tion. No one can say for sure whether she now trusts them or not.

In both the AL and BNP camps, there is a suffocating atmosphere. Scope is very little for the policymakers to open their minds to discuss any issue before making a decision. In most of the cases, they just sing the song of their respective supreme leaders. In this atmosphere, no one can dare to speak the truth. No one dares to do what actually needs to be done to improve the political culture.

So, where there is no trust within the parties, there is no possibility of developing trust and understanding between the parties. But unfortunately, the two major political parties--Awami League and BNP that have been ruling the country in turn since the restoration of democracy in 1991 have been asking people to trust them and to keep confidence in them and in their promises. Should people trust those who do not trust themselves?



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

The leader of the opposition meeting with party leaders.

The culture of mistrust had given birth to a non-partisan election time caretaker government system in 1996 following vigorous street agitation by AL, Jamaat and other political parties. People had got some sort of relief, as the possibility of political turmoil was reduced to the bare minimum as a non-partisan election time government would resume office during the parliamentary polls.

But the relief could not last long. The caretaker government system was scrapped in June 2011. The almost settled matter was unsettled. The outcomes of this action were predictable. With only a few months ahead of the general election, no one can say for sure that the election will be held peacefully in time. People fear of another spell of political turmoil centring the elections.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, however, at a press conference at her official residence Gono Bhaban on August 19, had assured countrymen that the next parliamentary polls will be held on time. But the way she insisted her government's stance on the current constitutional provision regarding holding the next polls has triggered fresh fear.

Her comments – "Everything will take place according to the constitution. I will not budge an inch on this" – is really unfortunate. Is it possible for a democratic leader to speak this way?

Why is she defending the constitution so bluntly and vehemently? The current constitutional provisions, introduced in 2011, benefits her enormously. The parliamentary election will be held within 90 days before the expiry of the Jatiya Sangsad's tenure.

This means that MPs will remain in office while seeking re-election if the parliament is not dissolved before the 90-day deadline. If the parliament is dissolved before the 90-day deadline, the election will be held within the next 90 days. The incumbent prime minister and her council of ministers will be in office during the general election, and there will be no limitation on their functions.

So, it is crystal clear that she is defending the constitution now not for the sake of the constitution, but for petty party interests.

As per the strategy the BNP took at the August 17 meeting, it may not enforce any tougher agitation programmes by the middle of October. By that time, the party wants to gear up its organisational network so it can intensify the movement at the end of October. The main opposition BNP did not take the strategy on its own. Rather, it followed the suggestion of US ambassador in Dhaka who at a recent meeting with Khaleda advised BNP not to wage violent street agitations including the enforcement of hartals. This made it clear that donor countries and development partners will again engage vigorously in Bangladesh's domestic politics ahead of the next polls. And the BNP-led opposition alliance will leave no stone unturned to resist the parliamentary polls if it is held under Hasina. Conspiracy theory will cloud the political landscape and politics of mistrust will get a new height in the coming days, increasing the suffering of people and risking damage to the country's economic life.

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