

**The Daily Star**  
FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI  
DHAKA THURSDAY NOVEMBER 21, 2013

**Khaleda's initiative**  
*President's moral authority can help resolve crisis*

THE opposition leader and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia's seeking the president's mediation to initiate a dialogue at the general secretary level of the opposition and the ruling parties to resolve existing political impasse is admittedly a step in the right direction. In this hour of need, the president as the nation's guardian would do well to exercise his moral influence to bring the two parties at the talking table to settle the crisis created over the nature of the poll-time government.

We welcome the opposition leader's taking up the issue with the head of the state for his good offices. But she could have made this move even earlier to avoid hartal and other agitation programmes to press home her demands.

That is because time is now the most precious asset to resolve the task at hand. At this point, she should also join parliament to reinforce her call for dialogue.

The ruling party should not fail to notice the opposition's overture to the president and its keenness to resolve the crisis amicably. It should now come forward to meet the crisis head-on rather than bury its head in the sand.

The fact remains, though, that being in the government, the onus actually lies on the ruling party to take a lead role in reaching a consensus with the opposition on polls-time government.

Meanwhile, nation looks forward to the president's exalted office to intercede as a facilitator to help address the present crisis over holding the next general election in a peaceful and inclusive manner.

**Children drawn into demonstrations**  
*Political parties must shun the practice*

THE latest political crisis rammed home for us certain new realities. That political parties were wilfully employing children in street agitations is a disturbing development. Any law enforcer will hesitate in using riot control equipment on a congregation with children at the forefront. This new phenomenon goes to show precisely how depraved our politics has become. Yet, that is precisely what has happened over the last few weeks of hartal called by the 18-party alliance. And what is alarming to see is that many have sustained injury, some fatal, during these incidences. It is little wonder that Unicef has voiced its concerns over the condoning of such irresponsible acts by mainstream political parties.

The use of children in violent demonstrations not only endangers their lives but weans them away from what is truly important, i.e. education. By embroiling our children in violent politics, we destroy whatever chance they have at building their character and a life that is not steeped in abject poverty. Children above all need to be shielded from such unscrupulous elements who, under the guise of politics, seek to build the next generation of delinquents by trading away books for lethal projectiles and weapons. There are no words to condemn what has now apparently become a routine matter indulged in by certain political forces that will stoop so low as to use children as human shields during demonstra-

**Let us have a poll time presidential government**

ABDUL MATIN

THE 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the constitution, abolishing the caretaker government system, and the refusal by the main opposition, an 18-party alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), not to take part in any election under any political government have created a serious crisis. Efforts to find a solution through dialogues between the two alliances failed to bear fruit. Subsequent confrontational politics cost the country dearly in terms of human lives and also economically.

The AL invited the opposition to join an all-party poll-time government to oversee the election. The BNP declined and insisted on forming a neutral caretaker government. The government, determined not to form any government with unelected people, has already formed a so-called all-party government. As a last effort, the opposition met the president to find a solution. Under the constitution, the president acts on the advice of the prime minister and not the vice-versa. So, the president has very little power to act.

How to find a solution acceptable to both the parties? There are several important issues to be considered. First, the government must consist of elected representatives as per our constitution. Second, it must be headed by a person acceptable to both the alliances. Third, the leader of the opposition has categorically stated that they would not take part in any election if it is headed by the present prime minister. Fourth, the prime minister recently stated that she wants "peace and development for the people, not the premiership." Fifth, both the government and the opposition must deviate from their rigid stands if they sincerely want a peaceful solution.

Under the circumstances, there is one face-saving solution that meets the above mentioned criteria. It is a presidential-type poll time government with 10 to 20 ministers from the members of the parliament belonging to the major political parties. The ministers will be selected by either the president or their respective leaders. The government will only oversee the election and hand over power to the leader of the majority party soon after the election. Since the parliament has not been dissolved, it is possible to amend the constitution accordingly. The amendment will provide that if there is any issue on which the ministry fails to come to an agreement, the matter will be decided by the president and his decision will be final. The parliament will be dissolved soon after the amendment.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

**STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING**



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

TO term the recent political developments -- the resignation farce, induction of new ministers and the Ershad antics -- as bizarre, would be an understatement. Politics has been tarnished by the admixture of both lust and aspiration for power on one hand and the effort to hang on to it at all cost on the other. And that includes the misrepresentation of the Constitution at best and its violation at worst.

We now have eight 'constitutional ministers' and 58 'unconstitutional' ones. The wording of Article 58 (1) (a) allow of only one interpretation although the PM and her ministers would want us to believe their explanation of Article 58 (1)



*If anything, the telephone saga and the formation of the new cabinet have deepened the animus. The level playing field that the opposition is demanding has become more uneven.*

(a) which, for anyone who is able to read would find difficult to concur with. There can be no other reason for a minister to place his or her resignation letter to the PM except for the purpose of giving up his or her post, and for that to be transmitted to the president. The PM, regrettably, has not seen it fit to fulfill the implied obligation of the Constitution, to pass it on to the president, on receipt of the same. So much for the PM's oft-proclaimed commitment not to deviate an inch from the Constitution.

We have seen the Constitution coming under the scalpel of the military dictators. But now even democratically elected persons can outdo them in defiling the supreme law of the land. No law can be devoid of its moral content. And likewise, no action of the government, legal that may be, can be devoid of its moral authority. If that happens then what we have is what Fared Zakaria describes as illiberal democracy, an autocratic dispensation under the gloss of democratic government.

And what is even more regrettable is that those whom we considered the voice of sanity, the conscience of the nation, have not been able to shed their party identity while explicating on the most talked about article of the Constitution. What we seem to forget is that the Constitution is the guiding doctrine that helps in the governance of the country. The Constitution is for the nation and not for any particular party. But that document has been misrepresented, all in the name of the people and in the name of upholding democracy. The issue now lies with the highest court of the land. And we are waiting eagerly for the verdict of the writ petition.

It would appear that the PM's latest move is yet another step towards keeping the BNP out of the elections. The new cabinet is old wine in old bottle, and the reinvigorated association of Ershad's JP with the government's ploy renders valid the speculation that he was to become the domesticated loyal opposition should the AL strategy to keep BNP out of the polls succeed.

The less said about Ershad the better. The two cartoons that appeared in this paper and the daily *Prothom Alo* on Monday amply express the character of the man and his present political status. While nobody can grudge a leader's stand on a political issue, but to blow hot and cold in the same breath to deliberately mislead the public lend a bad name even to politics. Who knows, such a disingenuous political flip-flop might soon come to be known as 'doing an Ershad.'

Beside the legal and constitutional issue, the more fundamental question is will the PM's actions help resolve the political impasse that we are facing? By no definition can the new cabinet be called an all-party government. While the PM can do anything with her cabinet we

wonder whether the Constitution (the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment) allows for a pre-poll government in the first place. And is there a need for one? And who will she leave out from her old cabinet?

Nothing that the government has done since the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment has helped to remove the distrust between the AL and BNP. If anything, the telephone saga and the formation of the new cabinet have deepened the animus. The level playing field that the opposition is demanding has become more uneven. A part of the 90-day period that was to be the domain of the EC has been ceded to the government, where the ruling party is freely conducting polls campaign. And the most important institution at this point in time, the EC, has done its best to cause public confidence in it to erode irredeemably. Can one expect free and fair polls under these circumstances?

The writer is Editor, Op-ed & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

**My best investment**

**VISIONARY VOICES**



DATU SRI DR. TAHIR

WHEN I was boy, I dreamed of becoming a doctor. I was born in Indonesia in the early

1950's, a time when most families in my country lacked access to health care. As a result, thousands of children died each year from preventable diseases such as measles, polio, and malaria. But revolutionary breakthroughs in medicine were starting to turn the tide on these killers, and Indonesia's doctors were celebrated as heroes. I wanted to be a hero, too, so I studied hard and enrolled in medical school.

My plans changed, however, when my father got ill. He was a hard-working man who made pedicabs in Surabaya, and I left university when he could no longer manage the family business. Ultimately, I became a successful entrepreneur and established a bank that is now one of Southeast Asia's largest financial institutions.

Looking back, I have no regrets. Indeed, I know that I have been incredibly blessed. Millions of children in developing countries in Africa, Asia, and the Western Pacific are forced into extreme poverty when a parent gets sick or dies. And millions more suffer from diseases that prevent them from leading a healthy and productive life. That is why I have decided to invest \$65 million in the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. When the Global Fund was created a decade ago, HIV incidence was rising around the world, and the drugs used to treat the virus were still prohibitively expensive. Malaria was killing one million people each year, with mortality concentrated among pregnant women and children under the age of five. More than two million people were dying from tuberculosis, because they lacked access to low-cost, first-line treatment.

Since then, the Global Fund has played a key role in reversing the course of these epidemics. Worldwide, HIV incidence has fallen by one-third, and the cost of HIV drugs has dropped more than 99%. The number of African households that sleep under insecticide-treated bed nets has risen from 3% to 53%, and malaria deaths have fallen by one-third. And TB mortality has dropped more than 40%. Altogether, support provided by the Global Fund has saved more than nine million lives -- a remarkable achievement.

But the impact of the Global Fund extends far beyond lives saved. When an HIV-positive mother receives antenatal treatment so that her child can be born HIV-free, we change the future. When a child is spared cerebral malaria and the lifelong mental disabilities that it can cause, new possibilities are created. The world becomes a better place when we commit to giving our children a better start.

The Global Fund also plays a critical role in strengthening health care in developing countries. Its resources have helped to train new generations of doctors, nurses, and

technicians, while dramatically improving the overall quality of maternal and child health. These investments are helping countries take direct ownership of the fight against infectious disease, ultimately reducing their dependence on foreign aid.

For example, support from the Global Fund has helped Indonesia, which has the world's fourth-highest TB burden, develop an efficient and effective national TB-control program. As a result, more than one million active cases have been successfully treated, while the incidence of the disease -- which has cost Indonesia's economy millions of dollars in lost productivity -- has been driven down. With technical support like this, Indonesia's government is creating an affordable and sustainable national health-care system that will be fully financed with domestic resources by 2019.

I believe that the Global Fund is one of the smartest investments that we can make -- as many governments



*The Global Fund also plays a critical role in strengthening health care in developing countries. Its resources have helped to train new generations of doctors, nurses, and technicians, while dramatically improving the overall quality of maternal and child health.*

have understood from the outset. The United States has been the Global Fund's largest supporter, but many others have done their part. For example, Australia has provided US\$410 million to the Global Fund since 2002, an amount that has enabled nearly 200,000 people to receive lifesaving HIV treatment, 80,000 people to receive TB treatment, seven million people to be cured of malaria, and 14 million bed nets to be delivered to families in need.

The Global Fund has brightened the futures of hundreds of thousands of children across Africa and Asia -- a heroic achievement that should make donor countries' citizens proud. I hope that others with the means to support its work will invest so wisely.

The writer is Chair of the Mayapada Group and Bank Mayapada. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2013. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

**Tagore a feminist!**

Recently one of my colleagues gave me a copy of Rabintra Journal wherein a research paper of her has been published where she said that Rabintra Tagore is a 'Feminist'. It was for the first time I went through the journal which was published by the Bishwa Kobi Krishi Prajukti Institute, Naogaon. My colleague concluded her research paper saying that Tagore may be referred to as a 'feminist' because he was vocal about women's condition and his literary works dealt with the subject of gender suppression with uncommon sense of respect for woman and that in his famous novel 'Ghore Baire', Tagore observed ".....for we women are not only the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself".

Professor M Zahidul Haque  
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture  
SAU, Dhaka

**Simple villagers hold out hope**

Someone once told me that what makes Bangladesh so special is the simple poverty-stricken people who live in its rural areas. These are the people who get satisfied and joyous over little things and even smile in the harshest of times. These people are always hopeful that something good is going to come out of all the bloody battles and the disasters that perpetually torment them. If they can do so, why can't we -- being the so-called 'educated' people of the nation -- negotiate for something and work together for the country's development, instead of engaging in violence?

Samiha Matin  
Uttara, Dhaka

**Ban hartal through constitution**

Thanks to TDS for raising voice against inhuman hartals which are not only paralysing the country but also killing brutally innocent people including children like Monir. Ours is the only country in the world which can be shut for 84 hours at a stretch! With this political culture, do you think we will achieve MDGs? A single hartal costs us some invaluable lives. Vandals and torching hundreds of vehicles and destruction of public property are also common. There is only one way out to get rid of this destructive political weapon, which is to ban it forever using the constitution. Will the PM help ban hartal through introducing necessary provision in the constitution so that people can live in peace?

Khandaker Zia Hasan  
Special Correspondent  
Weekly Jogajog Canada

**Comments on news report, "4-party polls-time cabinet today," published on November 18, 2013**

**Ash C.**  
Seven new members in the interim cabinet of 14-Party alliance from JP alone! Ershad must have been promised a lot more than what he got during and after the last election.

And obviously, this 'arrangement' if successful -- even for a few months with a one sided election -- may make him leader of the opposition that he had been planning for long!

**Shahin Huq**  
Will Menon ever dare to talk about socialism and democracy? I hope not.

**Ash C.**  
Once upon a time I used to admire Menon. But now I feel ashamed having done so.

**Saleh Tanveer**  
Seems like Sheikh Hasina and her blind followers are deeply committed to taking the nation to a deep plunge into darkness and still hoping to get away with it.

**Mahboob Hossain**  
Those who have won in the competition of sycophancy have been selected ministers of the cabinet, the main objective of which is vote rigging. Their name will remain as "vote thieves" in the history of Bangladesh.

**God propose man dispose**  
Awami League has proved the phrase "Man proposes, God disposes" wrong. For them it is "Hasina proposes and Hasina disposes".

**Spiderman**  
With the formation of this cabinet, the countdown of a new form of dictatorship began.

**MistiKotha**  
Let us go for NON STOP strike and from now on police as well as judiciary must disregard orders from these criminal ministers led by Hasina as this illegal government is rejected by 90% of the people.

**Molla A. Latif**  
BNP can depute ten members to counter anything. But Mirza Fakhrul is not an MP and Khaleda Zia does not have any faith in anyone else except him.

**Deepelejai**  
Sheikh Hasina played well. Ershad has a good reputation as a player from the past. Both of them will take Bangladesh politics to a new height, no doubt.

**Shafiqur Rahman**  
I disagree with the reporter that "a one-sided election without the BNP and its allies now looks more of a reality..." as members of different parties have been chosen for the all-party government.

**Rick**  
I have been following Bangladesh politics in recent years and it seems that Tofail Ahmed is a sincere and educated leader. It will be interesting to see what is in store for Bangladesh in the upcoming elections.