

Resignation controversy

It makes light of constitution

FOLLOWING handing in of the ministers' resignation letters to prime minister, controversy has now arisen about their present status according to the constitution. The resignation drama, it may be recalled, was made with much fanfare responding to the prime minister's call to this effect as a prelude to her next step of forming a so-called all-party interim government to conduct next general election.

Though the constitution provides that positions of the resigning cabinet as well as state ministers should have fallen vacant, it appears that the prime minister and her cabinet colleagues have been trying to interpret the relevant provision to suit their purpose. Such arbitrary interpretation of the constitution is uncalled-for and undesirable.

Naturally, questions are being raised by constitutional and legal experts, if the ministers still continuing in their job despite their resignations are doing it in breach of the constitution.

The government has created a smokescreen around a constitutional point. The way ministers are coming up with various interpretations of the resignation is in effect making light of the constitution. This is unprecedented and undesirable.

The government, the prime minister in particular, must now clear the tangle about the entire issue without further ado or refer it to the appropriate authority, the High Court, for its opinion.

Holy Ashura

Karbala epic remembered

MUHARRAM reminds us of the epic sacrifice made by Imam Hussein, grandson of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon his soul) and his trusted followers against the brutal forces led by Yazid on the fields of Karbala. Imam Hussein (RA) made the supreme sacrifice in the defence of his faith and against the injustices of a cruel ruler. Indeed, it was Hussein (RA) who personified above all else that it is an honour to lay down one's life for one's faith rather than bow down to the petty and nefarious designs of an unprincipled ruler. In remembrance, Muslims the world over mourn the death of Imam Hussein (RA). For us, the day signifies the eternal battle between good versus evil and the eventual triumph of the former over the latter.

Ashura gives us strength in our struggle against oppression and the injustices of the world and serves as inspiration for holding true to the righteous path. The sacrifices of Imam Hussein (RA) and his followers serve as a beacon of light in the face of the onslaught of evil in all its manifestations in the world to remove any darkness around us. For Muslims of all countries and all sects, Karbala has endlessly served as a cardinal lesson to all that when men of questionable intent seek to cast their unhealthy shadows all over our lives, it is time to rise and, invoking the name and grandeur of the Almighty, wage a moral struggle to uphold the cause of right in its majestic splendour.

What people think

Friday: November 8, 2013

Do you think any of our political parties really cares about people's life and their rights?

Yes

8%

No

92%

Saturday: November 9, 2013

Do you agree with BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir that the government is playing "hide-and-seek" over holding the next general polls?

Yes

71%

No

29%

Sunday: November 10, 2013

Don't you think there should be a law to realise compensation for the damage caused by pro-hartal rioters?

Yes

71%

No

29%

Monday: November 11, 2013

Do you think it was justified for the government to arrest top BNP leaders?

Yes

30%

No

70%

Tuesday: November 12, 2013

Do you think the arrest of top BNP leaders would deteriorate the political situation and trigger more unrest?

Yes

61%

No

19%

Wednesday: November 13, 2013

Do you think the newly passed ACC Act and the provision for prior government permission to file cases against public officials would weaken the authority of ACC?

Yes

9%

No

91%

Thursday: November 14, 2013

Do you think it was justified for the four prosecutors and two investigators of the International Crimes Tribunal to seek nomination from the Awami League for the next general elections?

Yes

90%

No

10%



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

have also reminded the prime minister of times when her own party had resorted to such violence to topple the opponent.

If we give the prime minister the benefit of the doubt, this time she was probably talking from her heart. Politicians in the last analysis are human beings and at some point pricking conscience is bound to keep them awake. But does that mean the prime minister is going to relinquish her post or give up the campaign for re-election? The answer is a resounding no. First thing about politicians is they don't put their money where their mouth is.

It's perhaps the nature of this profession that politics remains a split screen for the mind. Idealism and mischief go hand in hand in it, an enchanted forest inhabited by monsters, witches and fairies where magic and danger lurk in every step. People know politicians lie and cheat, yet they can't resist the spell of these men. There's something about the personality and diction of politicians that produce a deadly concoction, fumes of which send people into a trance.

Advanced societies have rules in place that control the players by controlling the game. Ours is an exception to that rule because the players who control the game also control the rules. Historically, politics in Bangladesh has been based on personality cult. One person symbolises national aspirations, followers swirling in the gravitational pull of their leader like iron particles trapped inside a magnetic field.

In our case this magnetic field is inherited. Dynastic politics has the irony of the Seljuk satirical Sufi Nasreddin Hodja, who served the soup of the soup of a rabbit to the friend of the friend of the man who had brought him that rabbit. When leadership goes from progenitor to progeny or from spouse to spouse, there is an element of dilution to it.

23rd Commonwealth Summit

DAVID CAMERON

THE meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government this week is a unique gathering -- representing 53 sovereign countries, a third of the world's population and 20% of the global economy. It is a purely voluntary club, bound together by shared history, deep and diverse links between our peoples and -- at our best -- strong common instincts about the importance of open societies and open economies.

But as we meet in Colombo, some are questioning whether we are still prepared to stand up for our values. The location of the summit in Sri Lanka has drawn significant criticism: the human rights record of its government has even caused some leaders to stay away.

So, the stakes for the Commonwealth this week are high. And my argument today is clear -- we face a choice. At the summit, we can either bury our head in the sand, ignore the difficult issues and essentially give in to those who think that the Commonwealth is no longer relevant. Or we can use this as an opportunity to come together and restate why our values matter.

It won't surprise you to know that I will be making the latter argument. I am deeply committed to the Commonwealth and what, at its best, it stands for. Not just out of a sense of tradition and obligation -- but of belief. The belief in political freedom which has underpinned this organisation for almost sixty-five years is as relevant now as it was at the time of the London Declaration.

This is not some outdated attempt to impose Westminster ways on the world. Political freedom is innately important in itself. No government crack-down -- no force of arms -- can forever suppress people's aspirations for a voice and for national independence. But this is a hard-headed economic argument too. History shows a remarkable empirical connection between healthy political institutions and a nation's material prosperity. Look at India: the world's largest democracy and a powerful economic success of the past decade. Look at Botswana: a country with relatively open, transparent institutions -- and a standard of living that is far beyond many of its neighbours. Look at Malaysia: a country that has seen democracy and economic growth go hand in hand.

It comes down to this. Countries prosper when they adopt an open economic system: where people are free to trade, free to innovate and have property rights and the rule of law to protect what they own. And that inclusive economy can only succeed in the long-term if it is underpinned by inclusive political institutions: where governments are the servants of the people and are forced to act in the interests of the people. Unless this happens, the wealth of a nation is liable to remain forever in the hands of a narrow clique. This is at the heart of the golden thread of conditions which allows countries to thrive.

In Britain we know that we must make this argument with frankness. We are fully aware of the historical context and of the need to put our own house in order. This is not about telling others what to do and how to do it -- political and economic progress should not be advanced by imposing it on others, but by argument and persuasion. That is why the Commonwealth is so important. And at this year's summit there are two things in particular I believe we can do.

First, there is a real opportunity to shape the global debate over what should replace the Millennium

Politicians should have a retirement age

WHAT the prime minister said in her address to the imams last week should be the wisdom of all wisdoms. She said she didn't feel like aspiring for the prime minister's job anymore because the sufferings of people had become unbearable. She was obviously referring to violence imprecated by strings of shutdowns called by the opposition. The senseless deaths and devastation must

If our politics is increasingly succumbing to arrogance and showdowns, it's because that dilution started many years ago. The successor to the highest profession is picked on the basis of the lowest common denominator. The acceptability of the new leadership is determined by blood connection, not by experience, knowledge, character or political vision.

That must change if we mean business. If we must heal the ills of politics, we must begin with the choice of leaders. Since dynastic politics is the name of the game, the least we can do is set an age limit for the politicians. It can be one family member after another but no single member forever. Every other profession has a retirement age, and there is no reason why politics can't have one too. It may not entirely prevent the disaster, but will significantly control its damage.

Now, at what age should the politicians retire? When do the politicians cross the functional limit of their productive age? Ideally, the older a person gets, the more experience and knowledge he or she is supposed to accumulate. Older age improves the decision-making ability in a person. People are also expected to become more inclined to give to others as they approach what French scholar François Rabelais termed as the "Great Perhaps," meaning death.

Most professionals around the world retire between 60 and 65, some stretching up to 67. But politicians should retire earlier for the same reason organic food has a shorter shelf life. This type of food doesn't have preservatives, which is why it spoils faster.

If we do not want to have politicians with preservatives their stay in power should be shorter. The lies that politicians tell us, the mischief they do, the machinations, compromises, and chicaneries that are their second nature are byproducts of an undying ambition to return to power in perpetual motion. Our political weather is conducive to decay, all the more reason why leaders should be removed before they go from bad to worse.

We have talked about term limit for the politicians. We have talked about ending family-dominated politics. But retirement is the most effective of all. Some leaders might feel squeezed to plunder the economy faster than fire consumes oxygen. But it might also act as its own deterrent. Knowing how much time they have, politicians might refrain from excesses.

Since politicians never get tired, they must get retired. In our context it's better than setting the two-term limit, which can give politicians a wide spread between first and second. Retirement leaves no choice but to plan for succession.

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Development Goals when they expire in 2015. Many of the values which the Commonwealth has embraced are fundamental in the fight against extreme poverty. The recent UN High Level Panel -- which I had the honour of co-chairing with the Presidents of Liberia and Indonesia -- recommended specific targets on open government, free political choice, the rule of law, property rights and free speech. These areas, alongside health, education, and nutrition, are vital to development post-2015. But it is by no means inevitable that governments will manage to agree inspiring and compelling goals. It will only happen if together we show ambition and leadership. The Commonwealth summit is an opportunity for us to stand up for what we believe in. It is a moment where we can start to broker international agreement -- and show a determination to end extreme poverty forever.

Second, we've got to speak candidly to each other. We do the Commonwealth and its history no favours unless we take a stand when we see our values under threat. This is our first meeting since we enshrined our belief in political freedom in the Commonwealth Charter -- and we must show it now has real meaning. Together we must make clear that the political process in the Maldives should respect the will of the people expressed in democratic elections. Together we must encourage further progress towards free and fair elections in Fiji. And together we must say clearly to the government of Sri Lanka -- our hosts -- that there must be accountability for the past and respect for human rights today.

There are those who have asked whether it is right to go to Sri Lanka for this summit given the current situation. By going to Colombo I believe we have an opportunity to raise our concerns clearly and directly -- and to focus the eyes of the world on Sri Lanka. Four years on from the end of the civil war and defeat of the 'Tamil Tigers,' a brutal terrorist organisation, there has been nowhere near enough improvement. We need to see more progress: genuine freedom of expression and a free media, an end to the intimidation of journalists and human rights defenders, action to stamp out torture, demilitarisation of the north and reconciliation between communities. And of course we need to see a thorough investigation into alleged war crimes, and if it does not happen rapidly, an international independent investigation will be needed. This won't always make for easy conversations, but diplomacy isn't about ducking difficult decisions. We will only protect the values that are precious to us if we take action when they are at stake.

So this is a big summit and an important moment. The world is looking to the Commonwealth to rise to the occasion. Ours is a truly unique and special organisation, hugely diverse in background and outlook. But there is one thing which can unite us all: a belief that economic progress and political progress can go hand in hand. That is the vision the Commonwealth offers the world: let us be true to it again.

The writer is British Prime Minister.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Playing T20 series

Playing just one or two T20 international matches does not bring out the best in any team. Since T20 cricket is highly popular, I believe at least 3-5 matches should be played. This would also increase the importance of T20 cricket.

Net practice does not enable a batsman to see where he has hit the ball. There is also no fear of getting out. In order to improve one's batting ability a batsman must bat in a field with proper field settings so that he can actually practice hitting the ball in the gaps. He must also learn how to run fast between wickets instead of relying just on boundaries.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali
Dhaka

Tools of violence in governance

Peaceful hartal is a democratic right, especially in developing or flawed democracies as in the case of Bangladesh, but no one in good conscience can agree that enforcing hartals through violence is a democratic right. The pre-hartal violence that has been inflicted on the country recently can definitely be considered criminal offence and need to be dealt with accordingly. What is more frightening is the widespread use of bombs in the arsenal of picketers



in enforcing hartals. Pictures of those hurling bombs at buses and other vehicles suggest that they are enjoying their work.

In the fifties, we participated in political processions with hand bands and leaflets. Police killing of four students led to the fall of the then East Pakistan government and subsequent routing of Muslim League in 1954 election. Almost 60 years later, the same political processions have become so violent, so destructive. Many of our generations have already left this world and those of us remaining will leave soon. We appeal to our younger compatriots to beware of violence and especially tools of violence in political governance.

Dr. A. T. Rafiqur Rahman
Retired Professor and United Nations Officer

Break the vicious circle in politics

Political parties are supposed to serve the people and the country. Ever since democracy got restored in 1991, the political parties have been hatching different kinds of conspiracies against each other, making the general people suffer and ruining the economy in the end. They have always competed for securing their own stranglehold on the country. But it is high time that political parties worked together to help the nation move forward. Both the ruling party and the opposition should come forward to break the present stalemate and reach a consensus as soon as possible for the country's sake.

Samiul Raijul
Bangladesh University of Textiles, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "PM invites new controversy," published on November 12, 2013

Shahin Huq

It seems that Sheikh Hasina is the owner of Bangladesh and she can make and unmake ministers.

Abul Kashem

Amidst such widespread repercussions and criticism, AL leaders, with undated resignation letters, are in their habitual disguise to contemplate explaining constitutional obligations in their 'own way' in a futile effort to fool the public once again.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Another example of double standard by politicians in Bangladesh.

Mohammed Ismail

This is a new drama by the government. Everybody should reject these politicians.

Ash C.

The whole country appears to have turned into a factory of uninterrupted production of controversies!

Aasfisarwar

Why bother? Constitution is one thing, the provision is another and most importantly the power of interpretation is totally different. Who knows the constitution better than our PM? No one!! So forget about it.

Molla A. Latif

A resignation letter or any official letter needs a date and signature of the person writing it for its validation. A resignation does not come into effect until it is accepted by the competent authority and till then the person is in the job.

Spiderman

Resignation letter without date and signature? Was it a handwriting competition? Why are these so important post holders sending letters without date and signature? What is the value of these letters?

SM

Well done, Sadat!