

Political customs and political problems

KHANDAKAR QUDRAT-I-ELAHI

EMOCRACY is a political system in which the public chooses some of its fellow citizens to manage the business of the government. This constitutional law is founded on the belief that people are the sovereign authority of the state. Therefore, when a "fair" general election is held, the outcome of the election becomes both final and mandatory for politicians, simply because it is the sovereign choice. Thus, fair general election constitutes the first fundamental requirement of democratic governance.

During our three-decade old political history, the 5th and the 7th parliamentary elections were most fair by all standards of our political life. Yet, neither of the two parliaments performed their assigned duties, which include analyzing legislative bills that eventually become new government policies and reviewing critically the government activities. These two duties are together called "public accountability" in democracy. During the BNP regime, the main opposition AL boycotted parliament along with all other opposition members. In the current AL regime, the main opposition BNP is doing the same thing, arguing that AL did it during its time.

This situation is indeed subject to constant concerned criticisms. Yet, these criticisms do seem to investigate the serious constitutional question that this parliament-boycotting custom has created and the implications which it bears for the future political conditions in the country.

Democracy is described as a system of "majority rule". In our system, those candidates, who secure more votes than their rivals in general elections, are declared elected to the parliament. After the elections. President invites the leader of the political party, which commands absolute majority, to form the government. The next second majority party assumes the role of main opposition. In the absence of absolute majority, a coalition is needed to prove a majority in the parliament for forming the government. If that is not possible, people vote again to determine a majority party.

Thus, all issues in the democratic political system are settled by the conceptions of "majority" and "majority rule". These conceptions raise an enormously interesting constitutional question

about the legitimacy of the past BNP government and the current AL government: They were certainly legitimate when they were sworn in, but when the opposition boycotted the parliament, their legitimacy immediately came under question. The reason is that the government derives its legitimacy from the parliament. So, when the majority elected members of parliament boycott its sessions, this elected body no longer exists by the principles of democracy!

Therefore, the parliament-boycotting and the continuation of governments during the past decade were unconstitutional. If we accept these practices as constitutional, then we have very little to complain about what is happening in the country. This suggests that the parliamentboycotting and the continuation of the government practices are political customs which have been established during the past decade. These customs seem to say: We need "fair elections" only to determine which party is supposed to form the government. Once this function is performed, the parliament has little or no other use to us!

In addition to this constitutional question, these political customs have created an important political issue. This issue may be better explained in terms of employer-employee relationship. Once a person is offered a job, he/she is supposed to have the "right" to retain that job so long he/she fulfils the terms of the contract. One of the most important terms of the contract is to satisfactorily perform the duties for which the person has been hired. If the person fails to meet this contract criterion he/she has no legal or moral right to retain the job

In the parliament-boycotting custom, this universal employer-employee relationship is being seriously violated. The public, being the sovereign authority of the state, chooses some of its fellow citizens to run the business of the government. This means that the public is the employer and the selected citizens are its employees. All members of the parliament have one common duty, which is to attend parliamentary sessions to fulfil their duty of "public accountability". When anyone fails to fulfil this duty, he/she breaks the terms of contract of the job. Thus, all opposition members of the current parliament are breaking their contracts, which is mere repetition of what was done during the BNP

The parliament-boycotting opposition members have no right to retain their seats and enjoy all the privileges which accrue to them due to their offices. And they have no right to seek reelection when next votes are held. The reason is they violate all customs, principles and laws concerning democratic governance. Thus, the situation that currently exists in the country is the most serious and ominous.

Why and how has this parliament-boycotting custom developed in our society? This is the question that demands our utmost attention. If our politicians knew that they could not retain their parliamentary seats and seek reelection by boycotting parliamentary sessions, then they would not have resorted to this political tactics. And it does not seem to be in the best interest of

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The most expected answer to the first part of this question, is apparently our politicians, as they are the leaders who bring about changes in society. But in this particular case, our politicians can hardly be expected to change this custom. The reasons have been hinted above. When government power changes through fair elections, politicians cannot afford to continue pursuing political tactics which might displease the public, for that will cause their defeat in elections.

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the opposition politicians' to let the government complete its so-called elected tenure. Therefore, politicians though obviously the perpetrators of these undesirable political customs, are not its ultimate cause. All politicians, have only one purpose to pursue to control the government authority. When they need public consents to achieve this goal, they largely follow what the people want.

This line of reasoning points the responsibility to the public. The public must believe that a political party, if elected through fair polls, has the right to be in power no matter whether parliament works or not. And it must also believe that the opposition members of the parliament have the right to retain their parliamentary seats and seek reelection, even though they refuse to perform their duty. The parliament-boycotting phenomenon that has been created during the past decade is then the outcome of political customs which we, the public, have created. And we could not have created this custom, unless we believe that parliament-boycotting is a "right" form of political strategy of our political parties when they happen BNP did not vacate the opposition seats, and called for by-elections, when the opposition boycotted parliamentary sessions en-masse. AL is now following BNP's footsteps. These BNP-AL actions should give us enough evidences that changing this custom is not in the best interests of our political parties. In other words, we cannot expect our politicians to voluntarily change their parliament-boycotting political strategy.

At this stage, we should perhaps specify the term, public, a bit clearly. In our country, 80 per cent of the people live in the rural areas, who are little concerned with what happens in government. Of the 20 per cent urban population, the vast majority, who are poor and the real victims of the opposition activities, have little or no power to say anything about it. Therefore, politicians care very little about them. This leaves the middle and high income urban dwellers, who constitute a tiny proportion of the total population, are the real public in the current context. They are the members of so-called civil society, professionals of all kinds, salaried income earners, people dominating the private sector and public media. These

are the people who are responsible for creating the political customs of parliament-boycotting and the continuation of government.

Perhaps, an example would make the point a little more clear. Political hartals, which are being perpetrated over the decade, are natural consequences of the opposition's parliamentboycotting tactics. Some business leaders and newspapers have denounced these hartals. But Salaried income earners, such as college and university teachers, and service holders in government and semi-government organizations. who constitute the overwhelming majority of this public, do not seem to share these denouncing views. The reason is perhaps that hartal is a kind of bonus holiday for them, as their salaries are not affected. The situation might have been different if these people were not allowed to get their salaries for the hartal days, meaning that they might not find the opposition's hartals so demo-

We preach democracy, but do not practice it. However, since the democratic framework is the political system of governing our nation, we must seek solutions to our political problems in the theory on which the ideology of democracy is founded. This theory is the principle of social contract: Individuals, free and equal in rights, surrender their natural freedoms to the society in order to establish civil authority. The purpose of this contract is common welfare, which is supposed to bring security and happiness to all members of the society. This is not a contract between the ruler and the ruled; this is a contract between individuals who are free and equal in rights. The sovereign authority of the society is vested in the institution of government and the people, being this sovereign authority, choose deputies to exercise this power. These deputies stay in their offices so long as they respect their employers and sincerely carry out their duties.

We have a nation in which the people are the sovereign authority. This means that we exist, as a nation, by the theory of social contract. But we are failing to achieve our common goals, because our politicians our deputies are refusing to perform their duties. One way to force them to perform their duties is to bind them in some kind contract. This contract is implicit in the ideology of democracy, for without this notion of contract, a democratic system cannot work. It now seems to

have become absolutely clear that we need to make this contract explicit in our country by having it formally signed. The nature of this contract may be described as follows:

To participate in any upcoming general elections, which are conducted by the caretaker government, each candidate must sign this contract: I, so and so, solemnly declare that, if elected. I. as a public deputy, will sincerely perform my duties, which will include attending the parliamentary sessions regularly. If I fail to attend the parliamentary secessions regularly accordingly to the letter and spirit of our constitution. I will lose my seat in the parliament and lose the right to seek reelection.

After AL hands over the power to the caretaker government, the President might turn this conception of contact into an electoral law. This law will apply only to the parliamentarians who will be elected in the eight parliament and thereafter.

Our political leaders are our own creation. As one French philosopher has rightly observed: A nation gets the leadership it deserves. The fundamental objective of a political party, as indicated above, is to control the state power. It will choose a person as its leader who can help fulfil this objective. In democracy, this means that the person must be popular among the public. Therefore, in the ultimate analysis, the public creates its political leaders, not political parties. The public must accept this responsibility. Instead of blaming our political leaders, we ought to assume part of the blame and help our leaders perform their duties.

AL and BNP joined forces in the 1990's to form the first caretaker government in Bangladesh. The objective was to oust General Ershard from power, but the slogan was to ensure fair elections. Then AL and BNP seriously disagreed about institutionalizing this system and AL eventually forced BNP to enact the system. But there is nothing in the system that can force the elected politicians to perform their responsibilities i.e., to make the system effective. And our politicians have little reason to make it effective. This means that we, the public, have the responsibility to make this system effective, for we are the sovereign authority of our nation.

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PROPOSED

Other hotels

In Memoriam

Abul Khair-as I knew him

ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

met for the first time Abul Khair in the beginning of 1970. I had joined the then Government of East Pakistan on deputation as Director of Public Relations and Joint Secretary. In fact I had sought this transfer myself from my post as Press Attache in the Pakistan Embassy in West Germany. Earlier in 1969 I had come on home leave to Dhaka and witnessed the popular upheaval, which freed Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from the trumped up charge of conspiracy at Agartala and had swept away the regime of Governor Monem Khan from power. I had sensed then that my land was pregnant with great events and I sought a posting in

I discovered that I was presiding over a tiny empire of nearly 500 people and I had offices throughout East Pakistan. Among my close colleagues there was Abul Khair, Director of Films. Almost immediately I struck deep friendship with him. I found him an uncomplicated patriotic Bangalee.

One of the first projects that we took in hand was to make a film on our national rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. This was the pet project of Abul Khair In order to realise his project Abul Khair travelled far and wide. He went to places where Nazrul spent his childhood in West Bengal. He went to schools where the poet had studied in his childhood. Abul Khair went to Karachi, where the poet was stationed during the First World War. And he succeeded in making a nice comprehensive film on poet Kazi Nazrul

On 12 November 1970 a cyclone and tidal wave struck the coastal area of East Pakistan. The disaster was so massive that according to reports it killed nearly 500000 people and laid waste the whole area. Immediately after the tragedy Gen. Yahya Khan, the Chief Martial Law Administrator, stopped over in Dhaka on his way to Islamabad after his visit to China. He failed to comprehend the gravity of the disaster and flew away to West Pakistan. Later when they realised the extent of the disaster he came back to Dhaka.

The government of Pakistan made some feeble effort to make amends. One day Abul Khair rang me in my office and wanted me to see a documentary film that came from West Pakistan and was about to be released to the movie houses.

The film showed relief material being collected in West Pakistan the concern for Pakistanis towards the people of East Pakistan. The truth was, however, quite the opposite and a gulf had been created between the people of the two wings. A Dhaka daily had graphically headlined 'ora elona' (they did not come'). Abul Khair wanted to stop distribution of the film for it would cause great commotion among the Bangalee public.



agreed with him and informed the Chief Secretary (Shafi-ul-Azam). Maj. Salek saw the film and we decided that the film would be screened at the Governor's House and be seen by the Governor Admiral Ahsan and Martial Law Administrator Lt. Gen. Yakub Khan. After viewing the film it was decided that Maj. Salek and I would edit the film before release for public viewing. The film was put in cold storage and never saw the light of day.

The making of the film on poet Nazrul Islam took the whole of 1970 and a part of 1971. On 26 March 1971 the War of Liberation began. There was curfew imposed by the military authorities throughout East Pakistan and we stayed home. On the 28 March I believe, that a military jeep came to my house in Gulshan and took me to the cantonment. I was faced with a Brigadier of the Pakistan army. Since I was the seniormost officer, the Brigadier spoke to me. I found that from my Ministry there were officers like the Zaman brothers from Radio and TV. there was Hashim of the Associated Press of Pakistan and several others.

The Brigadier told me that as was customary in a Martial Law regime they would set up a censorship office and it would be located in my office. I told him that it would be a wrong move since the journalists were angry with the events and would resent coming to my office, going through the 'double protected

area'. I was determined to have as little to do as possible with censorship. The Brigadier told me that would be the head of censorship. told him that I had never seen censorship since I had worked in capitals like Istanbul, Paris, New York, Tokyo and Bonn. My globe trotting credentials seemed to impress the Brigadier. The censorship office was set up in the PID office and although I was technically the head I never set foot in that office. Throughout the nine months of our Liberation War the censorship was performed by Mai. Salek who did information work on behalf of the Martial Law.

Life fell into a pattern after 26 March 1971. An officer was brought from West Pakistan as the Secretary of the Information Ministry. The main job was performed by him since Bangalees could not be entrusted with sensitive Information work. My job was to look after my people, who in one way or other were under continuous pressure. My senior colleagues would thrust their heads through the doors every morning and make sure that I was in my seat.

Of all my colleagues I had the most problem with Abul Khair He wore his heart on his sleeves and told me that he would go across the border to Calcutta. He added that the Pakistan military could not have failed to notice him at Road Number 32 (Bangabandhu's residence) which he visited almost daily. I told him that before getting him the Pakistan military would make me a target since I was a regular visitor to Road 32. I could not hold back Abul Khair. In August 1971 he crossed the border to reach Calcutta and took the Nazrul film with him. I am happy to note that the film was first screened in a movie hall in independent Bangladesh with President Abu Sayeed Chowdhury as the chief quest.

Following the brutal assassina-tion of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1971, Abul Khair left Dhaka. I found him in New York in the late seventies. He was living in a flat across the UN building and he invited me and my wife to a dinner. We reminisced about the War of Liberation and the turn of events. In the eighties and nineties met him sometimes. He had become a full time artiste and we witnessed the flowering of his talent. With his passing away I have lost a dear friend.

Developing hospitality industry and tourism

ALI M. IDRIS

OSPITALITY Industry is now-a-days, one of the major industries in many countries of the world. This comprises operation of hotels, motels, resorts, guesthouses, rest houses, picnic and recreation spots etc. while industrialists, businessmen, professionals, working people and of course tourists are the principal customers. In fact in many countries, hospitality industry is the principal source of foreign exchange

Tourism indicates touring activities by local inhabitants and foreign visitors throughout the country. In order to develop tourism many preconditions have to be fulfilled, such as proper infrastructure, abundant, cheap and secured commuter road, rail, water and air abundant, cheap and secured staying places viz. hotels, motels, resorts etc. furnished with recreational and entertainment facilities; abundant and secured tourist spots viz. historical places, beaches, parks, waterfalls, lakes, rivers, hills and hill tracts etc. and lastly a peaceful political and administrative atmosphere in the country.

Hospitality industry and tourism are closely related, one cannot thrive without the development of the other. Hospitality industry cannot march forward without the foreign visitors and tourists, the local inhabitants form only a portion of the customers. Foreign exchange cannot be earned without influx of tourists and visitors from abroad. On the other hand tourism cannot thrive without first constructing the hotels, motels, resorts, questhouses etc. So the two sectors are very closely

National infrastructure and facilities: No country can develop without necessary infrastructure viz roads, highways and bridges; sea ports and airports; rivers and coastal waters worth navigation; airways and rail roads etc. These infrastructures are essential and should adequately connect the tradecentres as well as all important spots and resorts worth visitation by tourists and the local people.

As for Bangladesh the following infrastructures are badly needed at

Sonargaon Hotel

and expanded.

expanded.

the existing ones improved at

Barisal, Rajshahi, Cox's Bazar,

Rangpur, Khulna, Dinajpur etc. and

commuters should be modernized

(v) Railway transportation for

(vi) Road transportation facilities

(vii) River and coastal vessels for

(viii) Beaches in Cox's Bazar,

Arrival of visitors and forex earn-

ing: Total arrival of foreign visitors in

Bangladesh amounted to 172,781 in

2000, it might go up to 180,000 this

year. But this number looks like a

drop in the ocean if compared with

that of other countries of the world.

Kuakata and other coastal spots

should be developed for construc-

tion of more hotels, motels etc.

commuters/tourists should be

modernized and their number

with more air-conditioned buses,

taxis, minibuses, etc. should be

number of flights increased.

(i) With completion of Bangabandhu Bridge steps should now be taken to build Padmabridge, Bhairab bridge and other small bridges on all national high-(ii) Highways and roads with

necessary fly-overs and by-passes in the cities and inter-connections with tourist spots and places of interest should be further improved.

(iii) Rail link between Dhaka and

Similarly foreign exchange earned by Bangladesh amounted to US \$24.6 million which also seems to be very little compared to other countries of the world.

From the above, it appears that Bangladesh is still lagging far, far behind in tourism. Bangladesh must endeavour to develop its tourism facilities and attract visitors. In this regard the government should play the major role in development of both tourism and hospitality industry.

ues for six months when tourists

rush to tropical countries. We are

blessed with the longest beach of

the world which, if developed, can

alone attract one million tourists

every year. The BPC should take

initiative either to do this themselves

or invite foreign investors to do this,

alone or in collaboration. The gov-

ernment should also take appropri-

ate steps to develop the beach with

modern facilities for tourists, visitors

Sonargaon and other hotels in

Dhaka: Sonargaon Hotel is the

largest 5 star hotel in Dhaka with 305

saleable rooms presently, but with

its expansion plan, which is under-

way, it will have additional 150

rooms, car parking for 500 cars,

ballroom for 1500 people, 3 restau-

rants and other facilities. The other 5

stars hotel is Seraton. A chart of

rooms and other facilities of

Sonargaon and other hotels in

Dhaka is given below:

and local people.

2107 Room Grand ballroom 3 (estimated Meeting room 40 Restaurant 40 Swimming pool Tennis court The proposed new hotels include: Name of upcoming hotels Status and questrooms Sonargaon hotel (Extension) 5 star 150 rooms Dhaka Sheraton hotel (Extension) 5 star 60 rooms 5 star 250 rooms West Inn SKS Airport 3 star 250 rooms

EXISTING

1187

Other hotels

Shugandha

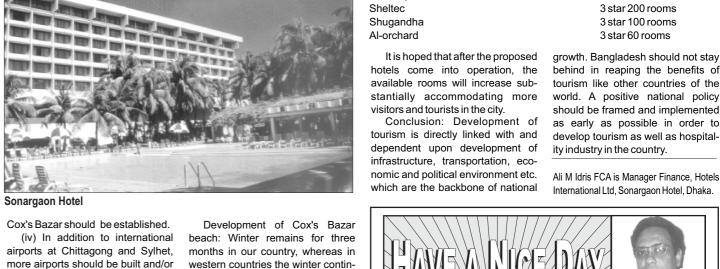
behind in reaping the benefits of tourism like other countries of the world. A positive national policy should be framed and implemented as early as possible in order to develop tourism as well as hospitality industry in the country.

3 star 200 rooms

3 star 100 rooms

3 star 60 rooms

Ali M Idris FCA is Manager Finance, Hotels International Ltd, Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka.



Sheltec



All health information to keep you up to date

Know your medicines Inhalers

Aerosol inhalers contain a solution or suspension of a drug under pressure. A valve mechanism ensures the delivery of the recommended dosage when the inhaler is activated. A mouthpiece fixed to the device facilitates inhalation of the drug as it is released from the canister. The correct technique is important; printed instructions should be followed carefully. Aerosol inhalers are used for respiratory conditions such as

Suppositories and pessaries

Suppositories and pessaries are solid, bullet-shaped drug forms specially designed for easy insertion into the rectum (rectal suppository) or vagina (pessary). They contain a drug and an inert (chemically inactive) substance that is often derived from cocoa butter or another type of vegetable oil. The active drug is gradually released in the rectum or vagina as the suppository or pessary dissolves at body temperature.

Next: Tips on vitamins.

Garfield ®









