

# Dialogue, not diatribe

Z.A. KHAN  
AWAMI League's (AL) recent humiliating defeat in the five city corporation elections has put the party in disarray. It seems to be trying desperately to lift itself through its usual verbose propaganda that those election results do not reflect public opinion against the party but against the candidates who claimed to have obtained the blessing of the party. A large section of the people think that this propaganda does not hold any ground, as they saw how the stalwarts of AL campaigned for Mr. Azmat Ullah Khan who lost the election by a large margin despite the government's support.

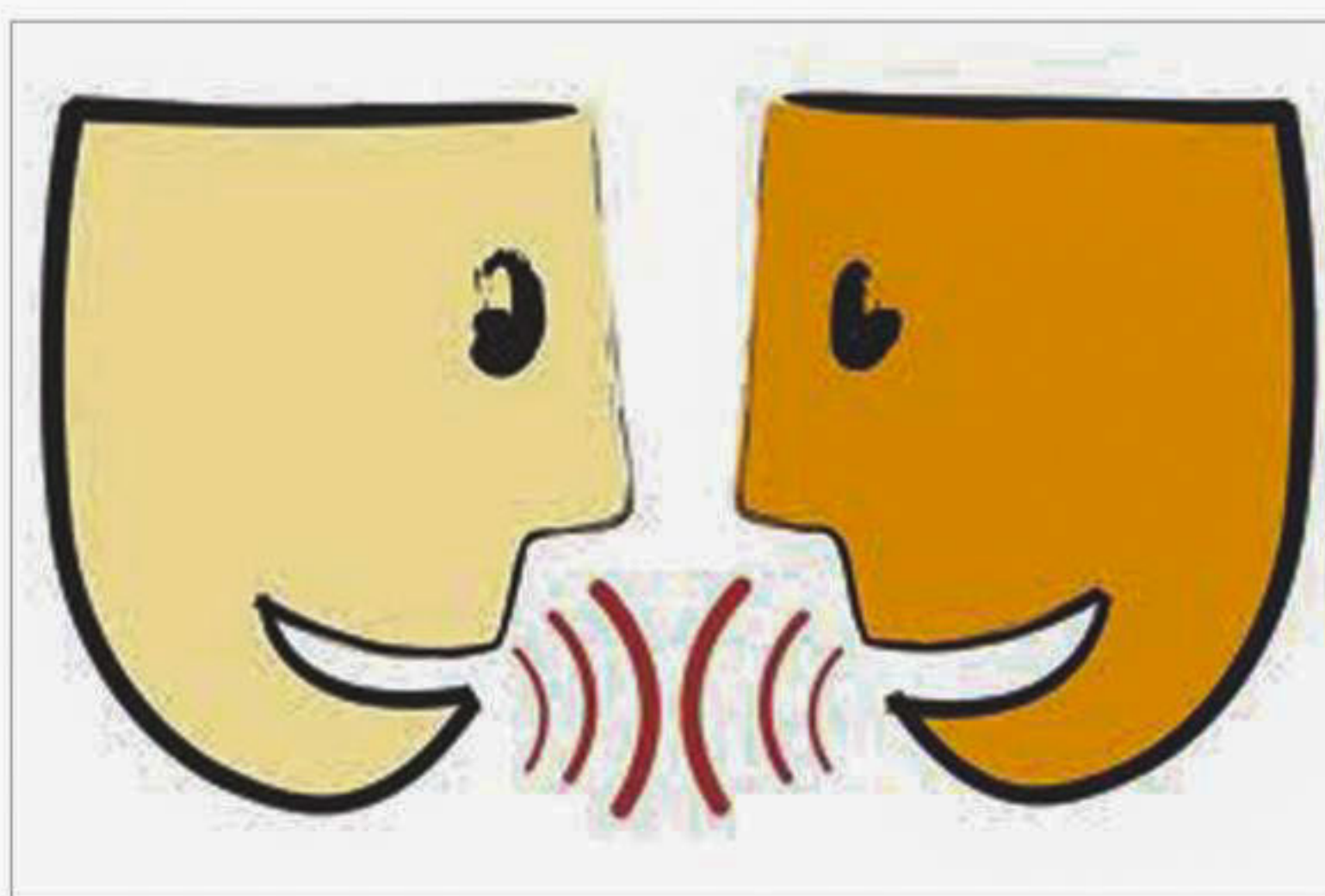
The danger of yet another drubbing in the ensuing national election is looming large for AL as its more than 4 1/2 years of rule has proved to be anti-people. Instead of introspecting on the causes of such unprecedented defeat of AL supported candidates in the local government elections, especially when election to the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) is only a few month away, AL is busy finding excuses to thwart the national election by clinging on to its stand of holding it under an interim government headed by the PM, which is opposed tooth and nail by almost the entire nation.

The AL, it is alleged, has become arrogant about power or may be more arrogant about the source of power because of its brute majority at the JS, which enables it to legislate any rule that it thinks can catapult it to power in the next election. Mr. Sajeeb Wazed, the son of our honourable PM, has claimed that he has authentic intelligence that AL will swing back to power by winning the ensuing election. On this belief AL has locked horns with the most popular opposition alli-

ance headed by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

AL is making inflammatory insinuations involving the 18-party alliance and is unleashing the state machinery to create a situation that may force BNP not to participate in the election, which will be extremely damaging for our nation. The bone of contention, as reflected in the actions and utterances of AL leaders, is its opposition to holding of the next general election under a neutral caretaker government (CTG).

The people have not forgotten that AL itself spilled a lot of blood in 1996 to force the BNP government to relent to the claim that only a neutral CTG could ensure free and fair election on a level playing field. Paradoxically, AL is smelling a rat in the neutral CTG today, and is now plowing a lonely furrow to hold the



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Increasing insularity is fuelling the government's arrogance and that is why the majority of the people are anchoring their hopes on the BNP led 18-party alliance. The party in power has its hands full with problems like the scams in Padma Bridge, Stock Exchange, Destiny and Sonali Bank, and spiraling corruption in all sectors of the administration, poor performance in our foreign affairs, loss of

erful' democratically elected leaders who became autocratic fell like ninepins in the of face public agitation. Those despotic 'leaders' thought that the citizens were nothing but straws upon the winds of their caprice and that is why they dispatched true democracy into the debris of the past and replaced it by muscular democracy.

It is the government that should take initiatives to bring the opposition to a dialogue to resolve the issue of the CTG as the term of the current parliament ends later this year. People are unsure about any fruitful political dialogue in our country unless it is decided at the summit level. Let there be unconditional dialogue outside the parliament between the two top leaders of the two major political parties to work out a formula for holding the elections that will meet the aspirations of the people. Then the secretaries general of both parties can dovetail the details with the assistance of party stalwarts and experts. JS can then come into play for the passage of the bill as there is no provision for referendum in the constitution any more.

One is hearing SOS calls from every nook and corner of the country to stop bloodletting, which has become the order of the day due to the highhandedness of law enforcers. The only way that can ensure return of normalcy in law and order is the resolution of the neutral CTG issue. All parties will be constrained to show respect to any decision taken concertedly by the two major parties in an atmosphere of concord and amity. Let us rise to save democracy, which is not a Herculean task if there is political will.

The writer is a former Director General of BISS.

**ACROSS**  
1 Impale  
5 Father  
8 Waller or Domino  
12 Operatic solo  
13 Playwright Levin  
14 "Step —!" ("Hurry!")  
15 Kindly bloke  
16 Make a mock-up of  
18 I before E except —  
20 Draw forth  
21 Doesn't feel good  
23 Overly  
24 Kiss  
28 Winter forecast  
31 Debt notice  
32 Detroit team  
34 Payable  
35 Calm before the storm

**DOWN**  
1 Long story  
2 Not kosher  
3 "It — Necessarily So"  
4 Flat-bottomed boat  
5 Deny  
6 "Exodus" hero  
7 Knighted woman  
8 Page numbers  
9 Big snake  
10 South American monkey  
11 Undo a dele

**37** Vary a tone  
**39** Winning hand's winnings  
**41** Cupola  
**42** Notlikethis  
**45** Random drawing?  
**49** Count  
**51** Require  
**52** Right angles  
**53** Knight's title  
**54** On the rocks  
**55** Encounter  
**57** "Finding Nemo" character

**17** Last (Abbr.)  
**19** Small stream  
**22** Remained upright  
**24** Lubricant  
**25** Old French coin  
**26** Guilty  
**27** Germ layer  
**29** Result of three strikes  
**30** Tiny  
**33** Wrestling style  
**36** Noisy swarmer  
**38** Nikita's successor  
**40** — Aviv  
**42** Branch  
**43** Wan  
**44** Morse morsel  
**46** Retro art style  
**47** Lecherous look  
**48** Vortex  
**50** Dead heat

**Solution time: 24 mins.**

M	E	S	A	S	P	A	N	D	A	S	
H	O	O	P	L	A	O	C	T	R	O	
A	N	N	E	A	L	R	E	H	A	N	
D	O	S	E	A	C	E	R	M	E	N	
B	R	A	S	I	R	S	L	U	N	A	
Y	A	N	K	E	E	S	T	A	D	I	U
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E	A	T	A	N	D	I					
C	U	L	R	E	T	O	R	C	A		
A	S	I	M	O	V	A	R	D	O	R	
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T	R	A	D	E	R	D	O	L	E	D	

Last answer 5-27

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52						53			54		
55						56			57		

**CRYPTOQUIP**

BJGRF VFLF MUHGIIGUTE  
RBMLPE XTFFBR GX VWLRJNOR.  
BJFE HGMP KGBJGMRWUPR  
GXINTFR OFL KWTTFGU.

Last Cryptoquip: SINCE THERE ARE THREE MORTGAGES ALREADY IN DEFAULT, ONE MORE MAY RESULT IN FOUR CLOSURES.

Today's Cryptoquip Code: X equals F

## Government's self-publicity with public money

TAJ HASHMI  
IT is time to protest the ruling Awami League's self-publicity through billboards at a staggering cost of more than Tk.3 crore (one senior minister would possibly say taxpayers' Tk.3 crore is "rubbish" as he "rubbished" the 4,000 crore stolen by Hall-Mark). I am really shocked and saddened by the government's overwhelming "billboard campaign" -- whose impact will be grossly underwhelming though -- and the deafening silence of our civil society, intellectuals, politicians and youths over this scandalous act of the ruling party. The removal of commercial billboards to the detriment of commercial firms by the government is also shockingly unwarranted.

colonial rule. One may point out the magic lanterns, and later the cinema shows (silent and "talkies"), of the 1920s through the 1940s in this regard. Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq's government of Undivided Bengal did publish a booklet with government money in 1940 or 1941 in self-publicity (of what his government had achieved) and there was bitter criticism from the opposition and some members of the ruling parties (Muslim League and the Krishak Proja Party) for blurring the line between government and the ruling party.

What has been mis-described as the government's right of self-defence is actually the ruling party's blurring the line between the government and the ruling party. It happens only under totalitarian rule, not in democracies. This bizarre and undemocratic self-publicity at public cost is as bad as the government's not-so-muffled pork-barrel policy that threatens opposition voters of minimal or no development projects (or longer load-shedding hours) in their constituencies.

Then again, this flagrant violation of democratic norms and principles by the ruling party is not unprecedented. Unrepresentative governments/regimes that realise the ice they are trampling on is quite thin, often do publicise their "achievements" to buy the elusive mass support. The British rulers did this quite frequently to buy mass support in colonial India. They were quite successful in hegemonising mass consciousness for more than a century through development projects and publicity. Some achievements of the British Raj (even Karl Marx had kind words for those projects) were actually unprecedented, such as the telegraph, railways, electricity, and the rule of law.

The colonial British Government had its Publicity Department, which used the press and publicity officers to demonstrate government achievements and the "benign" nature of the

The Pakistan government also did publicise its achievements through the Publicity Department, which is a colonial hangover in some postcolonial countries. One may mention the short films the Pakistan Government Publicity Department used to show in movie theatres (viz. *Chitre Pakistan Khabor* during Ayub Khan's rule). Ayub Khan also publicised his "achievements" ("The Decade of Reforms, 1958-1968") through billboards and media. He blurred /erased the line between the government and his ruling party. And He did not run a democracy. Most importantly, the over-blown publicity of his "Decade of Reforms," albeit with public money, precipitated his fall in less than five months following the "Decade" in March 1969.

In view of this, one wonders, can the government really salvage its eroding popularity with billboards? One wonders if the ruling parties in India or Sri Lanka could get away with self-publicity with public money. One may ask the question: Can democracy really sustain in a society where people are so inert and indifferent to such violations of democratic principles?

It is time to protest. If this move goes unopposed then there is every likelihood that whichever party comes to power after the next elections would do the same and would probably spend even a bigger amount (taxpayers' money) in self-publicity and self-aggrandisement. Let good sense prevail and the government withdraw all the billboards! People across the board should come out of their "bullet proof" partisan shells to condemn self-publicity with public money.

The writer is at Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee, US.

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**BEETLE BAILY** by Mort Walker

**HENRY** by Don Trachte

**QUOTABLE Quotes**

"If a political party does not have its foundation in the determination to advance a cause that is right and that is moral, then it is not a political party; it is merely a conspiracy to seize power."

Dwight D. Eisenhower

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# riot

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- ✓ Is the Project approved by RAJUK with updated Land Documents? Please check it by yourself or get it checked by your lawyer.
- ✓ Do you have the option of paying only 5 – 10% booking money and rest of the amount with construction progress, so that you can stop payment for any delay in construction?
- ✓ Does your agreement incorporate this important clause - "If you fail to pay your installment for any reason, you will get 100% REFUND of your money without any deduction"?
- ✓ Does your agreement also include the Handover date and commitment for monthly rent payment in case of failing of handover within due date?
- ✓ Does the company refrain themselves from offering "BIG DISCOUNT" or "ATTRACTIVE GIFT" offer? Because, after paying a big amount, if construction work gets delayed, your money will be blocked and your dream home would not come into reality.
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