

Ashraf talks beyond remit

His advice to DCs lacks common sense

LG minister and AL Secretary General Syed Ashraf Islam's exhortations upon the deputy commissioners that they prepare for the next parliamentary elections without 'help of the army' have taken us aback. Our surprise is exceeded by the unwarranted and misplaced nature of his assertions.

The Election Commission (EC) is charged with the responsibility of holding free, fair and credible elections with the DCs working under its watch and control during the polls. The minister skirted any reference to the EC whose independence is crucial to the conduct of good elections. The EC is the best judge as to whether army would need to be deployed for the national election. Who is the minister of LGRD to decide whether army would be used in the polls or not? This is as inappropriate as it is outside his given remit.

Actually, in all the four national elections held under caretaker system, and even those held before, army had been deployed as sentinels to secure law and order conducive to free, fair and credible elections.

There is a distinction between the local government polls and by-elections on the one side and the national elections on the other. Yes, under the incumbent government quite a few thousand polls including local government ones and by-elections have been held properly and credibly. However, none of those elections are comparable in terms of total voters, territory covered and number of candidates. Also, the biggest of these elections were staggered over a period of four months in 2011. Essentially, parliamentary elections are dissimilar as the latter change governments and others merely usher in office-bearers of local bodies.

If the minister fails to comprehend these obvious distinctions then he must be devoid of common knowledge, or he is deliberately trying to confuse the public.

Extortion on highways

Now the gatekeeper is in the act

It is disheartening to say the least when we hear of the allegation that law enforcement agency personnel being engaged in toll taking on highways that is driving up prices of essentials during the holy month of Ramadan. Investigative journalism has revealed that the price of eggplant purchased by a consumer in Dhaka or Chittagong at Tk50 per kilo is sold by the farmer at Bogra's Mohasthan market at only Tk5 per kg – a tenfold increase in price! Indeed, the price of all vegetables travelling 12km distance from Mohasthan to Rangpur increase, on average, anywhere between ten and twenty times. Allegations have been raised by truckers that the police directly or indirectly extract toll from goods laden trucks at various points on highways.

Where the highway police and the various police stations are supposed to provide protection against robbery and extortion, the manner in which tolls are now being collected are marking up vegetable prices across the board in the capital city. This is reflected when at the beginning of Ramadan, prices of vegetables per kilo jumped Tk10 per kilo on average. Stepping into the second half of the holy month, prices are yet to come down significantly. This sort of unbridled corruption by the very authorities which are responsible for maintaining law and order is completely unacceptable.

Turning a blind eye to what is obviously a systematic regime for toll collection is hardly conducive to protecting consumers' interests and we strongly urge meaningful steps be taken by higher authorities to prevent such extortion and hold those responsible to account.

Presidential polls boycott

EDITORIAL: DAWN

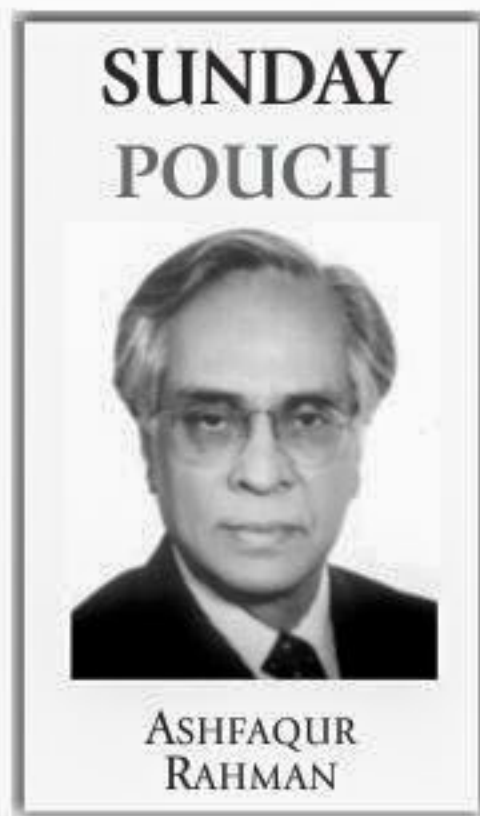
IF controversy was in fact unavoidable, then perhaps it was too much to hope it would end quickly. A historic and democratic transition in the presidency has been plunged into deep and fresh controversy by PPP's decision to boycott the rescheduled election. Quite where the original sin lies in this unnecessary fiasco is a tough call. Had PML-N not fought so hard to have the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) original poll timetable amended – a fixation seemingly rooted in the party's desire to score a crushing victory in the presidential election, as opposed to just a comfortable win – the Supreme Court would never have been seized of the matter to begin with. But then, the court had the option of erring on the side of caution, and, arguably, the Constitution too, by allowing the presidential election schedule to be decided by the ECP. Neither PML-N nor the court erred on the side of caution, however, and now PPP has decided to do the worst it can do to the legitimacy of the electoral process.

The optimistic approach here would be to regard the entire matter as little more than a storm in a teacup. After all, given the configuration of the assemblies, PML-N was always in pole position to decide who will be elected the next president, regardless of the date on which the election was to be held. Unhappily, optimism isn't really warranted at the moment. PPP, as indeed all opposition parties, has been denied a fair electoral process, and the democratic project is certainly about both substance and form. There is, then, little cause to be optimistic to begin with. But PPP's response has further and unnecessarily tainted the democratic process.

To be clear, given that a Supreme Court bench presided over by the chief justice of Pakistan has overruled the ECP, a legal challenge to the court-sanctioned change of polling day was unlikely to succeed. But a political response to a legal challenge has been PPP's preferred, almost default, response since 2009. That famously did not work in the Swiss-letter saga and, in the case of a presidential election, is certainly not a democracy-enhancing step.

PPP contested general elections in 1990, 1997 and 2008 in far more adverse circumstances and with the stakes much higher. A boycott is a tempting device for a party to register its protest against an unfair process or system, but participating sends an even stronger signal – that democracy is the ultimate goal and it will be ultimately achieved, in form and in substance.

A British king for the 22nd century!



SUNDAY
POUCH

ASHFAQUR
RAHMAN

LAST week, a son was born to Prince William of Britain, whose father Prince Charles is the crown prince of that realm. The bonny boy was named George Alexander Louis. The child's great grandmother is Queen Elizabeth II, who only this year celebrated 60 years on the British throne. Therefore, today there are three generations of male royal successors to the British throne. The monarch herself is still reigning. If there is a safety in numbers, the British royal family seems to be now fully secured for another century. Of course this is subject to all these successors remaining in good health. And, more importantly, if the people of that small island nation continue to accept monarchy for another one hundred years.

The Queen is now 87 years old. This is the same age that the newborn Prince George has to reach before he steps into the 22nd century. Life expectancy of males in the high echelons of British royal family has of late increased exponentially. So Prince William, who was born in 1982, is likely to live to his mid-eighties. If that is so then he will succeed Charles as king of Britain in 2068 when he will be 56 years old. When the 22nd century begins newborn Prince George will have already been on the British throne for several years.

It is precisely because of this reason that the growing up of the infant prince will be of great interest

to many in Britain. The baby prince is now residing in Kensington Palace in London with his parents. But soon he will move temporarily to his maternal grandfather's house in the village of Bucklebury, Berkshire. But interestingly, his mother, Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge, has not employed any nanny to look after him. The parents are very modern in their approach to child rearing and want to look after George themselves. Only the maternal grandmother and grandfather, and a housekeeper, will be around. This is a departure from what royalty is generally used to. Baby George is a healthy kid weighing 8 lb 6oz at birth. This is more than the British national average.

Royal babies are always pampered the world over. This can be seen from the attention they get as well as the plush nurseries they live in. The royal cot is always the cynosure of all eyes. Every royal household tries to outdo the other in creating the most exquisite cradle for the newly born. Just take the case of the royal nurseries in Germany. It was a tradition with the German Hohenzollern dynasty that all newly born royals would use an exquisite 200 year old cradle. This was on the direct order of the German Kaiser. This cot had the pleasant history that it was known never to induce convulsions or other stomach problems in a child. A royal cot also symbolised the exclusivity of the occupant and prevented any royal-baby-switched-at-birth conspiracy.

The Burmese royal family designed unique baby cots

for their newly born. Usually, the frames were made of mango wood, but the sides were encased in gold sheets with precious stones affixed on the piece. Such a cot would be suspended some 12 feet above the floor of the nursery by gold cords. It would swing gently as the baby was lulled to sleep. The king of Spain built a conch-shaped cradle lined with pink satin for the Spanish royal babies. Swedish royalty had in the past designed a swan-shaped cradle with the wings coming up to protect the child from slipping to the floor.

Gifts given to newly born royalty have always been a matter of great public interest. Over the centuries, gifts ranged from specially designed items for the baby's personal use to precious jewels or live animals, or even buildings or monuments. Royalty has been celebrating birth as a rite of passage for both mother and child as far back as in ancient Egypt and Greece. In the Middle Ages, celebrating the birth of a child, especially a royal birth, was considered more a religious affair. In the Christian world, a newborn was baptised the day after his birth. But over time, these celebrations morphed into festive occasions. Then family and friends started giving expecting mothers a range of gifts which included clothes, food and even paintings. In many countries in the west this has become known as a baby shower.

So what gifts did infant Prince George get? The British royals are so far tightlipped about disclosing what the prince has received from the grandfather as well as the great grandmother, as well as from other royalty. Prince William and his wife had suggested earlier that if anyone wanted to give money they could do so to one of their favourite charities either in their country or abroad. But let us

see what some have really given. Australia has gifted a live baby crocodile. Canada has given \$100,000 to a charity in Canada on behalf of the prince for the welfare of kids. It has also given children's books both in French and English to be eventually read by the prince. Blankets for the child and a special shoe called Mukluks for the parents of the prince were also given. Finland has given diapers and other personal effects. A retail store in Anglesey Wales, where Prince William works, has given a parking space for the royal couple and Prince George, emblazoned with the word HRH. It is a good marketing strategy too for the retail store. Expatriate ladies residing in Singapore have crafted a special quilt for the use of the prince. Gifts continue to pour in from the people and well wishers.

The moot question is, why does the British royal family attract so much attention the world over when it celebrates births and marriages. This is perhaps because the British perform all the rituals with great care and colour. The world seems to love all this for the sake of its pageantry. Will it be so, a hundred years hence? Let us wait and see. Thank God, in South Asia we have done away with monarchy. Only Bhutan is still a monarchy but the Bhutanese king is a reluctant monarch. Bravo, South Asia!

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AFP

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Israel vs. Iran, again

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN

EARLIER this month, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel went on American television to remind the world (in case anyone had forgotten) that the threat from Iran remains very much alive. Speaking on "Face the Nation," Netanyahu warned that the Islamic Republic is once again approaching a nuclear redline, and hinted that if the United States doesn't take action soon, he will.

Expect to hear more of this in the weeks ahead; Bibi's TV appearance was reportedly just the opening shot in a new campaign to push the spotlight back on Iran. But don't expect Washington or the international community to leap into action.

Netanyahu won't -- and shouldn't -- get the kind of response he's hoping for. Simply put, that's because both his language and Israel's behaviour are making it harder and harder to take his warnings seriously.

The problem starts with just how familiar Israel's warnings on Iran have become. Netanyahu went through a similar exercise, remember, last summer. And the summer before that. In fact, Israeli leaders have been issuing such alarms for almost a decade now.

That repetition wouldn't necessarily be a problem if just what they've been warning about hadn't also shifted so much. Consider: Back in 2004, when Prime Minister Ariel Sharon raised the issue of Iran's nuclear programme, he said the point of no return would come when Iran came close to developing the technical capacity to enrich uranium.

Months later, however, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said no, the real danger would come when Iran started enriching fuel on its own soil. Then, in 2006, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said the fatal moment would actually come when Iran started running a certain number of enrichment cascades. And then last year, Ehud Barak (Bibi's defense minister at the time) said the real red line would be crossed when Iran entered the "zone of immunity" -- the point at which its nuclear programme would be so advanced or well defended that it couldn't be disabled by attack.

What's confusing about this litany is that Iran has blown by each red line in turn, yet the supposed disaster has yet to materialise. So Bibi now has a boy-who-cried-wolf problem. But there's a deeper flaw in his case against Iran, and that's intellectual incoherence. Netanyahu insists that the Islamic Republic must be stopped before it builds a bomb because it couldn't be trusted not to use it. Iran, in other words, is undeterrable.

But for that to be true, the country's leaders would have to be more evil and less rational than Stalin or Mao, whose crimes were infinitely greater, yet against whom deterrence worked just fine. That claim is tough enough to accept on

its face. It gets even tougher when you remember that Iran has apparently slowed down its uranium enrichment in the last year. Tehran did so in response to concerted threats and sanctions -- the very definition of rational behaviour.

Now, let me be clear: I'm not trying to argue that Israel doesn't have any reason to worry about Iran. Given Israel's size and location, the Obama administration's current preoccupation with Egypt and Syria, and Washington's seeming willingness to engage Iran's new president in yet another round of talks, Netanyahu's anxiety is understandable (if excessive).

What's not understandable, however, is how he's dealing with it. Were his government truly determined to stop Iran's nuclear programme, it would be acting very differently in a few key respects.

First, in order to build broad international support for action, it would be doing everything -- everything -- in its power to make peace with the Palestinian Authority and thereby remove the biggest irritant in its relations with Europe and the Arab world.

Instead, Bibi is doing effectively nothing on that front. Don't be fooled by the recent US announcement that peace talks might soon resume. The fact that the Israeli side will be led by Tzipi Livni -- a coalition partner Netanyahu doesn't like or trust -- and that, even before the talks were announced, another of his cabinet members anonymously declared them little more than a ruse -- shows how seriously Bibi takes them.

Second, if Jerusalem really wanted to stop Iran from getting a bomb, it would put its own on the table. This might sound outlandish, but consider what merely offering to establish a regional nuclear-free zone would buy Israel. Netanyahu could insist on the most intrusive verification mechanisms imaginable -- Israeli inspectors on the ground at Fordow or Natanz, say. Iran would refuse, but it wouldn't matter; Jerusalem would have put Tehran on the defensive and bought some of the international support it desperately needs.

Yet rather than take such bold steps, Netanyahu has resorted to an old tactic and is beating the drum in Washington instead. Which points to a cynical but unavoidable conclusion: that what he really wants is for the rest of the world to take care of his Iran problem for him.

It's not that Netanyahu wouldn't rather the mullahs were stopped from building a bomb. Of course he would. He's just not willing to pay much of a price -- such as offering painful concessions -- to make it happen.

But if he's not, why should anyone on the outside do it for him?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Park on moon!

A recent news report of this daily titled "US plans to build park on Moon!" drew my attention. The report did not mention the starting and ending date of this mission. However, after learning this interesting information, people will start to dream about wandering in that park! Really it would be an amazing and rare experience. In fact, the US lawmakers' recent move in this regard is encouraging.

However, once John F. Kennedy created in the American people's mind the hope to conquer moon. The American people did everything for achieving it. Now again they are hoping to walk in the park on moon during Barack Obama's administration. We hope President Obama would see the success of this mission in his lifetime.

Mobarak Ali
Gopibagh, Dhaka

Ban cell phone use while driving

Road accidents are on the rise. In most cases, the driver's negligence and disregard of traffic rules are to be blamed for road accidents. Talking on mobile phone while driving is also behind road accidents nowadays.

If one must make or answer a phone call at the time of driving, one should stop driving and park the vehicle by the roadside. After finishing their conversations, they can start driving again. Laws should immediately be enforced to stop the use of mobile phones while driving.

Pushpan Chowdhury
Prime Bank Ltd.
Fatickhari, Chittagong

Promotions to reward party loyalists

In a recent move, the government has promoted 345 deputy secretaries to the posts of joint secretary. Only in last March, 182 senior assistant secretaries were elevated to the rank of deputy secretary. It is also learnt that the third round of promotion of joint secretaries as additional secretaries is under process. The funny thing is that these large scale promotions are not against the available vacant posts; rather the promoted officials hold their current charges while they enjoy the status, salaries and benefits of the higher positions.

A widely circulated national daily published the comments of three former cabinet secretaries on this promotion. Every one of them pointed to the adverse impact of such political promotions, which they feared, will not only drain public money but also ruin the administration by demoralising efficient, experienced and high performing public servants. They have been denied their rights. The sole criterion for these promotions has been the loyalty of the officials concerned to the ruling party. As an elected body, the government should know that the general people have not given it the right to make such misuse of public money.

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque
East Rampur, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Rony arrested," published on July 25, 2013

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

If Rony had not jangled Salman F Rahman's nerves, would he have been arrested?

Mahboob Hossain

This is indeed a good example which shows that nobody is above law. However, questions remain. If the government is so honest, why does it not take any action against the killers in their party? The crime committed by Rony is much less than that of many people inside AL who are being rewarded by the government.

Abul Kashem

We hope this is not an eyewitness.

Shahin Huq

Many Awami MPs and party leaders beat up journalists and other professionals on many occasions. Most of them (from top to bottom) are 'guilty' of corruption and misrule. So Rony didn't do anything unusual. He simply did it at a wrong time and in a wrong manner. Syed Ashraf's statement is really interesting as well as bewildering.

Sawgat Chowdhury

Why did the police fail to put handcuffs on him and keep him at DB office? He is a criminal!

"Prepare for polls without army" (July 25, 2013)

GoromGoromComillia

There cannot be free and fair election in Bangladesh under these looters, kidnappers, murderers and torturers of common people. We have to fight tooth and nail for the reinstatement of CG.

Anando

We just want fair election. Please try to bring some peace in the country.