

Forthcoming municipal elections

Ensure level playing field

WE welcome the upcoming municipal elections due to be held on December 30. Whether the decision to hold on party lines is a good one, only future will tell. Although there is yet to be any official confirmation from the principal opposition party BNP on whether or not it will participate in the municipal polls, we certainly hope that transparency and a level playing field will be ensured to generate confidence amongst all the political parties.

There are, however, a few matters that raise concern. We wonder whether the recent spate of arrests of opposition leaders and activists, in various districts, ostensibly on charges of causing violence and terror, according to BNP to prevent the party from participating in the said elections, has anything to do with the forthcoming elections. We hope that these arrests are on genuine grounds, because anything otherwise would certainly harm the government's credibility in creating an environment for free-and-fair polls.

Another matter that raises question is the appointment of 175 additional district commissioners and UNO to act as Returning Officers (RO), according to a leading Bangla Daily. The ROs had traditionally been appointed from amongst the EC staff. What, we wonder, is the rationale for the EC for doing so. Such decisions hardly inspire confidence in either the electoral process or the EC itself.

It is for the EC to allay all apprehensions of the political parties. It should take into account the misgivings expressed by various quarters. Failure to deliver an atmosphere that will allow the electorate to exercise its franchise in a transparent manner will do the EC's credibility little good.

"Bangladesh on Seven Summits"

An inspiration to us all

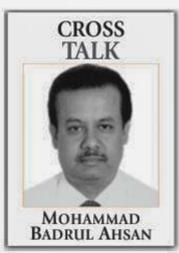
WASFIA Nazreen has achieved the rare distinction of climbing the seven highest peaks in seven continents, popularly known as the "Seven Summits," a dream that has come true for only a few climbers in the world. The first Bangladeshi to do so, the 33-year old mountaineer and rights activists has made the nation proud.

Named an Adventurer of the Year 2014-15 by the National Geographic for displaying extraordinary courage and spirit of adventure, she dedicated her feat to women's empowerment and the "Spirit of '71 and all those who are fighting to protect it." The four-year long journey ended with her reaching the summit of Carstensz Pyramid, the highest mountain of Oceania/Australasia that turned out to be even more challenging than the Everest which she had scaled in 2012.

Wasfia symbolises patience, endurance and determination for conquering the Seven Summits against all odds. But statistics alone is an incomplete assessment of her strength which, surprisingly, lies also in her humility. She remains remarkably unchanged by the adulation and attention her victories have brought her.

By reveling in the unusual distinction of boasting the world's best at something, she becomes an outstanding role model for a youthful nation that won freedom not too long ago. In hailing Wasfia, Bangladesh today hails a symbol of what, as a nation, we collectively aspire to be. Her perseverance, we are sure, will be an inspiration to the youths of the country to achieve the challenging objectives in fulfilling the dream of the nation.

Donald Trump does not know the world



CROSS TALK
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

DONALD Trump is full of ideas, but all his ideas are sadly full of it. This billionaire-turned-US politician has called China "the number one abuser" because it takes advantage of the United States through currency manipulation. He wants to build walls on the US-Mexico border to keep out illegal immigrants, because they "rape and murder babies". Most recently, he floated the ludicrous idea of requiring Muslim-Americans to carry special identification cards that note their faith. No need to go any further to know that this man has lost his mind, if he had any to begin with.

The Republican Party candidate for the US presidential race certainly isn't familiar with the Golden Rule, which was introduced by Confucius centuries ago: Do unto others what you want done unto you. What if others do to the United States what Trump wants done to them? Let's say, China decides not to trade with the United States and withdraws USD 1.26 trillion it has lent to that country plus USD 143 billion owed to Hong Kong. Let's say, illegal immigrants no longer consider the United States as their dream destination. What if the Muslim countries are going to ask the Americans on their soils to carry some kind of identification card or mark on them?

Not that these tits for tats are going to happen, but let's think wishfully to counter Trump's wishful thinking. It will significantly hurt Chinese exports because the United States is a big market for them. The illegal immigrants will face economic hardship and political repression if sent back to their countries of origin. The same thing goes for the Muslims, who arrive in the United States for the same reasons as anybody else.

But will the United States also not feel the pinch? As of 2013, over 40 million foreign-born representing 13 percent of the population resided in the United States. The size of the Muslim population is even smaller: 2.11 percent of the US population as of 2014. All of the employment growth over the last 13 years went to immigrants even though the native-born accounted for two-thirds of the growth in the working age population. The United States needs a steady flow of immigrants to keep its economy running.

What about China? In 2014, 20.2 percent of total USA imports came from there, higher than any other country. A 2012 estimate shows that 95 percent of American flags imported to the US for the 4th of July celebration came from China. The same year, 96 percent of fireworks imported were also from that country.

Things may never come to a head just because Donald Trump is thinking funny. But his thoughts give

us a view of his constipated mind where the big picture is terribly distorted. It's so distorted that he can't even see the obvious, which is why he is asking for a database for the Muslims living in the United States.

There are many ways to tell Muslims from others. Their names are the first hint. A Mohammad or an Ahmed or a Khan gives away their identity as assuredly as fingerprints give away criminals. Then women wear hijabs. Men wear caps and grow beards. They eat halal food and go to the mosques.

Despite these telltale signs, Trump needs a poke in

most powerful nation isn't exactly a business proposition and his parochial mind is bogged down by messianic delusions. He wants to become the leader of the free world by isolating his country. Propping up walls, targeting minorities and blaming other nations for comparative advantage in trade only confirm that he is erecting trees to hide the forest.

Last week, Fox News grilled Donald Trump for using phony statistics. He mentioned in a tweet that African-Americans killed 81 percent of white people although FBI's 2014 crime data shows white people



the eye. He needs a database to identify the Muslims. Why does he need it in the first place? How is it going to prevent terrorist attacks knowing which Americans are Muslims or which Muslims are Americans? The United States already has the surveillance in place to eavesdrop on phone calls, scrutinise emails, and track down suspects. Besides, it has been proven time and again that the terrorists are adept at falsifying identity using fake documents.

Of course, everything Donald Trump contemplates comes from his business sense whereby the variables are adjusted to make more money. But leading the

committed 82 percent of murders involving white victims. When an exasperated Trump asked, "Am I gonna check every statistic?" Bill O'Reilly of Fox News insisted, "You have got to, you are a presidential candidate."

Donald Trump's ideas represent the worldview of someone who doesn't know the world. Even worse, his candidacy for US presidency represents the fantasy of someone who surely doesn't know that office.

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Myanmar's icon will become president

LARRY JAGAN

MYANMAR'S opposition leader is planning to be the country's next president, after her party overwhelmingly won this month's polls. Although the Constitution appears to bar Aung San Suu Kyi from being president – because she has two children who are foreign nationals – her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), is preparing to nominate her, when the new parliament convenes at the end of January.

But in the meantime the party leader is trying to arrange face-to-face meetings with the country's current top leaders – the President, Thein Sein, the parliamentary speaker, Shwe Mann and the Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing – to discuss the transfer of power and national reconciliation.

where [seat] numbers actually count," said Myat Thu, head of the Yangon School of Political Science. "Now that the NLD clearly has more than 75 percent of the popular vote, it means they have the power to mold the future."

When the parliament reconvenes with the new MPs, the upper and lower houses elect a vice president each, and the military bloc selects a candidate. Then the president is chosen at a joint sitting of both houses of parliament from the three candidates. This means the NLD will nominate two presidential candidates – from the upper and lower houses – and their favoured contender will certainly be elected the next president.

"The people clearly want her [Aung San Suu Kyi] to be president," said Tin Oo. "It is only right and proper, she deserves to be president," he said.

Hlaing last week went even further and said the army would protect the Constitution with their lives.

For some time meant he was ruling out the possibility of changing the Constitution to allow Aung San Suu Kyi to become the president. But if the clause blocking her was temporarily revoked – just for the Lady in this instance – this might meet the approval of the country's top leaders, who drafted the 2008 Constitution. "As long as 59 (F) is still there to prevent other foreigners – Indians or Chinese – becoming president in the future, the army may accept it," said a source in the president's office, who declined to be identified.

The NLD has been insisting constitutional change as the top priority for the new government, but recently NLD leaders like Tin Oo have suggested

parliament, Suu Kyi's nomination for president seems certain. In the process of selecting a new president, the parliament has to elect a speaker and deputy speaker for both houses; these four people then form a scrutinising committee to vet the presidential nominations and conduct the parliamentary poll. In this case the four will be NLD MPs or supporters, perhaps from one of the elect ethnic minority representatives, Arakan, Shan or Zomi.

They would have the power to approve Suu Kyi as the candidate for the lower house, and with the NLD's superiority of numbers in parliament, duly elect her as the president. The only thing then stopping her from assuming the presidency would be a legal challenge to the constitutional court – or an administrative coup by the commander-in-chief, which is possible under the current Constitution. Both would be very disruptive and increase instability. It would end Myanmar's international support and reverse the liberal reform process. Something everyone wants to avoid.

So the proposed talks between Suu Kyi and the three leaders are pivotal to what happens next in Myanmar. She has already met the Speaker Shwe Mann, when they agreed on the need for the transition to the NLD government to be smooth and peaceful. He also advised her to seek a meeting with the former leader and architect of the current Constitution and political system, Senior General Than Shwe, according to sources in the government.

As a result she has been trying to arrange a meeting for more than a week now, but has received a response from him, though the contents of the message are being kept strictly confidential by both sides. At the same time she is still pressing for meetings with Min Aung Hlaing and Thein Sein. So far they have postponed possible meetings until after the election results are announced officially.

The president is willing – in fact anxious – to meet the Lady to prepare for the handover, but his close advisers have pressured him into waiting, according to sources in the president's office. But the 45-day delay recently mooted will be relaxed, according to sources close to the process. The meeting may now take place in the very near future. However, it is the planned meeting with the Commander-in-Chief, scheduled for early December, which will be crucial, if there is to be a smooth and peaceful transfer of power.

The writer is a specialist on Myanmar and a former BBC World Service New Editor for the region.



What is needed is for Suu Kyi to sit down with the top three men in the government and map out the transfer of power.

Despite 59 (F) – the clause in the Constitution, which seems to prevent her from being the next president – the NLD is paving the way for Aung San Suu Kyi to be president. The party's senior leader and patron, Tin Oo, told *The Daily Star*: "We need to find a way to make that happen." Party insiders refer to Plan Zero, which certainly seems to mean mapping out a roadmap to make the Lady president in the near future.

Although the election result is yet to be declared officially – as the election commission considers numerous complaints and protests – it is clear that Suu Kyi and the NLD have won the election convincingly. They are on track to win more than 80 percent of the seats that were contested – though 25 percent of the MPs are soldiers, selected by the military's commander-in-chief. "This is

emphatically, though the Constitution seems to prevent this from happening. But one way to overcome this, according to the NLD leader, is to temporarily suspend or repeal the clause that bars her. The U Nu government did that in the 1950s to allow the army commander, General Ne Win, to be a caretaker prime minister, he said. But legal experts say the clause that allowed that then, in the 1948 Constitution, is not in the current one.

Sources in the president's office are also considering how this provision could be "waived" in this case. This is something the military might accept, according to Myanmar analysts and observers. "The military commander and government officials have all emphasised the need to protect and preserve the Constitution," said Myat Thu. Min Aung

it needs time and detailed discussion before constitutional amendments are presented to the parliament – up to one or two years, and after the political dialogue on a Federal state, which is the next stage of the peace process.

Of course, what is needed is for Suu Kyi to sit down with the top three men in the government and map out the transfer of power. "It's a power sharing proposition," said Myat Thu – as the army still has considerable influence in government – selecting one vice president, and three ministers in the new government: border affairs, defence and home affairs. They need to discuss how to move forward or else there will be instability, uncertainty and even a constitutional crisis."

With the NLD in the driving seat because they convincingly control the

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The ban on Facebook

The government recently clamped down on Facebook for security reasons. We don't support this decision at all. It is like cutting the head off to cure headache.



In a democratic state there should be space for free expression of views and opinions. Nowadays, social media sites like Facebook have become an inseparable part of our daily lives. It helps us keep in touch with our friends and relatives abroad and at home. We exchange our joys and sorrows through Facebook. We hope the government will lift the ban on Facebook as early as possible.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

COMMENTS

"Lies and audacity" (November 24, 2015)

Momtaz Ali

It's not unexpected. Pakistan always feels "deep anguish and worry" regarding the trial and execution of the Rajakars.

Amrin

If they really cared so much about the Rajakars, why didn't they take the Rajakars with them when they were defeated in 1971?

Habiba Babor

Everyone hates traitors; even their patrons!

Orni

This failed state has no right to interfere in our internal affairs.