

Pragmatism is the shining path to take

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

By keeping a disgruntled BNP out of the equations, AL cannot be a gainer at the end of the day. It has cobbled up a government with an unpredictable Jatiya Party and a loyal opposition which may not stop short at anything to demand its pound of flesh.

THE joke is about a person getting lost whilst driving in Ireland. He asks a passerby for direction; the latter gives a reply, which far from being pedestrian, is spot-on. Says the passerby: "If I were you, I wouldn't be starting from here"! The joke is, he is already there!

Thus one could say that those who want to go back to pre-January 5 election days and say: "We should have, could have or ought to have done this or that," should realise that the country is already here! So, anything to put things right can only happen from here!

From capital after capital congratulatory messages greeting Sheikh Hasina on her reelection as prime minister of Bangladesh are pouring in at regular intervals. These may be straining the credulity of people wondering how a government thrown up by default could possibly be receiving such a cheery flow of missives. But it is a normal diplomatic practice to felicitate an emerging government that another government gets to deal with, no value judgment coming in-between.

Such governments even didn't adopt a go-slow policy like 30 envoys representing a whole gamut of countries in Bangladesh did making a point or two to the AL government. They voiced their 'disappointments' over the January 5 election being unreflective of an expression of popular will just as 'hartal and oborodh' inflicting terrorism and violence particularly on the vulnerable segments of society are not the ways to democracy.'

Let's not delude ourselves into believing that there is any contradiction between the congratulations to the post-election government and the critiquing of two parties for their

respective conflictive posturing on the question of coming to terms on pre-election modalities. Suffice it to say though that the prompt recognition by India of the new government followed by that of the Chinese government substantially bolstered the new Awami League government. Advani's phone call to Sheikh Hasina rang with an implicit message for the protection of minorities.

The USA and the European community apparently leveraging for a mitigating snap election are going to issue a strongly-worded resolution to whom it may concern urging an end to human rights violations and a quick dialogue between AL and BNP to make an inclusive, participatory and credible election happen at the soonest.

What chips away at our sense of dignity as a sovereign independent country is the systematic messing up of our indigenous capacity to sort out our own differences without venting out our spleens all over. The institutions which could enable us to do so have lost their ability to even use their remit with any amount of independence and integrity that on paper were vested in them. That's how we have courted external influence, good offices, and even admonition -- thanks to our love for outsourcing in matters strictly our own.

Now that the BNP has settled down to withdrawing brisling programmes as hartal and oborodh, the government should see it fit to set the imprisoned opposition leaders free and allow them to function as major party functionaries. To keep them in jail could betray an impression that AL was acting not from a position of strength but of weakness.

So long these two millstones have hung around the necks of BNP and AL keeping the atmosphere totally congenial for talks. BNP has opted for peaceful means, the AL should reciprocate by restoring BNP to a functioning mode. Whilst some duels will be fought anyway, the intensity will be within tolerable limits to allow an engaging atmosphere for a productive dialogue.

There is, however, another albatross BNP needs to rid itself of along with not pandering to its extended Islamist constituency. The AL chief has made it clear that BNP would be welcome to talks only after it has delinked itself from Jamaat-e-Islami. Khaleda Zia in a party conference said that if she disassociated herself from Jamaat, AL would take it into its fold. Such an apprehension has no leg to stand on in view of the rapidly advancing war crimes trials. Then there is the question of an eagle-eyed vigil of the Jagoron Mancho over the designs of Jamaat and Hefajat-e-Islam. If anything, the polarisation between pro- and anti-Liberation forces has only sharpened.

So, the government has its job cut out. It maintains peace to carry out its unfinished development agenda in a climate of security and normality. By keeping a disgruntled BNP out of the equations, AL cannot be a gainer at the end of the day. It has cobbled up a government with an unpredictable Jatiya Party and a loyal opposition which may not stop short at anything to demand its pound of flesh. Keeping it in good humour may be a bit of a distraction with a government having so much on its hands.

Thus, instead of senior ministers arrogating to themselves a five-year stay in power they should give out a signal to the BNP-led alliance that they are headed for a snap election on a mutually agreed formula to transit to the eleventh parliament.

No Thief of Baghdad with his hands extended to the treasure is to be seen in the new cabinet. After all, this time the electoral bills footed were low -- thanks to a fractionated election without contest. There shouldn't be any pressure 'for the takings to meet any deficit.'

Bear in mind that without corruption we will have added two more percent points to our annual GDP growth.

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De-mock-racy

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

IT'S a demo-crazy! It's a de-mock-racy!! It's a...oh, who cares!!! After a fair and lovely election, the country is now bracing itself for non-stop non-hartal, non-oborodh, non-opposition and non-chalance -- all for the pleasures of us non-entities. Now, don't think oborodh is gone for good. There is the Law of Conservation of Oborodhs -- it cannot be created nor destroyed, but simply transferred from one place to another -- like Thailand.

There is also the Law of Conservation of Genders. That's one small step for (wo)man, one giant leap towards getting our very own version of the Spice Girls (well almost). Till we get the full package, let us be happy with Boney M by completing the fab four with the brand new Special Envoy to the Prime Minister. He is special indeed, gets everything he doesn't desire, thanks to the Law of Non-Conservation of Decisions.

So, he along with the whole cabinet, is sworn in. Millions watch the swearing in ceremony on TV, while swearing under their breaths.

As for the 10th Parliament, there are mild fireworks, celebrating the no-change in bosses. The Democrats and the Republicans in the US are separated by an aisle, while we now have the two major parties separated by an aisle. The Parliament may inspire a hit reality quiz show *Guess Who's Your Representative?* Speaking of which, Mong may be the favourite Bangladeshi Idol, but the Parliament may be a strong contender to becoming the Bangladeshi Idle.

Meanwhile, life struggles towards normalcy. Traffic is back to being a quagmire. I get a great cardio workout from biking around Dhaka city - the traffic gets my heart pounding. I am elated to see the ever familiar indifference of the CNG driver snubbing me off, "No, I said I will NOT go to Mirpur!" That's when I do miss the oborodh, where they would oblige, even plead, to take me to the promised area, knowing that the cops are busy chasing arsonists.

Another sign of 'normalcy' -- continued attacks on Hindus. Each party blames the other for the attacks. If the attacks were indeed a masquerading exercise, then the January 29th hartal must surely be to protest against these heinous acts.

Politics and religion. We have simply lost the credibility to live for or speak of pluralism and community. We have deeply fractured our society and built walls that separate us that not only are hurting ourselves but also our future generations. Of course we couldn't care less for the latter -- my eight year old has already forgotten her alphabets from practically no school for several months. And yet, I get a tuition bill for this period. Should I send the bill to the incumbent, the incumbent-opposition or the former-opposition?

Depressed? You're not alone. Even the weather is depressed -- cloudy, gloomy and cold. A sure reminder that we were once a British colony. I'm sure the powers-that-be have no worries about remaining snug in the frigid climes (pun intended), keeping their toes warm in this cold spell by putting their feet in their mouths.

But Bangladesh will chug along just fine. That is the beauty of an inefficient society -- always figuring out a way around hurdles. After all, we do have the cure for erectile dysfunction.

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's The Naveed Mahbub Show and the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

The US Senate and Bangladesh

SARWAR JAHAN CHOWDHURY

A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the critical need for political dialogue in Bangladesh, and for other purposes" was the title of the US Senate resolution passed on January 7 with regard to Bangladesh. On November 20, 2013, the US House (of Representatives) Sub-committee for Asia and Pacific Regional Foreign Affairs also had a hearing on Bangladesh, the title of which was "Bangladesh in Turmoil: A Nation on the Brink?" Bangladesh, therefore, had been in the radar of both the Houses of the US Congress in recent days, and perhaps expectedly so going by the precedence of US Congress being concerned about big political disturbances in relatively important or sensitive parts of the world.

The chambers of the Congress and their foreign affairs committees or sub-committees concerned are normally vigilant and active to a considerable extent about ongoing or potential disturbance in various parts of the world. Their concerns usually emanate both from liberal democratic ideological premise involving the well-being of the people of the affected places and also from direct or indirect US interest which they hold rational and justified. In plain words, the US keeps an eye on every corner of some significance on the earth.

The language of the resolution was moderate in comparison to the articulation of other resolutions passed with regard to many other troubled nations. The language was also carefully crafted, stressing on internal political dialogue in Bangladesh. It deplored violence and loss of lives as a result of the violence. The resolution commended poverty alleviation achieved over the recent years but maintained its reservation about the standard of war crimes trial. No clear censure or condemnation against the government or the



ruling alliance of Bangladesh was made.

Just to have a quick understanding of how US foreign policy and diplomacy work; functional level US foreign policy and diplomacy, including defining 'National Interest,' is the prerogative of the presidency, and the secretary of state executes presidential directives. The Senate holds the power to ratify treaties and consent to or reject senior diplomatic appointments proposed by the president. Declaration of war, military budget, etc., require approval of the whole Congress. Congress retains power to regulate trade and commerce with a foreign nation.

The US state organs related to foreign relations, in one way or other, have so far been careful in their dealing with the Bangladesh governments. Among them, the US government has relatively been more critical of the previous AL government. Its views have been expressed through routine

press conferences of the White house, through state department officials and, of course, through the US ambassador in Bangladesh. Yet, US diplomatic investment to ensure an apparent electoral democracy in Bangladesh, at the least, could not be termed as 'extensive.'

The existing US position with regards to Bangladesh has surprised many in Bangladesh who expected it would take tough action to ensure an ideal all-participating democracy through forcing the Bangladesh government to bring back the opposition into the political fold for an inclusive election. That hasn't happened. The US is a bit hesitant to be too tough with a secular political party in power. Although the Americans do not view the overplaying of the Islamist terror card by AL government without suspicion, they have been conservative about something they aren't sure of.

India factor is also significant, if not overpowering, in the western approach to the region as they consider that country as a major liberal democratic strategic partner in the region with commonality in their counter-terror requirements and also counter-balancing increasing geo-strategic influence of China in the crucial Indian Ocean. But India factor has its limit as well. While Americans are getting more and more convinced that retaining the sizable Islamist political forces like the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) within the democratic fold would keep them moderate, India decided to tacitly support the robust AL drive against the considerably well-organised JI, and AL's clinging on to power quite undemocratically at such a critical juncture in Bangladeshi history.

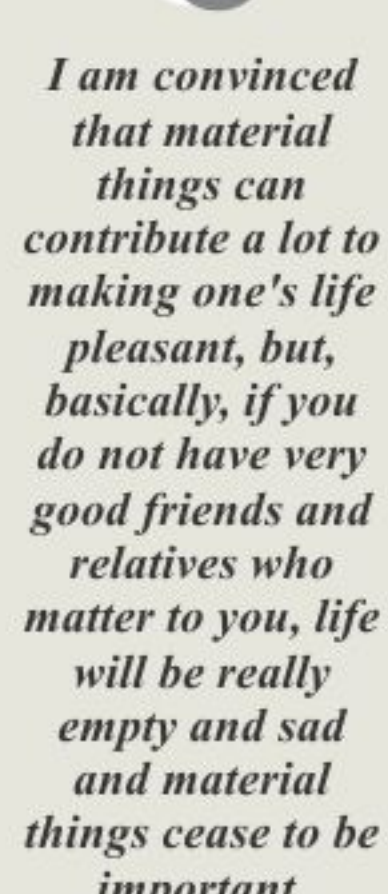
The India factor, alongside a few others, has allowed the AL to survive this round of the political game; but, this has perhaps bought them just some more time. The American activities, in terms of the increasingly critical tone and activism of the House and the Senate in matters relating to Bangladesh, seem to be a sign that some momentum might be building towards harsher measures against the incumbent government in Bangladesh. AL may bask in the glory of their victory in the political power play for the moment; but they better make use of this limited time they have gained.

The Houses of the US congress have the authority to dictate trade and commercial relations with foreign countries. The next resolution, if any, may not be filled with just soothing words. It would be wise for the incumbent government in Bangladesh to get to work quickly in order to achieve a comprehensive political solution with BNP, for misplaced complacency this time around may cost them and the nation dearly.

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QUOTABLE Quote



I am convinced that material things can contribute a lot to making one's life pleasant, but, basically, if you do not have very good friends and relatives who matter to you, life will be really empty and sad and material things cease to be important.

David Rockefeller

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

1 Propeller type
6 Plains grazer
11 Port-au-Prince setting
12 Draw out
13 Take, as advice
14 Emulate
15 Side-tracks
17 Failure
18 Brit's brew
19 Shrouds
22 Ocean between Eur. and Amer.
23 Blues singer Ma
24 Farm sights
25 "Settle down!"
27 Female rabbit
30 Chemical solvent
31 Clean Water Act org.
32 Seaman's answer
33 Trio of myth
35 Murdered
38 Avignon's river
39 Puzzle out
40 Alpine trill
41 Dawn
42 Watchful ones

DOWN

1 California mount
2 Sign of prestige
3 Ceremony
4 School near Windsor
5 Dark brew
6 Garden section
7 Lupino of films
8 Gooney treat
9 Take over
10 Calls for
16 Catching
20 Cover crop
21 Hosp. workers
24 Dickens nickname
25 Sri Lanka, formerly
26 "Paper Moon" co-stars
27 Crack, in a way
28 Starting bid
29 Studio stands
30 Low singer
34 Ship-to-ship call
36 "... had it!"
37 Court sight

Yesterday's answer

L	A	T	H	E	S	I	T	K	A
O	C	H	E	R	A	S	H	E	N
S	T	E	A	M	T	R	E	N	D
G	R	A	B	A	T	T	Y		
S	C	O	T	O	V	E	R		
I	L	L	T	O	O	L	A	T	E
L	O	D	G	E	T	I	G	E	R
O	P	E	R	A	T	E			
N	A	M	E	A	C	E	S		
T	A	B	S	N	O	R	M		
E	L	O	P	E	R	O	U	S	E
R	E	W	E	D	E	S	S	A	Y
M	E	L	D	S	S	E	E	M	E

CRYPTOQUOTE

SLDB VCEINZ OTE T JDLNCDE VTG NR
LBXBTACYU SN GNDLEBAR GNDL NRV
SLDB CUYNLTJJB.

-- YBCA IBULTEEB SGENY

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

If you even dream of beating me you'd better wake up and apologize.

-- Muhammad Ali

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



HENRY by Don Trachte

