

FOCUS

Overcoming the Faults in Democratic Exercises

by K M Idriss Ali

DEMOCRACY teaches us to accept verdict and thus, rule of the majority. This means that consensus of the majority's opinion prevails in the exercise of the democracy to decide on any issue of national and international importance. At the demise of the communist power, democratic process is in vogue in most of the countries throughout the world. Yet, the normal process of democratisation is tempered in many countries by the muscle power of some vested individuals. The weaker section of the population cannot express their opinion freely as it ought to be under democratic system and instead, are compelled to cast their opinion against their very will and in favour of others, simply being under the duress of the muscle power. This practice is prevailing in most of the Third World countries. However, it can be overcome with the improvement of national socio-economic structure and level of literacy in the country, as is evidenced in USA and Europe.

The major fault in democratisation process currently practised in most of the countries, particularly in the third world, appears to be completely different from the very concept of democratic lesson. It is learnt from the democratic concept that the verdict of the majority will be implemented; but is it really happening? Let us discuss what has been happening in Bangladesh, particularly in the parliamentary elections. In the last national election of 1996, Awami League secured about 37 per cent of the total national votes cast in its favour and 63 per cent voters cast their votes against Awami League; but Awami League is ruling the country against the very will of the majority of the population.

Similarly, BNP secured about 31 per cent of the total votes cast in the national election of 1991 and 69 per cent votes were gained by other parties against BNP; but BNP formed the government and ruled the country. In both these occasions, the very lesson of democracy that the majority's opinion must prevail is utterly ignored and the very concept of democracy, the "golden deer" of the modern age, is humiliated and put into trash. Similar phenomena are also prevalent in many other countries and in many institutions and organisations that boast of practising the so-called democracy in their affairs. Thus, the presently practised democratic process has enormous loopholes and thus demerits; some of them can be cited as follow:

1. The very concept and lesson of democracy that the opinion and verdict of the majority are to be followed and implemented are not at all maintained. This has been clarified above in the case of national election that the party securing less than 50 per cent of the total national votes cast rules the country.

2. Under the present prevailing system, the ruling party is tempted to behave autocratically. We have been observing it for the last few electoral terms, though some party is more autocratic than the others.

3. The presently democratic system tends to compel the ruling party to allure parliamentarians of other parties like "horse trading" to secure vote casting in its favour to attain "majority's support" on any issue. And this is mostly out of egotism than on national interest. This breeds autocratic temperament in the ruling party.

4. In the present system, members of parliament are tempted to accumulate more

wealth by any means to spend it during the next election and secure votes under bribe or duress exerted by the hired muscle.

5. To remain in power, the ruling party becomes dependent on muscle power to subjugate the opposing force. This induces a tendency for dependence more on muscle strength than on intellectual strength.

To avoid fundamental faults as well as to enrich the democratic process, many countries like New Zealand, Turkey, some of CIS members have adopted a policy to accept voting results on Proportion Vote Securing Basis. That is, a party, not the individual candidate, has the right to claim, gain and possess the number of MPs on the basis of the total votes cast in favour of that party.

"horse trading" in the determination of gaining majority in the assembly, because it is not the individual member of the parliament, but the party as a whole which is to decide whether to secede or to remain with the ruling cluster. The lawmakers may formulate the terms and conditions of "operando" of the proposed "Proportion Vote Securing Basis", for example, the party or parties securing less than the specific percentage (say 5 or 10 per cent) of the total national votes cast, may not claim or may not be eligible for any membership in the Parliament. The party will have the privilege and option to nominate and select the best possible parliamentarians based on their individual character, honesty, conduct, crisma, national feeling, and integrity and so on and not on their muscle power. In fact, the merits are more than the demerits in the proposed process; some of which are highlighted below:

1. The parties securing less than the specific vote (5 or 10 per cent) of the total votes cast will eventually form a group by compromising ideas and ideals among themselves in the interest of the nation and their own and will then prepare themselves to do better in the next election. Thus, a snow-ball effect among the political parties will come into effect and will eventually eliminate the smaller parties which contribute virtually nothing but chaos to the normal democratic process, and rather hamper the overall de-

velopment in the country.

2. This process will grow idealism in the party system and will eventually eliminate the need of muscle power, begetting peaceful situation in the society. This may be the best achievement of the proposed system.

3. The expenses of the electioneering will understandably be minimised.

4. The voters will feel free to cast their vote without any fear of terrorism.

5. This will also help musclemen to change their attitude towards humbleness and welfare activities from terrorism and evil acts, if they wish to secure party affiliation.

6. This process will bring the elite, honest, humble, intelligent, efficient and active people of the constituencies to the Parliament; in fact the cream of the society will come to the Parliament.

7. Thus, the Parliament will be enriched with people of quality and idealism in place of those many of whom even un-

derstand very little about the constituent assembly.

8. Then democracy will, in real sense, have firm footing in place of lip-servicing.

9. This system will cultivate tolerance and tendency to accommodate and incorporate better ideas and suggestions of other collaborative parties and individuals.

10. The formation of government by the parties securing more than 50 per cent of the total votes cast is, in effect, the formation of the government on consensus, which the present government is claiming to be and, in fact, preaching.

11. Since the political parties are required under the proposed system to achieve the highest level of performance to attract popular confidence, they cannot afford to depend on muscle strength but excellence in all activities. There will be no need of occupying residential halls of students and educational institutions. This will free our students from the curses in which they are now. The people will have the best opportunity

to have their children well-educated within the prescribed period without any session jam.

There are so many positive factors which can be put forward in favour of the proposed "Proportion Vote Securing Basis" system, where the voters cast their votes in favour of a party instead of a candidate or person of the constituency. The enormous demerits encountered in the presently exercised system, some of which elaborated above, are not applicable to and prevalent in the proposed "Proportion Voting Securing Basis", because it is the party and not the individual candidate will receive the vote. So, if the goodwill of the party flourishes, the party will receive more confidence of voters. In fact, it is a clear choice between all the positive characters of a party and all the negative odds of muscle power. People are generally good. But they are made corrupt by the negative process of forcefully securing of votes either by bribe or under duress.

This article is written in a time when the national interest is at risks in all spheres, whether it is humanism, culture, national identity and national survival or personal security. According to recent reports published in many local daily newspapers, on an average 4

persons are killed, one woman is raped, 2 hijackings occur each day. There are many such incidents which are happening every day but remain unreported. On the other day, the honourable Communication Minister expressed grave concern about the chaos and indiscipline prevailing among many officials, employees and workers in many offices recent press reports also indicate that such situation of indiscipline also exist in the secretariat and other institutions. All these evils are occurring definitely as a result of the faulty exercise of democratic systems in the name 'true' democracy.

Moreover, once the ruling party shows tendency to depend on muscle power to contain any abnormal situation and then if the muscle power is, somehow or other, let loose, for any reason, the situation goes out of control. This is the dark side of the faulty democratic exercises. It is, therefore, the time that the conscious people rise and do something to save the nation and the institution as well as the next generation.

K M Idriss Ali, PhD, is Chief Scientific Officer, Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Ganakbari, Savar. He will appreciate comments on and input to his proposal from enlightened readers.

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of Fourth Prosecution Witness

Cross-examination of Mohammad Quddus Sikder, a retired havildar and fourth prosecution witness in Bangabandhu murder case, began after he completed his deposition to the court July 28 (Monday).

Excerpts from cross-examination of the witness by advocate Mohammad Hanif, state defence for absconding accused Abu Hashem Mridha:

Q: When have received promotion as havildar?

A: In January, 1975.

Q: Where was your posting then?

A: One Field Artillery at Comilla.

Q: Where were you first posted after coming to Dhaka in 1975?

A: First at Ganabhaban.

Q: Who was your officer-in-command and Two-i-C (second in command) at Ganabhaban?

A: Capt. Abdul Bashar was the officer and there was no Two-i-C.

Q: Who was the havildar major?

A: There was no havildar major.

Q: On which date you were posted at the No 32 residence of Bangabandhu?

A: I don't remember the date.

Q: On which date you performed your first duty at the Bangabandhu's house?

A: August 2, 1975.

Q: Where did you change duty on August 14?

A: At the house of Bangabandhu.

Q: Whom did you hand over the duty?

A: To Havildar Abdul Ghani.

Q: Who was the havildar major?

A: Eight, including me.

Q: What did they carry?

A: SLR.

Q: Did you come to duty again on August 15?

A: Yes.

Q: Where did you meet havildar Abdul Ghani?

A: On the road, in front of Bangabandhu's house.

Q: Where did you receive the charge from him?

A: I hoisted the flag before receiving the charge.

Q: What was the time then?

A: The time was 5 O'Clock.

Q: Where was havildar Abdul Ghani at that time?

A: He was in the guardroom.

Q: You did not receive the charge?

A: From the bank.

Q: How far is the house of Bangabandhu from the bank of the lake?

A: Approximately 40 yards towards the north.

Q: How long the firing continued?

A: Five to 10 minutes.

Q: Can you say the range of rifle-shots?

A: Yes, effective for 300 yards and maximum range one mile.

Q: How long after the incident have you come to give witness?

A: About 21/2 years.

Q: How did you know that you have to give witness in the case?

A: I was summoned.

Q: When did you give statement to the IO?

A: 4/11/1996.

Q: Where did you give the statement?

A: To IO Abdul Kahar Akanda on the third floor of the CID office at Malibagh.

Q: You yourself were involved with this killing.

A: This is not true.

Q: You made false deposition as a tutored witness.

A: This is not true.

— UNB

Verbatim texts of further cross examinations shall be published as and when we receive them.

Metropolitan

HERE and THERE

OCAB

The half yearly general meeting of the Overseas Correspondents Association Bangladesh (OCAB) was held at the National Press Club yesterday with its president Zahiduzzaman Faruque in the chair, reports BSS.

OCAB general secretary Farid Hossain presented a brief report on the activities of the organisation during the last six months and suggested activities for the next six months of the year.

Former OCAB presidents Hasan Sayeed and Zafar Ahmed Chowdhury and executive committee member Ataur Rahman discussed the general secretary's report.

The meeting decided to organise a seminar on "25 years of journalism in Bangladesh" in the later part of the year.

BOU

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) has signed a consultancy package agreement with a British consultancy firm involving Taka three and half crore, reports BSS.

The 34 man-month consultancy package programme will be financed by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and becomes effective from first of August.

As per the agreement, consultancy services will be given on academic programmes of schools, media production, information technology, printing, student support services, examination system and audit management.

BOU Vice Chancellor Prof M Aminul Islam and the resident representative of the consultancy firm, Cambridge Education Consultants Limited Martin Pittler Gilham signed the agreement Monday on behalf of both the countries.

Presided over by the committee president, Whip Prof Rafiqul Islam, the meeting decided that the committee will hold meeting on 1st and 3rd week of every month.

It was also attended by Iman Ahmed, Advocate Fazle Rabbi, AKM Mosarraf Hossain, Abul Kalam Azad, M Dabirul Islam, Kazi Shamsur Rahman, Shah Mohammad Abul Hossain and Farook Khan.

The signing ceremony was attended, among others, by ADB project officer Jamal Mahmud, representative of the consultancy firm Jake Ross and some senior officials of the university.

The Prime Minister will be accompanied by a business group from Bangladesh.

Banglacrift

A one-day mini workshop on Implementation and Management of a Common Facility Centre was held at the auditorium of Bishwa Sahitya Kendra on Monday.

It was organised by Banglacrift with co-operation and support of German Federation of Small Business (ZDH) Partnership Programme, says a press release.

Selima Ahmad, chairman, ZDH Standing Committee, presented keynote paper.

Among others, Alauddin, chief designer of BSCIC, Nizamul Islam, Director (Commodity) of EPB, Al-haj Kazi Md Saifullah Islam, vice-president of FBCI addressed the workshop.

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