Jamaat Gaining?

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Which party – Awami League or Bangladesh Nationalist Party or Jamaat-e-Islami – will be benefited most if the country's political situation is worsened further? In the prevailing situation, many people think that Jamaat-e-Islami will gain. And who will be the loser if Jamaat finally gets maximum political mileage from the current situation?

The recent political development does not encourage us to be optimistic. With the political situation getting volatile, Jamaat men are getting the upper hand. The unprecedented rise of youths at Shahbagh and elsewhere in the country in early February has forced the main opposition BNP to maintain a distance with its electoral ally Jamaat. The BNP did not extend support to a number of hartals enforced by Jamaat in February. The BNP cancelled a scheduled rally in February to avoid hobnobbing with Jamaat. A number of BNP policymakers earlier told this correspondent that they would continue to maintain a certain amount of distance with Jamaat for some more months.

By holding the March 6 meeting, opposition leader Khaleda Zia has made it clear that the BNP now needs Jamaat to gear up street agitations to make the government unable to control the situation.

But the situation took a different turn very quickly. BNP chief Khaleda Zia played a game changing move by holding a meeting on March 6 with senior leaders of Jamaat and other components of the 18 party alliance led by BNP. The meeting appeared as a breakthrough for Jamaat. The meeting decided to go for a one-point movement to oust the AL-led government. And it also decided to enforce all agitation programmes under the banner of 18-party alliance. This means form now on Jamaat will be with the BNP to gear up street agitations. And as per the decision the March 7 hartal, separately called by BNP and Jamaat at first, was enforced jointly under the banner of the 18-party alliance. So the gap between the BNP and Jamaat was minimised very quickly. Isn't this a big win for Jamaat? It has emboldened Jamaat-Shibir men to go tough in the coming days to free their top leaders who are facing war crimes trial.

By holding the March 6 meeting, opposition leader Khaleda Zia has made it clear that the BNP now needs Jamaat to gear up street agitations to make the government unable to control the situation. What will then happen if the situation goes out of the government's control or the government is forced to start negotiating with the BNP to resolve the political stand-off over the mode of the government during the next parliamentary election? If such a situation finally comes, the BNP will of course raise the issue of the trial of war criminals for discussion to return Jamaat the favour the BNP has received. Not only that, two BNP leaders including a national standing committee member of BNP Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, are also facing war crimes charges along with Jamaat's top leaders. The BNP has already questioned the neutrality of the ongoing trial and it may again demand a fresh trial for the sake of transparency.

Jamaat has more to gain as public demand for holding talks is increasing fast. Jamaat moreover