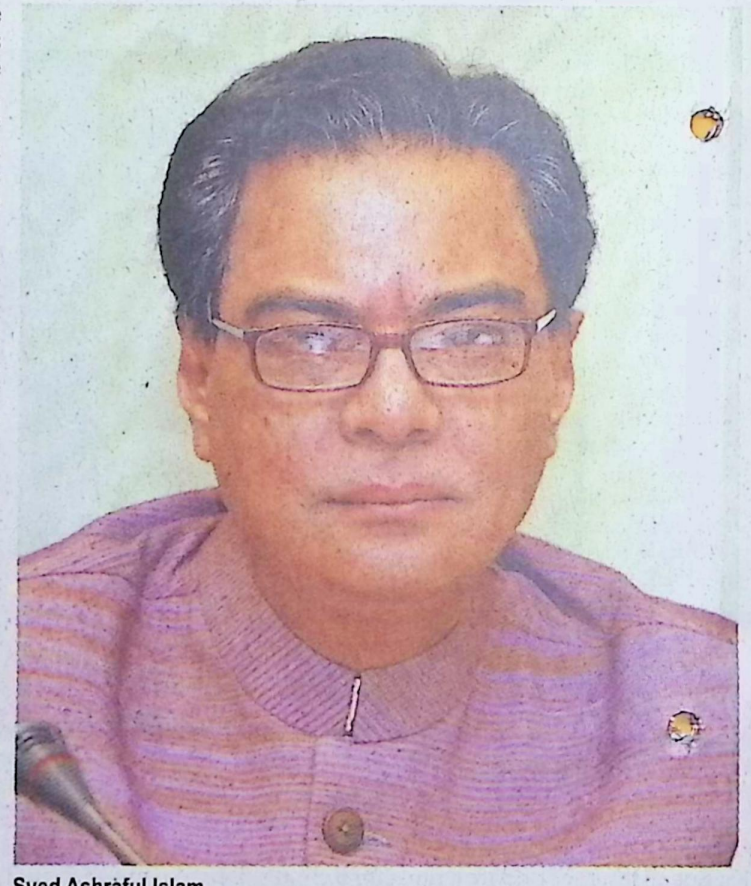
Let's Ban Politics!

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Freedom of assembly is one the fundamental rights citizens are guaranteed by the article 37 of the country's constitution. This fundamental right can be restricted only by a law imposed in the interest of public order or public health. The restriction must be reasonable and not arbitrary.

Last Sunday LGRD Minister Syed Ashraful Islam and Home Minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir might have not paid attention to people's fundamental right to assemble when they announced a ban on any political meetings and rally for the coming days. They made conflicting statements which triggered confusion over the duration and purview of the ban.

The police boss said no meeting or demonstration would be allowed for an indefinite period in the capital to avert anarchy while the LGRD minister said the ban was imposed on political meetings across the country for a month for the sake of smooth relief and rehabilitation work in the cyclone Mahasen-affected districts.



Syed Ashraful Islam

This exposed the severe lack of coordination within the government and its infantile behaviour, making many wonder how senior ministers have made conflicting statements on such a crucial issue.

The announcement to impose the ban however has triggered widespread protest and criticism. The main opposition BNP did not take time to denounce and reject it, alleging that the ban had targeted the opposition movement against the government. Legal experts, eminent citizens and other political parties have also denounced the announcement, terming it undemocratic and unconstitutional. The announcement also angered and surprised many leaders of ruling AL and its allies in the 14-party alliance.

Faced with tidal wave of criticism, the government might come up with new explanations in defence of the ban. At one point, it may rescind the announcement, if good sense finally prevails. But much damage has already been done and the government and the ruling AL will have to pay heavily to recover it.

The announcement has been a manifestation of the government's acute failure to deliver on its electoral pledges. It is a glaring example of how our political culture has deteriorated in the last four and a half years, prompting the government to take a whimsical and undemocratic decision.

In the run up to the last parliamentary election held on December, 29, 2008, the AL promised that "courtesy and tolerance will be inculcated in the political culture of the country. Awami League will take the initiative to formulate a consensual and unanimous charter of political behaviour."