# How valid will the next AL government be?

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

HANKS to the AL brand of democracy, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's firm determination to go ahead with the national election at any cost, as many as 154 candidates have already been elected unopposed in the 300 member Jatiya Sangsad election slated to be held on January 5, 2014. All these candidates belong to the ruling political alliance and the so-called multiparty poll time government.

In an election boycotted by the BNP-led 18 party opposition alliance and many other parties, Sheikh Hasina attributed the windfall success of the smaller parties of the poll-time government to her magnanimity and the spirit of "compromise" she had demonstrated in that she had asked her party candidates to withdraw their nomination papers from these constituencies. She said that she would have given a "walkover" to the BNP in some constituencies if the



party had joined the poll time government. She added that she would have done this for the sake of the interest of the country, the constitution and the ideals of democracy.

But what Sheikh Hasina forgot to say, or was unmoved about, was that in this charade of an election, half the voters have been denied their democratic right to vote and elect their representatives to the Jatiya Sangsad,

and the remaining half have been left with no choice but to vote for one of the two or three candidates left in the fray in a constituency. Besides, in most of the remaining constituencies, AL candidates are either pitted against rebel AL candidates or weaker candidates of the smaller coalition partners. What a mockery of patriotism, love for democracy and adherence to constitution in a land where,

in 1971, people made the supreme sacrifice by laying down their lives in millions for the ideals of democracy and freedom!

Does Sheikh Hasina want us and the rest of the world to believe that after the drama of Ershad being forcibly picked up at midnight by the state intelligence agencies and kept in confinement in a military hospital that the JP led by Ershad is a willing partner of the so-called multi-party poll time government? Do we not know why Ershad has been sidelined to pave the way for Raushan Ershad to emerge and lead the JP in the election?

Clearly, Sheikh Hasina is about to reach a milestone as the AL is well set to emerge victorious with two-thirds majority in the 10th Jatiya Sangsad in a virtually one-party election. Notably AL had won two-thirds majority in election twice before -once in 1973 and then in 2008. But never ever was the electoral victory of the AL, which led the Liberation War in 1971, called in question as it is being done now.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been following the proverbial stick and carrot policy in dealing with the opposition right from the day she came to power. The message is clear: Be at one with us or be prepared to be left out in the cold. Obviously, she does not like any dissenting voice,

whether it is on the floor of the Jatiya Sangsad or outside the Sangsad. As soon as she formed the AL government in 1996, she called it the government of national consensus and asked all the opposition parties including BNP to join her government. BNP had rejected the offer outright. But the Jatiya Party of Hussain Muhammad Ershad, the fallen dictator who was then in jail, quickly gave in, and Anwar Hossain Manju joined the cabinet as minister of communication. This time around, in 2008, Sheikh

Hasina allowed a minister each from the Jatiya Party of Ershad, the Jaiya Samajtantrik Dal of Inu and the Samyabadi Dal in the AL-led grand alliance government. From day one of her second stint in power, Sheikh Hasina and her minions in the alliance were on the offensive as they launched a virulent character assassination campaign on Gen Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia, forcing the latter to boycott the Jatiya Sangsad session.

Never was there any conciliatory move by the government to bring BNP back to the Jatiya Sangsad. When the BNP-led opposition parties vehemently opposed the cancellation of the non-party caretaker government (CTG) system through the 15th Amendment to the Constitution by disregarding the suggestion of the

apex court to continue with the CTG system for another two terms, and made it clear that they would neither participate in the next Jatiya Sangsad election nor would they allow the one-sided election to be held, Sheikh Hasina suddenly came out with stick in one hand and carrot in the other. She began to put senior BNP lead-

ers in jail on trumped up charges in a bid to put pressure on BNP to join the poll-time government and participate in the election. At the same time, she offered Khaleda Zia as many ministers and any ministry for the BNP-led opposition, except of course for the portfolio of the prime minister which has to be held by Sheikh Hasina. Khaleda Zia categorically rejected the offer. Could she decide to do otherwise and commit political hara kiri for her party and her political allies knowing full well that the election under this government headed by Sheikh Hasina could never be free and fair, and that a massive AL victory is a foregone conclusion?

As of now, the nation is clearly heading for a one-party election and perhaps an AL government without moral validity is in the offing. The multi-million dollar question is: How long will this government last and at what cost?

The writer is a former Military Secretary to the

## BANGLADESH I am sorry

FAHEEM YOUNUS

was born in Pakistan, a few months before the war which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971. And it was only after I moved to the US that I recognised the magnitude of human rights abuses the Pakistani army committed against their Bengali "brothers and sisters in faith." So now, whenever I come across a Bengali in the West, I offer her/him a sincere apology. The last time it happened was in Canada.

It was past midnight and we were having a blast at my sister's -- who had recently moved to Canada from Pakistan -- when my niece's friend bailed out on colour printing a class assignment. We found a 24-hour open Fed-Ex store a few miles away. I rode in a car full of cousins and within 30-minutes we were collecting colour prints from a Bengali looking spirited young man at the Fed-Ex store. (I know -- Pakistanis, Indians, Bengalis and Sri Lankans are a jumbled up mass of nearly 2 billion people to an average American eye but we immigrants have our tricks.) So I politely asked: "Are you from Bangladesh?" "Yes," he replied. "I am from Pakistan and I am very sorry for what my country did to your people in 1971," I said it without a warning. Immediately, his face turned red and his eyes welled up. "You don't have to be sorry sir, you didn't do anything wrong." "But it was done by my country, my people, in my name. Granted, I was in diapers back then but that's precisely why I am apologising to you now," I insisted.

Before you label me a self-hating Pakistani, let's agree on what I never read in my Pakistan Studies textbooks.

I repeat: I am sorry my brothers and sisters. My politicians and generals played with you.

The roots of this apology lie many time zones away from a Canadian Fed-Ex store, when in 1947 East and West Pakistan gained independence as a united nation. However, despite having a larger population, East Pakistanis were significantly under-represented

in civil, military and political arenas. Funds spent on East Pakistan consistently remained under 50% as a percentage of West Pakistan's spending and the representation of Bengali officers in the Pakistani army was a mere 5% until 1965. I never read this in any Pakistani textbook.

With this backdrop, the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won an absolute majority in the joint elections held on December 7, 1970. But all of its seats were in East Pakistan -- geographically separated by over a 1,000 miles from West Pakistan where Pakistan People's Party led by Z.A. Bhutto won a majority. While a constitutional consensus was being developed, West Pakistan started a military crackdown against East Pakistani dissenters on March 25, 1971. As a result, the idea of an independent Bangladesh was released; Mujibur Rahman was arrested.

If my textbooks had taught me the real history and if the conflict had ended there, I would have avoided this apology. But that's not what happened. Like in every mass conflict, the exact numbers are debatable. But what is not debatable is that millions of Bengalis were displaced from their homes, hundreds of thousands of Bengali civilians were murdered, thousands of Bengali women were raped, and hundreds of Bengali intellectuals were sent to mass graves. What is not debatable is that whenever I have had a candid conversation with a Bengali in the West, they have told me about a close relative who was killed or raped in 1971. What is not debatable is how my friend at the Fed-Ex store sobbed, telling me about the murder of his uncle and the rape of his aunt at the hands of Pakistani army and their religious proxies.

That is why I repeat: I am sorry my brothers and sisters. My politicians and generals played with you.

This apology comes easy to me because I get it. Being Ahmadis, we know what state sponsored marginalisation feels like. In Pakistan, we too had our families butchered; our intelligentsia slaughtered. Our losses might have been on a smaller magnitude; comparisons of two people's misery are always risky and debatable but what is not debatable is that for Ahmadis the only choice is to migrate to foreign lands and live a transplanted life -- like my sister's family, who grudgingly escaped Pakistan due to

unbearable hate and persecution. But others won't go down without a fight.

And that's why I beseech Pakistanis in general, and the state in specific, to offer an apology to Bengalis. If my countrymen allow their emotion to cool off, they will recognise that I am making a pro-Pakistan argument. Believe me: Pakistanis are the beneficiaries. Whether it's the political plight of Baluchis and Sindhis or the religious fight of Shias and Christians, a new threat of Pakistan's dismemberment looms large. An apology is required for course correction or I fear the lopsided justice of Pakistan's ruling class -- which dismembered the nation four decades ago -- might dismantle it this time.

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### The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami

### Transforming shared vulnerabilities

NOELEEN HEYZER & SIHASAK PHUANGKETKEOW

N December 26, 2004, the world witnessed a devastating natural disaster with an impact that still reverberates nine years later. One of the strongest earthquakes ever recorded struck off the west coast of Aceh, Indonesia, triggering massive tsunami waves that cut a path of destruction across borders. The lack of tsunami warning systems in the region left coastal communities unprepared for the enormity of the devastation as cascading walls of water swallowed up lives and livelihoods.

The Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami killed over 230,000 people, and up to five million people lost their homes or access to food and water. As the extent of the damage became clear, the world responded with unprecedented generosity and resolve. The Thai government played an important leadership role in the aftermath of the disaster by hosting the Ministerial Meeting on Regional Cooperation on Tsunami Early Warning Arrangements in Phuket in January 2005. At the meeting, Thailand pledged a donation of \$10 million as seed money to establish a voluntary trust fund to strengthen national and regional capacities in tsunami early warnings. Partnering with Escap, Thailand established the Tsunami Regional Trust Fund to catalyse much needed regional cooperation in preparing for such disasters. It was an expression of the strong regional solidarity felt by the people of Thailand, and placed the country at the forefront of global efforts to reduce disaster risk. Later, Sweden, Turkey, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Nepal joined as donors to the Trust Fund. This multilateral approach of countries coming together in times of great need was an excellent example of regional cooperation in action.

Nine years later, the Trust Fund, renamed as the Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness, continues to serve as a catalyst for strengthened early warning systems at the regional, national and local levels in Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian countries. Building coastal community resilience and strengthening last mile early warning systems have been a hallmark of the Trust Fund as seen in Krabi, Thailand, where over 2,000 local community members, civil society representatives and officials were trained on disaster risk management. In West Sumatra, Indonesia, the Trust Fund supported over 40 villages to develop their own local disaster management plans. Today, early warning systems in the region are more integrated and robust, and communities

persist and significant additional investments are still needed. The pioneering Regional Integrated

are better prepared, even though gaps

Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES) that was established by the Trust Fund provides innovative early warning tools and services that reduce risks and save lives. RIMES works with governments and partners to build forecasting capacity and make warning information more timely and accurate, so that the communities at risk are warned as early and as precisely as possible of potential disasters. The Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System provides timely and detailed information on potential tsunamis to countries across Asia and the Pacific, and will save an estimated 1,000 lives per year over the next 100 years. These types of targeted investments though the Trust Fund, with countries taking clear ownership and operational responsibilities, creates a sense of regional solidarity in the face of increasing natural disasters. Asia-Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world, and the region must confront these challenges together, transforming shared vulnerability into better preparedness.

In 2008, when Myanmar was struck by Cyclone Nargis, the region once more rose to the challenge. In the immediate aftermath, the United Nations and Thailand worked closely with Asean and its regional frameworks to support the government in responding to the needs of 2.4 million affected people. Escap mobilised its multi-disciplinary expertise to bridge the gap between relief, recovery and development efforts and activated the Trust Fund to strengthen multihazard early warning, working closely with the government and other partners. This process reached an important milestone earlier this month, with Escap transferring ownership of the Sittwe seismic station to the government of Myanmar. The Sittwe station plays a crucial role in regional and national tsunami warning systems, and has led to reduced risk along the coast of Myanmar and neighbouring countries.

In Asia and the Pacific, we know that natural disasters can strike at anytime, anywhere, and with little warning. Just two years ago, Thailand experienced the worst floods in more than 50 years, which left thousands homeless and temporarily shuttered hundreds of businesses. In the midst of the disaster, Escap and Thailand worked closely with other countries and UN partners to obtain near real-time satellite imagery, which helped manage the impact of the floods. Once again, regional solidarity and multilateral cooperation proved effective in supporting the national

response. It is, therefore, very timely that Thailand and member countries sponsored a resolution adopted at the 69th Escap Commission this year on "Enhancing regional cooperation for building resilience to disasters in Asia and the Pacific," with a view to enhancing regional cooperation and strengthening the Trust Fund through financial contributions and technical cooperation. Together, Thailand and the region emerged stronger and better prepared for future floods and other disasters, also a testament to the resilience of the peoples of Asia and the Pacific.

Building on this experience, in May 2013 countries in the region adopted a historic five-year plan of action for the use of space technologies to enhance disaster risk reduction. As part of the plan, it is now standard practice for space-faring countries in the region to provide near real-time satellite imagery to affected countries in the immediate aftermath of disasters. This powerful regional mechanism, coordinated by Escap, assists relief and recovery efforts to the most vulnerable communities among us, most recently in Tacloban following Typhoon Haiyan.

And just last month, the region took another crucial step by putting in place a monitoring and warning mechanism for drought, a silent killer in Asia and the Pacific. Over the past few decades, droughts have affected more than 1.3 billion people and caused economic damage of over \$53 billion in the region. This groundbreaking space application mechanism will enhance the capacity of countries to issue early warnings before the drought is visible to the human eye, and is yet another example of Asia-Pacific countries working together, to be better prepared.

Building resilience to natural disasters is one of the most pressing contemporary challenges facing our region. We must be prepared for future calamities caused by the impact of climate change, be they another large tsunami, another typhoon or another drought. When that day comes, we must ensure that the region is fully equipped with effective monitoring and early warning systems, so that vulnerable people are brought to safety and losses are minimised. More needs to be done, and done now, to better prepare the region to face such disasters. Since the 2004 Tsunami, Thailand and its partners have set a powerful example by showing how regional solidarity combined with multilateral cooperation can be effective.

Dr. Noeleen Heyzer is Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Mr. Sihasak Phuangketkeow is Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

If fifty million people say a foolish thing, it's still a foolish thing.

39 Dueling weapon

40 Thanksgiving

event 41 Ship of

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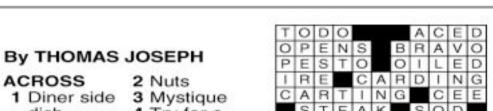
42 Catches

DOWN

43 Edinburgh native

1 Marquee

--Bertrand Russell



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> Yesterday's Cryptoquote: A LIFE SPENT MAKING MISTAKES IS NOT ONLY MORE HONORABLE, BUT MORE USEFUL THAN A LIFE SPENT DOING NOTHING.

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In

this sample, A is used for the three

L's, X for the two O's etc. Single

letters, apostrophes, the length and

formation of the words are all

hints. Each day the code letters are

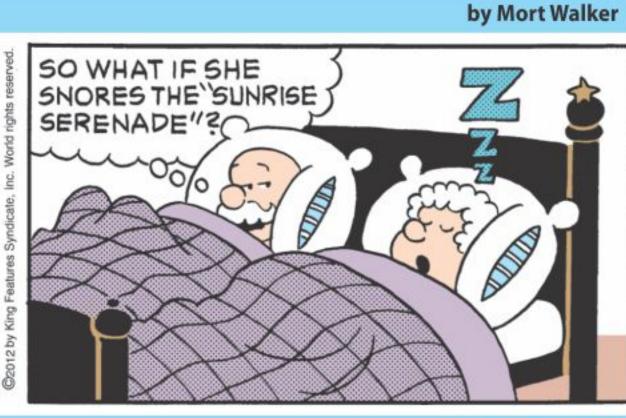
different.

CRYPTOQUOTE

-- GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

**BEETLE BAILEY** 





**HENRY** 

by Don Tranchte

