Politics of Mistrust

Bangladesh's politicians don't trust each other, why would the voters trust them?

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BNP chief Khaleda Zia expects her party leaders and supporters to follow the footsteps of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) activists who are fighting the law enforcers and are dying for the release and reinstatement of their leader Mohamed Morsi in the presidency. At a meeting of her party's national standing committee on August 17, she also enquired about the reasons behind the inability of her party supporters to follow the path of the MB.

None but Tariqul Islam, a member of the BNP national standing committee spoke the truth to answer Khaleda's question, a meeting source told this correspondent. "How will it happen here? We do not trust each other. My cell phone was seized prior to the beginning of the meeting," explained Tariqul, who might have been unaware of the bizarre ruling of the BNP chief that none would be allowed to attend the meeting with cell phone.



PHOTO: PID

The Prime Minister at a cabinet meeting.

In a surprise move, Khaleda Zia collected the cell phones of her senior party colleagues during a party meeting of BNP's national standing committee on April 10 and returned those to them only after the meeting was over. The move is seen as an extreme measure to "prevent the meeting discussions from being leaked" to the media. "Madam, are you suspecting us?" a BNP source who was present at the meeting quoted a standing committee member as asking Khaleda.

What Tariqul said at the August 17 meeting reflected the country's political culture. It prevents the BNP from being strengthened organisationally. And it prevents the party to work in unison. The party could not wage strong agitation against the current Awami League-led government due to its organisational weakness, although there were dozens of issues and instances of failures of the government. The way senior leaders do not trust each other has prompted grassroots leaders to express their lack of confidence in many senior leaders.

The August 17 meeting however decided to go slow on its anti-government agitation for the restoration of a non-partisan election time government. The party has repeatedly been saying that they will not participate in the next parliamentary election if it is held under the Hasina government. BNP's top leaders have even threatened to resist the parliamentary election if it is held under the Hasina-led government. The BNP does not trust the Awami League just as the latter does not trust the BNP.

The ruling AL is not free from this culture of mistrust. For instance, Hasina had dropped some of her party stalwarts from the AL presidium in 2009. She also did not induct them into her council of ministers, as she did not trust them. She was annoyed with them for their so-called reformist stance during the army backed caretaker government regime. Recently, she has been consulting with them ahead of the next parliamentary elec-