

AGENDA FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE country is reeling under the trauma of near breakdown in law order since October 27, which has exacted a toll of more than 200 lives, and now stands on the brink of a disaster. Attacks on minority religious communities launched by the BNP-Jamaat-Shibir combine in the post-polls days have assumed alarming proportions. The loss and destruction caused to trade and industry have gone up to several billion dollars.

Now, after the formation of the new cabinet, there is immediate need to put a stop to such violence and resurrect the economy by bringing the law and order situation under control. The

abstaining from election.

The past government that made pledges to cut the root of terrorism must face down the terrorists without favour or fear. The criminals' arrogance is fed by the feckless response that meets each new barbarism. We have a system that has allowed notorious killers and criminals to constantly change their colours and terrorise people. A report published in a Bangla daily on January 14 suggests that in Satkhira, an arrested bullet-hit Shibir activist is now trying to establish himself as an AL worker to escape punishment. Sheikh Hasina has issued orders to the law enforcers to book the criminals without discrimination. But people have seen how such orders given by the PM have gone unheeded.

With the BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia changed her stance on hartal and blockade and urged the government to reach a consensus through talks to finalise the modalities for the next parliamentary election, people heaved a sigh of relief. Now, the effort of the PM should

government, just for lack of sensibility and realistic appraisal of people's sentiment, can easily slide into. People are fed up with the venality of politicians, economic deterioration, social tensions, killing and arson on the streets and workplaces, and insecurity even within the safe boundary of their homes.

Recently, in Satkhira, several people including some UP chairmen were dragged out of their houses and beheaded. Such acts indicate that the jihadis are very clear minded about their mission. But the government, however, does not seem so clear minded about its national mission in the face of determined barbarism.

Another challenge facing the new administration is stemming the eroding public confidence in government. The first prerequisite is probity on the part of the leaders matched by tough and consistent enforcement of laws without malice or favour towards anyone, no matter if he/she is a ruling party member. The task of the prime minister and her cabinet would appear to be most challenging as they inherited a dismaying legacy of moral malaise indulged in by some law makers and some members of the cabinet in the past days.

The vast cohort of youths can be provided with employment opportunities by opening new areas like handicrafts development, and helping growth of leather industries and jute carpet manufacturing, in an effort to capture foreign market. People have to be motivated to take up these new sectors by providing them state-sponsored expertise, capital, infrastructural facilities and land for setting up new industries. Industrial growth and foreign investment suffered most in the past because of bureaucratic control, red tape, political turmoil, terrorism and instability.

Nevertheless, we were more interested in importing finished goods than producing them in the country. That practice did have an appalling effect on our economy. For instance, we depended totally on imported milk products since the liberation of the country but now, by encouraging cattle farms in the country and establishing dairy farms that receive milk supply from the rural areas, we have been able to meet the children's milk requirement to a large extent.

The benefits of economic growth must be distributed more evenly. The growth that was spurred by fitful economic liberalisation programmes mostly benefited the upper and to some extent upper middle classes. Now, as the country enters a new phase, what is called for is not only a programme for national administration but also a vision for the nation -- a vision of unity, and consensus -- and a non-violent journey to progress and that could only be fashioned and implemented by a leader who is more than a politician -- who is a statesman.

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Going to the moon and protecting Hindus

ALAMGIR KHAN

AWAMI League leader Suranjit Sengupta has criticised the government for failing to prevent attacks on Hindus. The High Court 'directed the government to provide adequate security to the minority community who came under attacks across the country after the January 5 general election.' Why did the High Court direct the government, not others, to do so? It's because legally the responsibility falls solely on the government though the moral responsibility falls on all in the country. A government should not sit idle and pointing the finger of blame to other quarters. There is little sincerity in this blame game when some past incidents are still fresh in people's memory.

In the past few months people saw the ugly face of the AL-BNP-JP-Jamaat politics. People paid the price of this politics with their lives as well as having their livelihood undermined. Attack on Hindus is the product of this same bankrupt politics which has become akin to a business enterprise. Many poor people of Bangladesh cannot read and write and so they have never seen what is put down in the constitution. Even though they do not know what is in that book, they are very liberal and will never be communal. At the same time, these people live in a society that is controlled by that above-mentioned politics. Elements of that politics see a financial interest in displacing poor people of the minority community, and take advantage of their vulnerability during a volatile political situation. The government sits idle, making speeches about anti-Hindu politics of some other parties.

If the heinous types of the political violence that occurred in the past months are taken into account, very little difference can be seen between the majority and the minority people when they are poor. Poor people have been used as hostages for promoting the interests of those parties that have enjoyed state power so long. Being a Hindu just worsens this vulnerability. That this government which could stage such a farcical election by terrorising the opposition with unprecedented force just cannot prevent the attack and also cannot catch the culprits is utterly unbelievable. At present, this most powerful AL government is capable of doing anything for the betterment of the country's people except two things, one, launching a rocket to the moon, though not improbable in the future, and two, protecting the religious minorities from attacks and bringing the culprits involved to justice.

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PM has again issued a call to BNP to cut ties with Jamaat and militants and shun violence as a pre-condition for holding talks about the modalities of the 11th Parliamentary election. Now, when the anxious citizens are waiting to see peace prevail, and an end to the worsening of the economy and polarisation of the society, neither of the parties can afford to engage in any further destructive programmes.

However, the people are optimistic about democratic governance. And the agenda for the new government is clear—holding together a country torn by partisan clashes and killing born out of radical beliefs. The immediate need is to curb terrorism, corruption and rampant lawlessness, and to heal the wounds of the minority community, the victims of repression and looting. Dark clouds of uncertainty hover on the horizon because although AL has come out with three-fourths majority, 153 members were elected unopposed as there were no rival candidates with the main opposition BNP

be to make multi-party democracy work, and to put an end to the practice of systematic official lying and inaction. Fundamental changes are needed to rescue the economy from work stoppages, corruption and colossal unemployment problem of about 40 million youths.

The AL-led Mohajote rule in the first two years beginning from 2008 produced a flicker of prosperity, but experienced a decline because the stagnation was too widespread and deep-rooted to be cured by tinkering. The country's largely illiterate and overwhelmingly poor electorate, despite all handicaps, is now well informed. Dull and stereotyped propaganda and rhetoric indulged in the electioneering campaign or put up in the manifesto do not appeal to them. The AL-led alliance must heed the fact that they will be judged by their track record.

Indeed, the new government need not look beyond their immediate past rule for lessons about the predicament which a democratic

Fallout from the elections

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

THE elections are over, and a new government has been sworn in. The doom and gloom that overcast the political sky of Bangladesh for the last few months seem to be clearing up, at least for the government party and its alliance, for now. But even as the government party and the alliance celebrate their victory, termed pyrrhic by some, the anxiety of the nation keeps on lingering over what comes next.

On the one hand, the parties that have rejected these as sham are threatening to continue their long movement against the government, demanding a general election under a neutral government. On the other, many of our western friends have determined that elections without participation of all political parties are not democratic, and they would like us to hold one that is all-inclusive.

Caught in between are the citizens, who were paralysed by blockades and strikes for months last year. Property was destroyed, both government and private, innocent lives were lost, people lost their living, and the country lost precious revenue. Will the ushering in of a new government bring an end to the violence of last year, or will it lead to greater violence and breakdown of law and order?

One common factor in the last elections was that no side changed its rule of the game. The government stuck to its position that it will hold the elections under the leadership of the current prime minister, and the main opposition held to its stand of not taking part until the elections were held under a neutral caretaker government. International intervention at UN behest, and friendly persuasion of the two leaders by powerful

countries for a negotiated settlement for elections did not prevail. Each party wanted elections on its own terms. War of words continued unabated from two sides while a charade of dialogue was being played. No one budged while people suffered, but no one cared. Each leader cried that democracy was in danger while people who they claimed were fighting for became collaterals in their battle for political power. The obstinacy of both sides led to what was expected; a one-sided election with a make believe opposition that led to more than one half of the parliament being elected unopposed.

Our politics proves Newton's law of motion; a force is met with equal and opposite force, in a perverse way. Pugacity of the opposition in holding to its demands was met with greater pugacity; protests were not put down by discussion but coercion; brickbats were not answered by bouquets but bullets. One side outsourced its street fights to hired hands while the other side sent out "volunteers" to support the law enforcing agencies, and the people helplessly observed the fights and became victims to arson on shops, buses and trains. This was an election that each party wanted to have its way, forgetting people in the equation.

The fights between the two parties and unending mayhem on the street did not ultimately prevent the government from holding the elections. Not even the advice and suggestions of our foreign partners and the media for a more collaborative election prevailed. The dire forecast of pitched battles by opposition also did not pan out. We had the elections, and we have a new government now, however imperfect or flawed the election process or the results have been. What is next?

The challenges that these elections and the child of the elections, namely the new government, will face will come primarily from the domestic front, and partly from the international front. The most obvious is the threat of more violent opposition from the parties that abstained from the elections, and their demand for a new election under a neutral government. If the combined opposition stick to their old practices the country will again go through the same cycle of blockades, strikes, and outsourced vandalism causing further death and destruction. The government will be spending much of its time and resources combating these disruptions, neglecting other areas of national security and law and order. One can only hope that the opposition will have learnt its lesson from the sufferings it caused to ordinary people by relentless strikes and blockades, and innovate different ways to show their opposition and press demands.

The second challenge is completion of the war crimes trials. This is a wound that is hurting both the victims and the culprits. Unfortunately, although the culprits are few, there are more sympathisers of those now under trial and have been sentenced. Last year, we had seen enough evidence of such support that ranged from negative stance on the trials to more violent and ferocious street battles in favour of these culprits. Such protests may increase in strength and violence when the government goes to expedite completion of the trial and execution of sentences. This protest, when combined with the opposition demand for new elections under a neutral government, can prove deadly. As it moves with the trial the government will need to address the serious side effects of the execution of the sentences.

The next challenge, which may not have morphed into a lethal force as yet, is from the radical forces that may benefit from a government weakened by continued disruption by a determined opposition. The radical elements that are currently dispersed but not depleted will try to draw renewed strength from a government that has little time or resources to stem its growth. These forces are not necessarily embedded in the religious seminaries that were last year in the forefront of a countrywide rally. These forces draw their strength from their international allies for a common cause to found a government based on religion and have their spiritual allies in institutions across the board. The challenge is to recognise the elements and stop their banding to further their cause.

The main challenge from international front is proof of the government's intent to establish democracy and democratic institutions. Obviously, the recent election process has failed to impress many in the international arena, government and media, in that intent. The government cannot undo what has been done, but it can do a lot to salvage the negative image by holding up its promise to negotiate with its opponents on more inclusive elections on an agreed timescale. No one will ask the government, nor anyone expects, that elections should be held on a semester basis. But a firm commitment and a proven willingness to hold elections in a democratic manner will go a long way to assure our international allies of that intent. This will prove that our elections are meant to establish democracy; these are in no way a means to establish autocracy.

The writer is a US-based political analyst and commentator.

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QUOTABLE Quote

Justice, sir, is the great interest of man on earth. It is the ligament which holds civilized beings and civilized nations together.

Daniel Webster

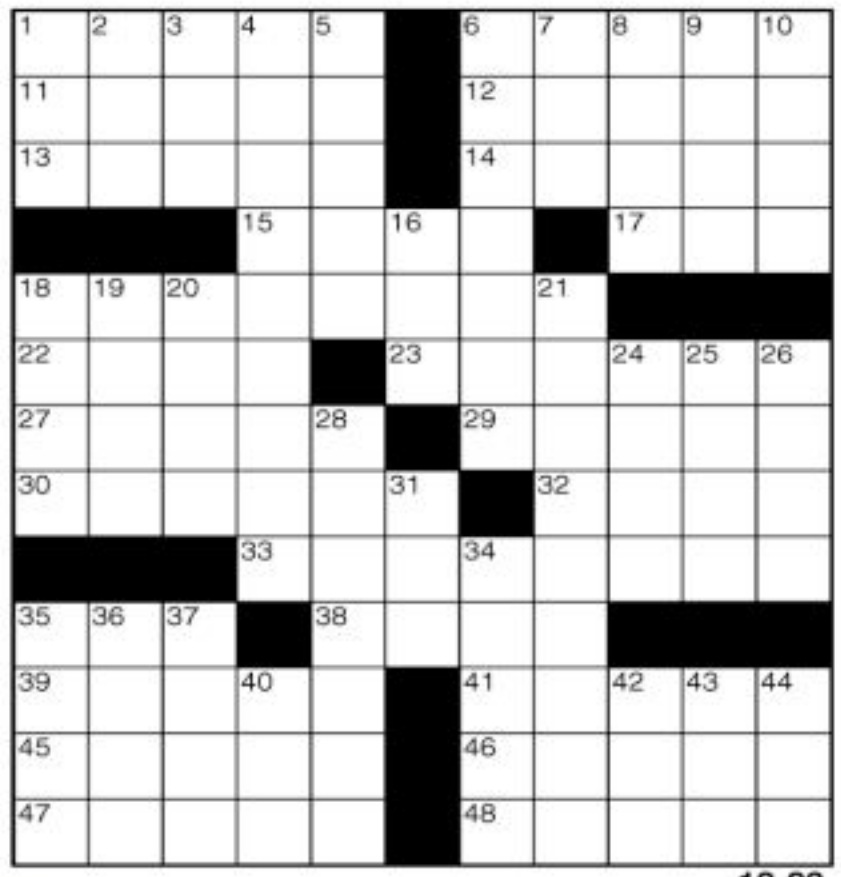
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Christmas song
- 6 Sounds of suffering
- 11 "O come, let us - Him"
- 12 Christmas tree topper
- 13 Pencil part
- 14 River of France
- 15 Opera set in Egypt
- 17 Indicate assent
- 18 Entries for Santa
- 22 First-rate
- 23 Treat for Tabby
- 27 Seventh day of Christmas gift
- 29 Gallows sight
- 30 Targeted, as with a mailing
- 32 Irishman, e.g.
- 33 Glitters
- 35 That lady
- 38 " - saw Elba"
- 39 One of Santa's reindeer
- 41 Emulate a blood-hound
- 45 Full of energy
- 46 Snowy wader
- 47 Yard plus a bit
- 48 Slalom curves

DOWN

- 1 Santa suit part
- 2 Commotion
- 3 King, in France
- 4 They're hung at Christmas-time
- 5 Admit
- 6 Kuala Lumpur resident
- 7 Lennon's love
- 8 Not "Fer"
- 9 Infamous emperor
- 10 Toboggan
- 16 Christmas mo.
- 18 One of mamas
- 19 Hockey's Gordie
- 20 - Instant
- 21 They're hung at Christmas-time
- 24 Christmas song
- 25 Vacation spot
- 26 Tabby and Spot
- 28 Pearly Gates tender
- 31 Lifeboat need
- 34 View over
- 35 Con game
- 36 Doughnut feature
- 37 Give off
- 40 Holiday lead-in
- 42 Tax agency
- 43 Clinic cost
- 44 Army bases: Abbr.



CRYPTOQUOTE

WYLCWE SW LCK TYMQJ SR XYMK
JDWEKMYNR LCDW RSWFKMK
SEWYMDWFK DWJ FYWRFKWL SYN
RLNVSJSLG.
- XDMLSW QNLCKM ZSWE OM

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE: TRUE WISDOM HAS A CURIOUS WAY OF REVEALING TO YOURSELF YOUR OWN TRUE IGNORANCE.
- NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON

Yesterday's answer

SCREW BISON
HAITI EDUCATE
ACTION DANCE
SHUNTS DUD
TEA ENWRAPS
ATL RAINNEY
COOLIT DOE
BENZENE EPA
AYE GRACES
SLAIN RHONE
SOLVE YODEL
ONSET EYERS

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.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte

