

Bangladesh Politics: The Changed Scenario

by Khairul Anam

THE results of the recent parliamentary polls and the formation of government by the Awami League have triggered a lot of analyses and shake-ups in the politics and society of Bangladesh. A variety of views and opinions has sprung out — some intellectuals have dubbed it as the beginning of a new era; some have termed it as a deviation from the right path; and some simply don't see any significant change in it. Whatever may be the effect of these political events, it cannot be denied that Bangladesh is passing through a transitional phase and some decisive qualitative changes have occurred in these days.

When Bangladesh emerged as an independent state in 1971, it retained an impoverished, over-populated land; its economy was ruined by nine months-long Liberation War. Its new political leaders were fleeing to state-building and failed to solve major political crises of the country. All these factors led the situation to political turmoil, bloody assassinations and military takeovers which overshadowed the later years. Prior to the fall of the Ershad government, not a single transition of political power occurred in a smooth and natural way. Sheikh Mujib was killed in a brutal military coup; and the same happened to Ziaur Rahman.

Ershad also came to the power through a bloodless military coup. During all these years, politics of Bangladesh was marred in authoritarian

rule of the government, aimless movements of opposition political parties, armed struggles of the revolutionary 'lefts' and unsuccessful military coups. Over these two decades, the political situation was volatile, and there was no organised political movement to establish a democratic government. The people at large were not very much involved in politics.

The first breakthrough from such a situation took place when university students came out to protest the martial law of Ershad in 1982. In the following years, there were tremendous political movements in the country, spear-headed by the students, against the military rule of Ershad. In the face of strong political movement, President Ershad was forced to hand over power to a caretaker government. It was the first smooth transfer of power in the history of this country. The impact of this unique achievement was twofold. First, it re-established people's political power in the country, and second, it ushered the hope to introduce democratic process in the country.

When BNP formed the government through the election of '91, the people expected that the new government would establish parliamentary democracy in its true sense and the country would enjoy political stability. However, that dream was shattered just after two years when a serious political conflict occurred between the ruling party and the opposition on the issue of caretaker government. Although the BNP

government had a good performance in country's economy, it completely failed in solving the political problems. The BNP government was callous to opposition demands, which lacked maturity and sensitivity needed for the smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy. All these matters eventually led the opposition parties to resign from the Parliament and call for an all-out political struggle against the government.

During the last two years of BNP rule, there were tremendous political movements against the government on the issue of caretaker government. The most critical aspect of this movement was that it threatened, at one point, the functioning of liberal democracy in the country. The viability of bourgeois political system came under question when the parliamentary politics was destroyed just after two years of practice. When the movement reached its pinnacle, the country was virtually in a complete standstill. However, the crisis was over when the BNP government passed the Caretaker Bill in the Parliament and the opposition accepted that.

The successful completion of the 12th parliamentary election has raised new hopes and aspirations in the minds of the people. Although there were some disturbances in different polling centres, the election was by and large a free and fair one. The Awami League, having

the largest number of seats in the Parliament, has formed the new government and political stability has returned to the country again. Over the last few years, some qualitative changes have taken place in the outlook of the people and these changes have been reflected in the recent parliamentary polls. These changes cannot be overlooked as these are supposed to play the most vital role in shaping the future politics of this land.

The most significant aspect of these days is that the present political system, commonly known as liberal democracy, has survived from its most critical crisis. The recent political row over caretaker government almost destroyed the newly achieved democratic process in the country. However, it has been a great fortune for the people of Bangladesh that the political crisis has been solved and a new government has begun functioning. May be for this reason, the former US Congressman Stephen Solarz, after observing the polls, has commented that this election was probably the most significant election in the history of this country.

The second is the high turnout of voters, particularly the women, in the polls. The overall turnout was 72 per cent and this unique phenomenon has proved that the people of this land are determined to establish a true democratic process in Bangladesh.

Third, the people have become much more conscious about the politics. The defeat of BNP in the polls indicates that the general people now keep a good knowledge of the country's politics.

Fourth, the difference between the outlooks of urban and rural people has narrowed down. Previously, we have seen that the voting behaviour of the rural electorate was largely different than that of the urban. But in this election, this difference has been squeezed.

Fifth, the electorate by and large have rejected political parties having fundamentalist and autocratic political ideas. The poll result indicates that there is not much future of such political parties in this country.

Sixth, the poll result suggests that the politics is going towards a two-party system in the country. Such a trend will help establish political stability in the country.

Seventh, the necessity and role of students in national politics are narrowing down. Unlike previous movements, the recent movement for caretaker government was not spearheaded by the students. If this trend goes on, the necessity of student politics will wither away.

Eighth, unlike previous time, political parties now count on the opinions and demands of the voters seriously. The major political parties are now re-shuffling their policies and programmes in line with the demands of the electorate and trying to be more account-

able to the people. Ninth, through the recent parliamentary polls, the electorate have indicated that the government must be accountable to the people and there should be a high level of transparency in the works of the government. Otherwise, the electorate will reject the ruling party in the next polls.

All these changes have occurred in Bangladesh during the last few years, and the recent polls have contributed to reveal these changes. However, this changed context signals that the formative phase of Bangladesh politics that has been completed and the liberal democratic process has established its foundation on this land. It also suggests that in future there could be political movements against the ruling party, but it will not threaten the viability of the present political system. These new developments also usher a new era for the people of Bangladesh. The Awami League government is planning to take some important steps, such as the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive, autonomy of TV and Radio, and to institutionalise democracy in the country. As the situation demands, the government is trying to be more accountable and transparent. This phenomenon is going to be more prevalent day by day, and the future governments, we hope will be more democratic and accountable to the people.

The writer is a graduate student of Political Science, University of Dhaka.



To which (---) these 'two' belong?

Suvash Kumar Barman

If a quick survey is made out a number of newspaper readers, it will be seen that all of them will be able to recognise some of the commonest words which 'decorate' everyday's papers. 'Hijack, loot, mugging, dacoity and incompetence' are many of these words. But it is very natural in our context. The quantitative analysis of crimes of any sort shows that crime is so much in our country, that if any newspaper maintains only a single column for it in any given say, the number of crimes will encroached three columns of that paper. What is the reason for all this?

It is a well-known fact that Bangladesh has a higher rate of unemployment than most of the countries of the world. Due to the lack of investment in our economy, we cannot find or maintain job opportunities for our younger generations who are passing out the universities and are looking for jobs. These people unable to do any job for months and years, get frustrated. Until and unless they get a decent work they have to depend entirely on their father's income.

In our social context, these youths feel themselves as burdens to their families. Earlier, they were students and were not subject to do any jobs and were bound to be dependent on their families. But now as they have concluded their students' life, they expect to find a job, whose earnings will help their families. And as most of the cases

are, the father (the main earner) retires a whole lot earlier than their first son completes his student life. So, the feeling of being a burden engulfs these people.

A lot of students stay in the varsity halls and other places to study, leaving their parents in other parts of the country. Some maintain their varsity and living expenses by engaging themselves in private tuitions. Most of the remaining students unwillingly depend on their family, while the rest have nothing at all to depend on. But even if they earn nothing at all, they have to consume something in order to survive. But fate even the autonomous consumption needs some money! But where will they get this money from? So, they rob, hijack and mug. First to survive and later because it becomes a habit!

So, we see that the urgency to survive leads them towards crime. But what once was their only means of survival, later on becomes their profession. First they had little intention of taking up this profession and then they have a little intention of leaving it. First it was survival and then it was to enjoy — to improve their standard of living. Well, the number of hijackers, who were bound to be hijackers at the beginning, is not

much comparing to the total number of hijackers. Then what about the rest?

A person would involve himself in any business when he will see that the return he is getting is exceeding his total efforts in the business. For instance, a rickshawpuller (although unknowingly) engages himself in doing so, because he thinks that it is worth it, or in other words, the amount he earns from pulling the rickshaw exceeds the total labour he puts in it — in monetary terms. Another example, a bit complicated one is that, suppose you are asked to do a job for me. I have agreed to pay you. If you are a rational person, then the things you'll consider for doing the job will be, a) the amount of your time, labour and skill you will be giving in doing the job itself, converted into monetary terms; b) the total time you've taken for going there and coming back home, converted to monetary terms, and c) if there is any risk in doing the job or any chance of getting humiliated, converted into monetary terms. If the sum I'll be paying you exceeds the sum of (a) + (b) + (c), then, and only then, you'll do the job for me, assuming that our relationship is strictly professional.

Another easier form of calculating this is by considering

your opportunity cost of doing the work for me. You will calculate the amount you would've received by putting that specific amount of time, labour and skill you have used in my case, at any other place. If this sum is equal to or less than the sum I am paying you then and only then you'll agree with me.

Now, suppose that you are a 'hijacker-to-be', i.e., about to hijack. What are the things you would consider? Firstly, the amount of money you would get from the victim. Next, about how you are going to do it and escape from it, and finally if you get caught, to what extent your punishments are going to be. The greater the return is, the more will you be willing to do it. Think that you are planning to commit 100 crimes which will earn you money. If the probability of getting caught and succeeding in committing the crime is fifty-fifty, and if you are a risk-lover, you will decide for it. And if the chances of succeeding exceeds the chances of failure, then almost everybody willing to commit crimes will do the same.

Now, in our country the chances of total success is above 80 per cent. So why not do it? Assuming that you will be

caught in the rest of the 20 per cent (which is only a probability) what will your punishments be? In our country, the first thing is, if you are caught, by road, the public will beat you almost to death! Then the police will come and take you to a hospital. Now calculate the opportunity cost of getting such a good beating!

If you think that if you are given twenty thousand or fifty thousand or, say, one lakh taka to get such a good beating, then that is your opportunity cost of the beating. Next, add your hospital expenses and the opportunity cost of jail (say, if you were not at jail for 'x' period of time, then how much would you've earned by that time). Now, if you think that, the gains you've made from these 80 per cent successful crimes exceed this total cost of yours, then go ahead and do them! And if you are beaten to death, then you will be above all calculations (opportunity cost of death is infinite). So, why bother about getting beaten to death!

Hijacking or mugging is like a drug, as many people will support, because when one starts doing it, he just goes on doing it. Without knowing how and why — the man begins to love the

risk and return involved in doing it. This leads to the proof that more than 95 per cent of all criminals are risk-lovers.

Now, let us see what the government is doing about it. Under the new supervision of the new government, the police have developed a new technique. Nowadays, the police search the backseat, more precisely what is underneath it, of the taxis and rickshaws of Dhaka city, at most of the important road crossings and areas. Those who live around the university area will know this better. If anything is found under the seats of the vehicles, then the passenger, or in his absence, the driver falls for it. A sad fact remains that our policemen can really make life hell. It's the passengers who feel the inconvenience. The arms, or other illegal things, which the police are looking for, could've been kept there by the driver or by the former passenger or anybody else. But the police don't care, as long as there is a passenger in the vehicle.

When a pick-pocket on a hijacker gets caught in a public place, before he is beaten to death, in most of the cases, the police arrive and take him in their custody. A surprising fact is that as generally seen, a few policemen are always around the scene of these crimes. If the

crime is pulled out successfully, then the police present there tries in vain to catch the hooligans. And in other cases, the police rescue the culprit as soon as possible. In most cases the public don't know if these culprits are brought to justice or not. The indications of this is not very vague. The probability of a hijacker in becoming a police is much more less than that of a policeman becoming a hijacker!

The government wants to increase the number of police force. But it is well-known that most of the terrorists or other culprits are very much known to the police. The area is divided among the terrorists, that one will separate in this part of the city and in another part. The present police force is sufficient to look them up. But it seems like the police have a good liaison with these terrorists. Either, in my opinion, the police are getting these terrorists. These terrorists get in and come out of the jail in no time at all. The greater the number of this they get in jail, the bigger the credit. They come out of jail like a hero. I don't now what punishment they get inside the jail, but they really came out unchanged!

This situation leads us to think of the idea of capital

punishments. How much or what should our capital punishments be? Will it be like those of the Islamic countries of the Middle East? Like cutting off the fingers or the hands if a thief is caught and found guilty? Or will it be like giving them our own 'police' treatments to a greater extent or will it be like increasing the normal sentences they usually get? If capital punishment is introduced, then it will be very beneficial for the whole country, because crime is bound to decrease to a great extent as the culprits will be more and more afraid of the law and order. But the human rights organisations and other such NGOs will offer a strong resistance to this proposal, as for many minor crimes, criminals will be dealt with severely. So, it will be very wise for us (the younger generations) to leave these serious problems and questions to the government.

After 25 years of our independence, we got the same government in power. People are hoping high on them. But now, the Awami League is walking on a tightrope. Their main issue is to stop terrorism and the above discussed points should be observed carefully, as some major parties have vowed not to stop terrorism. But the government alone can't help change the situation. We should all be against all unlawful activities, leaving over political ideologies aside. Well, we should better uproot terrorism quickly for good, or we may have to pay dearly.

The Opportunity Cost View of Crimes

by Raihan Jamil

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide



Re-watch on Star Plus, Tonight at 12:30

Tuesday 27th August
(All programmes are in local time. There may be changes in the programmes).

BTB

3:00 Opening Announcement
3:10 Reelation From the Gesta
3:15 Documentary Film: Cinema
Europe 4:00 News in Bangla
4:15 Echo Para Shikhi 4:45
Cartoon Series: The Animals of
Parthlingwood 5:00 News in
Bangla 5:20 Sangeeta: Modern
Songs 6:00 News in Bangla
6:05 National Television
Debate Competition 7:00 The
News 7:05 Open University
7:25 Comedy Series: Seinfeld
8:00 News in Bangla 8:40
Drama Serial 10:00 News in
English 10:30 Apan Priya 10:55
Mini Series 11:30 News in
Bangla 11:35 Wednesday's
programme 11:40 Close down

BBC

6:00 BBC Newsroom inc. World
Business Report/Asia Today/24
Hours 6:30 BBC World Head-
lines 9:05 Panorama 10:00
BBC Newsday 1:00 BBC World
News 1:15 Panorama 2:00
BBC World News 2:30 Time
Out: The Sky At Night 3:00 BBC
World News 3:30 Time Out:
Tomorrow's World 4:00 BBC
Newsdesk 6:00 BBC World

News 6:15 The Money Programme
7:00 BBC World News
7:15 World Business Report
7:30 BBC Newsday Asia & Pacific
8:30 Time Out: The Travel
Show 9:00 BBC World News
9:15 Panorama 10:00 BBC
World News 10:30 Time Out:
Building Signs 11:00 The World
Today 1:00 BBC World Head-
lines 1:05 Panorama 2:00 BBC
World News 2:30 Time Out: Air-
port 3:00 BBC World Report
Inc. World Business Report/24
Hours 5:00 BBC World News
5:10 Newsnight

CHANNEL V

6:30am Frame By Frame 7:00
Rewind VJ Sophia 8:00 Jump
Start VJ Trey 9:00 Frame By
Frame 11:00 The Vibe VJ Luke
12:00 Rewind VJ Sophia 1:00
By Demand VJ Trey 2:00 Frame
By Frame 2:30 First Day First
Show 3:00 The Indian Top 10
4:00 Planet Ruby 4:30 By De-
mand VJ Trey 5:30 Rewind VJ
Sophia 6:30 Big Bang VJ
Alessandra 8:00 Planet Ruby
9:00 The Vibe 10:00 First Day
First Show 10:30 Soul Curry
11:00 Speak Easy 11:30 The
Ride VJ Trey 12:00am Over
The Edge VJ Sophia 12:30 Big
Bang VJ Alessandra 1:00
Haysah 2:00 By Demand VJ
Trey 2:30 Big Bang VJ Alessan-
dra 4:30 Bill Board US Count-
down

watch 1:30 Kriket! 2:30 El For
Your Entertainment: 3:00 The
Oprah Winfrey Show 4:00
Hooperman 4:30 Home and
Away 5:00 The Sullivan 5:30
Gabrielle

STAR PLUS

6:30am Volttron 7:00 Teenage
Mutant Ninja Turtles 7:30 G I
Joe 8:00 Saber Rider And The
Star Sherif 8:30 The Adventures
Of Black Beauty 9:00 Aerobics
Oz Style 9:30 Nanny and
The Professor 10:00 Mr
Belvedere 10:30 Yan Can
Cook 11:00 El For Your Enter-
tainment 11:30 Gabrielle 12:30
Santa Barbara 1:30 The Bold &
The Beautiful 2:00 The Oprah
Winfrey Show 3:00 Remington
Steele 4:00 Yan Can Cook
4:30 El For Your Entertainment
5:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja
Turtles 5:30 The Adventures Of
Black Beauty 6:00 Lost In
Space 7:00 Home and Away
7:30 Charles in Charge 8:00
MASH 8:30 Chicago Hope 9:00
The Extraordinary 10:30 The
Bold & The Beautiful 11:00
Santa Barbara 12:00am The
New Twilight Zone 12:30 Bay-

STAR Sports

6:00am Live US Open Tennis
1996 From Flushing Meadow,
New York, USA Day 1 Night
Time Session 9:00 1996 Pro
Beach Soccer New Brighton
10:00 Trans World Sport 11:00
Asian Football Show 12:00
Inside PGA Tour 1:00 Formula
One World Championships Belgian
Grand Prix From Belgium
2:30 World Windsurfing H/L
3:00 Asia Sports Show 4:00 US
Open Tennis 1996 From
Flushing Meadow, New York,
USA Day 1 Night Time Session
7:00 Gillette World Sport Special
7:30 World Superbike Champi-
onship 1996 From Sugo, Japan

STAR MOVIES

7:30am Comedy: The Heav-
enly Kid 15 (Arabic Subtitles)
9:30 Western: Frontier Gun 12
(Arabic Subtitles) 11:30 Com-
edy: This Can't Be Love 15
(Hindi Subtitles) 1:30 Comedy:
Mystery Date 15 (Hindi Sub-
titles) 3:30 Western: Run Man
Run 15 (Hindi Subtitles) 5:30
Comedy: I Was a Teenage
Comedy 15 (Hindi Subtitles)
7:30 Comedy: The Mask 15
(Hindi Subtitles) 9:00 Hollywood
1 On 1 9:30 Action: Dominion
187 (Hindi Subtitles) 11:15 The
Bulletin 11:30 Horror: Wes
Craven's New Nightmare 18
(Arabic Subtitles) 1:30 Action:
Death In Brunswick 18 (Arabic
Subtitles) 3:30 After Dark: Wide
Sargasso Sea 18 (Arabic Sub-
titles) 5:30 Film Club: Five Cor-
ners 18 (Arabic Subtitles)

Planet Ruby on Channel V, Tonight at 8:00

9:30 Live US Open Tennis
1996 From Flushing Meadow,
New York, USA Day 2 Merit &
Women's Round 1 2:00 The
European Tour Volvo German
Open H/L 3:00 The Asian
Football Show 4:00 Thai Kick-
boxing Highlights 5:00 World
Windsurfing H/L

SONY ET

8:30am Gaane Jaane Maane
9:00 The Three Stooges 9:30
Dennis The Menace 10:00 I
Dream Of Jeannie 10:30 Public
Keya Bola 11:00 Pehchan
11:30 Cine Matinee-Hindi: Fea-
ture Film 2:30 Kismet 3:00 Za-
min Asman 3:30 Mere Message
Meri Geet 4:00 Surf-Wheel Of
Fortune (Game Show) 4:30 Jai
Br Hanuman 5:00 10 Civil Lines
5:30 The Three Stooges 6:00
Mere Message Meri Geet 6:30
Dennis The Menace 7:00 Pre-
mier 7:30 I Dream Of Jeannie
8:00 Surf-Wheel Of Fortune
8:30 Cine Prime-Hindi: Feature

Hand/Naat 8:20 Cartoon 8:30
Khabrain 8:45 Beauty Care
8:50 Fun Katha 9:10 Dhanak
& Health Tips 10:05 Har Taan
Heli Deepak 10:30 English Film
Home Improvement 10:55 Milli
Naghma 11:00 Khabrain 11:10
Anita (Serial) 12:00 Sports Hour
1:02 Bismillah 1:15 The Science
Show 2:00 Yeh Janan (Music
video) 2:25 Animated Classics
3:15 Geography & Sammar
School 4:20 Mithi Sona 5:00 Al-
lah Huma Labak 5:25 Gahni
Main Soochta Hoen. (Drama
Serial) 6:25 Aou Courses 7:00
Dhanak 7:45 English News
8:15 UN Quiz 8:45 Jab (Drama
Serial) 9:00 Break for Headline
News 10:00 Khabrainama
11:20 VCD Top Ten (Pakistan)
Video Countdown 12:30 Dr.
Quin Medicine Women Jean

Saymor) 1:35 Khas Khas
Khabrain/ Close down

DD 7

10:30 Janmadin 10:35 Classical
Music 11:00 Ghare Bare 12:30
Prachin (Serial) 1:00 Janani
(Serial) 1:30 TBA 2:30 Batayan
(Serial) 3:00 TBA/Nirjan Dupure
Premier Gaan 3:30 Dik Darshan
5:05 Science Prog. Bighan
Prasange 5:30 News 6:00 Pali
Katha 6:30 Chitrangaji 7:00
Amake Dekhun 7:30 Bangla
Sambad 7:55 Dinndan 8:00
Param Purush Ramkrishna 8:30
Naam 9:00 Janani 9:30 Jeeban
Setu 10:00 Bengali Movie Club
Film Show 1:00 Closed

EL TV

00:30am Jugal Jodi 01:30
Nasir Hussain Special 02:30
Party Time 03:30 Chalti Ka
Naam Gaadi 04:30 Mohammed
Rafi Special 05:30 Jugal Jodi
06:30 Nasir Hussain Special
07:30 Party Time 08:30 Chalti
Ka Naam Gaadi 09:30 Mo-
hammed Rafi Special 10:30
Awaz Nayi Andaz Wahi 11:30
Newsline 12:00 Meri Marzi
12:30 Dori Maa (Bina Roy,
Ashok Kumar) 3:15 Songs 3:45
Udhur Ka Sidoor (Jeetendra,
Asha P) 6:30 Kudeepak (Gur-
rati) 9:15 Songs 10:00 Sharabi
(Amrtaab, Jaya P) 12:45 Kaya-
ab (Jeetendra, Shaana) 3:30
Film Baaten 4:00 Mandir Masjid
(Nutan, Sajid Khan)

ZEE CINEMA

6:30 Hit Hai Fit Hai 7:00 TBA
9:00 Film Baaten 9:30 Bees
Saal Baad (Mithun, Dimple)
12:15 Anne Samne Antakshi
12:30 Dori Maa (Bina Roy,
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Khabrain 8:45 Beauty Care
8:50 Fun Katha 9:10 Dhanak
& Health Tips 10:05 Har Taan
Heli Deepak 10:30 English Film
Home Improvement 10:55 Milli
Naghma 11:00 Khabrain 11:10
Anita (Serial) 12:00 Sports Hour
1:02 Bismillah 1:15 The Science
Show 2:00 Yeh Janan (Music
video) 2:25 Animated Classics