



JIMMY CARTER

October 4, 2001

To M.A. Syed

I am writing to congratulate you for the central role played by you and the Election Commission in ensuring the peaceful, free and fair conduct of the elections on October 1. When I visited Bangladesh in August, I was impressed with the evenhanded, impartial preparations for the election being made by the caretaker government and the electoral authorities, laying the foundation for free and fair election. It now appears from all international and domestic observer reports that the elections were relatively peaceful and that they were conducted in accordance with international standards. These reports run counter to public statements attributed to Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League of massive rigging. Any complaints should follow normal legal channels of appeal rather than a complete refusal to recognize the election's legitimacy.

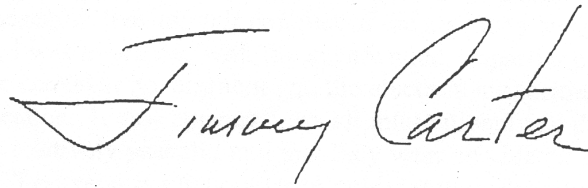
Given the international situation right now, it would be damaging and destabilizing for Bangladesh to enter into a protracted post-electoral political crisis. The candidates and their parties have the power to avoid such a crisis by adhering to the commitments that they made in August. They agreed to renounce the use of *hartals*, violence and intimidation. Living up to this commitment will require clear, public statements to supporters to avoid mass demonstrations, strikes, and violent acts of any kind.

Party leaders, including former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also pledged not to boycott the next Parliament and to help ensure that the opposition plays a meaningful role in the new legislature, not matter which party formed the government. I have called on Khaleda Zia to respect fully the pre-electoral agreements to ensure a full and legitimate role for the opposition under the new government, especially in Parliament and with respect to the role of the Speaker. I urge other leaders to do the same. However, Sheikh Hasina's recent vow to boycott Parliament runs counter to her August pledge and has the potential not only to destabilize this new Parliament, but also to unravel the delicate fabric of the Bangladeshi democracy.

As you know, I lost a presidential election myself. I am well aware of how hard it is to accept such a defeat. It is imperative, however, that the Awami League accept the results of the election in order to strengthen Bangladesh's democratic institutions in the long-term. The party has played an important leadership role for democracy in Bangladesh, and this is a role that must continue in opposition. This is the essence of democracy.

Bangladesh has many friends around the world who are hopeful that democracy can take hold and that the poverty and suffering of many Bangladeshi people can be alleviated through good governance, meaningful political deliberations, and sound policy-making. The Awami League is critical to this long-term process as a strong party opposition in the next Parliament and as a contender in future free and fair elections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jimmy Carter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a distinct "Carter" at the end.