Courts Union, Washington began funding rival Somali factions, and finally gave tacit backing to an Ethiopian intervention. The Islamic Courts Union was destroyed but regrouped under its far more radical, violent arm, al-Shabab, which is now on the rise.

Somalia highlights the complexity of almost every approach to failed states. If Washington goes after the militants aggressively, it polarises the political landscape and energises the radicals, who can then claim to be nationalists fighting American imperialism. If it talks to them, it is accused of empowering jihadis. The real answer, argue many, is to strengthen the state's capacity so that the government has greater legitimacy and the opposition gets discredited.

But how easy is it to fast-forward political modernisation, compressing into a few years what has taken decades, if not centuries, in the West? All these dilemmas are on full display in Afghanistan right now.

What to do in Somalia? In a thoughtful report, Bronwyn Bruton of the Council on Foreign Relations makes the case for "constructive disengagement." The idea is to watch the situation carefully for signs of real global terrorism -- which so far are limited.

al-Shabab's "links" with al-Qaeda seem to be mostly rhetoric on both sides. But if they become real and deadly, be willing to strike. This would not be so difficult. Somalia has no mountains or jungles, making it relatively hospitable for counter-terrorism operations.

Just be careful not to become a player in the country's internal political dynamics. "We have a limited capacity to influence events in Somalia, to influence them positively," says Bruton. "But we have an almost unlimited capacity to make a mess of things."

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