affront to democracy because it derives from distrust. But we needed it as the ruling party always politicises the administration, judiciary etc. Trust is the fundamental component in democracy whereas our leaders don't trust each other. Now the opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia is not likely to trust the election commission without a caretaker government," she says.

"Dialogue means compromise," says Dr Akbar Ali Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government. He thinks that willingness to have a dialogue has a good public posture; the public thinks the parties are being constructive and doing the right thing. "But a dialogue will not be meaningful without two things. Both parties must realise the present situation is untenable and must be willing to compromise their positions through a dialogue," he observes.



Raiding the BNP headquarters and detaining opposition leaders pushed away the possibilities of a dialogue between the two parties.

Dr Khan relates, "None of the political parties have a true commitment to a fair and impartial election. If they have no commitment, why would they want to have a dialogue for compromise?" he comments.

A dialogue is meant to fail without compromise. Dr Khan recounts that the dialogue between Bangabandhu and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was unsuccessful because neither were in a position to make a compromise. The Pakistani rulers were not willing to concede six-points. And there was no way the father of the nation would backtrack from the six-point demand.

Asked whether an all-party interim government can be an alternative to a caretaker government, Dr Khan admits that we cannot hold impartial elections because the political parties have always been tinkering with the election process. "All powers are in the hands of the prime minister; it doesn't matter whether five or ten members are selected from the political parties for an interim government. That's why, in 1996, the mediation did not succeed over the choice of the prime minister. In our caretaker government, the chief advisor was not interested in an impartial election. Despite our best efforts, we couldn't do anything because he had all the power in his hand."

Dr Khan suggests solutions to overcome this impasse. "The Supreme Court suggests electing a caretaker or an all-party interim government. This can be done through constitutional amendments where the parliament members will elect non-party people as members of a caretaker government. This is not in conflict with the Supreme Court. If the president can be elected by the government, why can't the non-party caretaker government be elected by the parliament." he asks.

Another instance of a solution comes from Dr Khan. "It can be done by changing the constitution like that of the Indian constitution. In India, a person can be appointed a minister in six months' time even if he's not a member of the parliament. You can nominate non-party persons as cabinet ministers and after three months of holding the election, they go out of power. So if the Indian constitution is valid, we can have the same sort of provision in our constitution." he says.

"Another option is that both parties select ministers from each other for the caretaker government, which should be more acceptable to both parties. Even some form of caretaker government can be revived in consultation with the Supreme Court because they said that you can have a caretaker government for the next two terms. Proposals can be taken to the court but it seems very unlikely that the government will do it. There are a lot more options with the constitution experts, it is not unsolvable," he adds.

Dr Khan affirms that the law is not a stumbling block to form a caretaker or some other type of interim government, contrary to what the government says about the Supreme Court's judgment. Rather the government's obstinacy in not having a discussion with the opposition is the main stumbling block. "Does the government realise that a dialogue will be good for them?" he questions.

A dialogue and the willingness to make compromises for the nation's greater interest seem to be the only viable solutions, according to the intelligentsia. As tension builds over various disagreements between the AL and the BNP, the nation can barely sit back and suffer, thinking - let nature take its course. The two parties definitely have their own political speculations but the recent events would suggest that those have so far served to further disappoint the people. Despite having options to end the current stalemate, it remains a 'public fantasy' that our leaders will harness their hatred towards one another now put on show for public and say, "Let's talk this over, shall we?"