national consensus according to her party's electoral pledges, she must take the lead. She must stop verbally abusing her archrival Khaleda Zia. If she refrains from doing so and urges her party and cabinet colleagues to follow suit, no one will dare make any such remarks to pollute the political atmosphere. If she does so, it will mount pressure on Khaleda and her party leaders to remain decent in their statements. Otherwise, the war of words will keep preaching hatred in politics.

Immediately after the December 29 parliamentary polls in 2008, Hasina had talked about making compromises and changing political culture. But this time, she took a hard line. She has been repeatedly making threats to her political opponents. Even in the run up to the elections to the upazila parishads, she has warned her own party's grassroots level leaders of stern actions against those who will contest the upazila elections as dissident candidates. Lack of check and balance in power always invite danger. The current political situation has already triggered some fear in the public mind of rise of an authoritarian leader. Hasina has already established her supremacy over her own party. The BNP, the AL's main political opponent, is now facing a debacle after its failure to resist the January 5 parliamentary polls. Jamaat has earned a bad name. Another major party, Jatiya Party, has virtually been made subservient to the ruling AL through distribution of favours. So now there is no strong political opponent to the AL and Hasina's leadership in and outside of the parliament. This is a very dangerous situation. This is the hotbed for the rise of authoritarian rule.

Now, all depends on the political wisdom of Sheikh Hasina. She must reassess her strategy before going ahead. She should discard the plan to stay in office for five years with the fractured mandate her party got in the last parliamentary election. She should take some game changing moves to recover the damage done to her party. Such moves will help her party to regain public confidence. Then it may go for a fresh election allowing people to exercise their right to elect their representatives. If the AL gets people's mandate in the fresh election, it will morally uplift the party. She should take some extraordinary measures to bring reforms in some crucial institutions including the parliament, the EC, civil administration, police administration, and political parties to make them what they are supposed to be. She must clarify the mode of the government which will remain in power during the next election. The prime minister may come up with a roadmap specifying the timeframe for their implementation. If she takes such moves, it will of course brighten her and her party's image. But for this she should not take much time. The sooner she does this the better.



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