

DYNASTIC LEADERSHIP

# Of political parties

What are the outcomes of such trends? One clear result is that talented and competent people, who are interested in promoting public good but do not have dynastic connections, are increasingly losing interest in getting involved in party politics as they see no future for their upward mobility in the party hierarchy. The absence of such competent and dedicated people is creating a vacuum which is being filled by others whose main interest is to make money through involvement in party politics.



ROUNAQ JAHAN

MUCH has been written about dynastic leadership of political parties in Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh is not the only country with dynastic party leadership. In three other South Asian countries we have witnessed such leadership. In India since independence in 1947, the Congress Party has been led by three generations of Nehrus: Jawaharlal Nehru, his daughter Indira Gandhi, Indira's son Rajiv Gandhi and now Rajiv's Italian born widow Sonia Gandhi. The fourth generation is waiting in the wings: Rajiv's daughter Priyanka and his son Rahul, who has already been elected to Parliament from the ancestral constituency of Amethi. In Pakistan, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), has been led by two generations of Bhuttos since its birth in 1967: Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter Benazir Bhutto. In Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) founded in 1951 has been led by two generations of Bandarnaiques: S.D. Bandarnaike, his wife Srimavo, and now his daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga.

What makes Bangladesh different from the other three South Asian countries? First, Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia where both major parties, who could win elections and form governments are headed by dynastic leaders. Indeed of the four major political parties in Bangladesh only the Jamaat-Islami has demonstrated no tendency towards dynastic leadership. The Awami League (AL) and

the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) have been headed by two dynastic successors, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia for nearly a quarter century. Both parties appear to be preparing for the succession of the third generation. The BNP is ready for the succession of Khaleda Zia's elder son, Tareq Rahman, who has reportedly masterminded the successful 2001 election campaign and is now running the party organisation, heading the faction of the young turks. And there is recent buzz in the media about Sheikh Hasina's son, Sajib Wazed Joy entering politics to assist his mother. In the Jatiya party, led by H.M. Ershad, his first wife Raushan has already been promoted to leadership position and his second wife Bidisha's claims are now being pushed. On the other hand, in contrast to Bangladesh, in the other three South Asian countries only one major political party, Congress in India, the PPP in Pakistan and SLFP in Sri Lanka, is led by dynastic leaders. There are other major parties, such as BJP in India, Muslim League in Pakistan and United National Party in Sri Lanka where leaders have been able to climb to the top through non-dynastic route and form governments after winning elections. Thus, despite dominance by dynastic leadership in one major party, there is space for leadership development in other parties by non-dynastic politicians in these three countries.

Second, in Bangladesh state and political power have been concentrated in the hands of only two dynastic individual leaders for a prolonged period without interruption. In the other three South Asian countries we have seen much more rapid change, rotation and power sharing. For example, in India, Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister during 1966-1977 and again during 1980-84 but during her first tenure as Prime Minister she did not head Congress party. She was President of Congress party during 1960-61 and then again from 1978-84.



Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister (1984-87) and headed the Congress Party (1984-91) at the same time following the model of Indira's second term but now Sonia Gandhi is heading only the party (1998 present) and not the government.

In Pakistan though Benazir has headed the political party, she was Prime Minister twice only for brief periods (1988-1990 and 1993-96) and is currently in exile. In Sri Lanka, the dynastic leader, Chandrika Kumaratunga has been president since 1994, but after the last election she has to share power with the political opposition. Thus, compared to Bangladesh dynastic leaders in the other three South Asian countries face more serious challenges from non-dynastic leaders.

Third, in Bangladesh, the trend towards dynastic succession is

rapidly spreading from top to mid to lower level political leadership positions. Nominations to parliamentary seats are increasingly being given to people with dynastic connections: wives succeeding husbands, sons succeeding fathers in different constituencies.

Women's reserved seats at various levels, from parliament to local bodies, are being used for favouring candidates with familial connections. Such tendencies are also prevalent in the other three South Asian countries but in Bangladesh the trend appears to be spreading the fastest.

What are the outcomes of such trends? One clear result is that talented and competent people, who are interested in promoting public good but do not have dynastic connections, are increasingly losing interest in getting involved in party politics as they see no future for their



upward mobility in the party hierarchy. The absence of such competent and dedicated people is creating a vacuum which is being filled by others whose main interest is to make money through involvement in party politics. Another obvious outcome is the loss of democratic practice within political parties. Dynastic succession rules out democratic competition for party leadership. Debates over policies, issues and visions within parties are discouraged and dissenting voices are silenced.

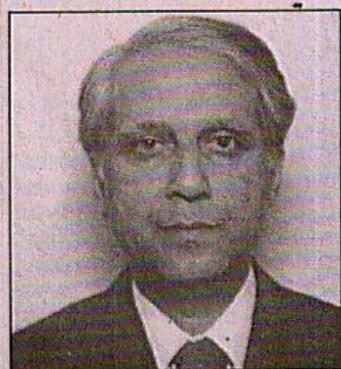
As a result we find increasing strength of sycophants pushing out independent thinkers from political parties. New and creative ideas are not being generated within the political process. It is interesting to note here that though South East Asian countries have more recently

undergone democratic transition, and South Asia can boast of nearly half a century tradition of elected and multiparty democracies, the former region displays less dynastic tendencies. Only in Singapore we have seen a father-son dynastic succession and dynastic rule for decades. In the other countries: Burma, Philippines and Indonesia leaders have succeeded in politics by using dynastic names after long gaps of time.

Gloria Arroyo and Megawati Sukornoputri became presidents of Philippines and Indonesia respectively decades after their fathers: Presidents Magapagal and Sukarno. South East Asian countries have been ruled by authoritarian governments but they have, on the whole, avoided dynastic politics. Can this be a factor contributing to their faster rates of social and economic development?

## A panoramic view

It is clear that dynastic politics has many facets -- some good and some bad. This format possesses interesting connotations. There is also a built-in advantage that cannot be overlooked.



MUHAMMAD ZAHIR

THE buzz about dynastic ambitions has surfaced once again in our political arena. The political participation of Sajib Wazed Joy, son of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in Awami League politics, has been seen as a mirror effect of domestic conditions. We are now looking at a possible situation where the BNP, the Awami League and Jatiya Party will all have close relatives of their leadership involved with their respective political parties.

Participation of family members in politics is not something new. It is as old as history and as current as modern international relations.

Aristotle wrote and spoke at length about 'demokratias', the Greek word for democracy. Along with Plato, he also dwelt on people's participation in governance. As the tutor of Alexander the Great, he was also not averse to monarchy as a form of government. In fact, both in ancient Greece and Rome, despite stated preference for republicanism,

dynastic ambitions surfaced more than once.

In Islam, the early years of the Caliphate at Medina witnessed democracy being practised in spirit as well as structure. It was only later, during the Umayyads, the Abbasids and the Fatimids that the concept changed and the principle of dynasty was firmly established.

This factor appears to have lingered on even today in Middle Eastern politics. We have monarchies in Morocco, Jordan and countries belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council. Dynastic rule as a format of governance was introduced into most of these countries by colonial powers who legitimised tribal leadership. We have also seen how dynastic rule has been overthrown in Egypt, Iraq and Iran -- sometimes peacefully, and at other times through bloodshed.

We have also had the recent example of Syria where the son has succeeded his father after his death. Speculation is rife that a similar possibility is being examined and considered in Egypt. Libya's President Qaddafi already has a hyper-active and high profile son waiting in the wings. His fondness for soccer management is apparently enough to ensure his chances as a successor to the presidency. Inverse logic no doubt, but obviously good enough for oil-rich Libya.

Further afield, we have observed how political dynasties have provided significant leadership at various levels in the United States. The present President of the United States

comes of a long line of politicians. His grandfather was a Senator and father a former President of the United States. We also know of the Kennedys and their crucial association with US politics since the 1940s. This family has already produced a President, a Senator, a Presidential candidate, a member of the US Cabinet, a member of the House of Representatives and now a Governor in California. We have also had the recent appearance of the Clintons -- the husband already a President, the wife a Senator, and also a possible future Presidential candidate.



There is however a slight difference here. Political positions have been achieved through the ballot and democratic processes. Consequently, the family-factor

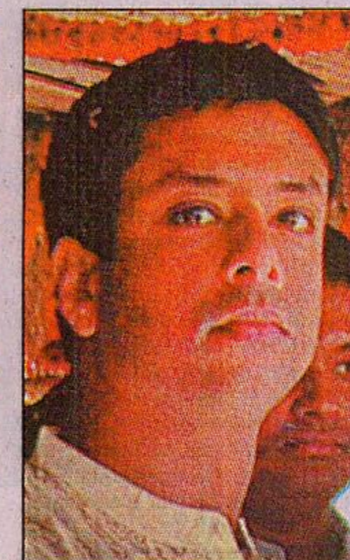
might have been a boon, but most definitely was not the reason for ensuring success of the person associated in the curve of politics.

In similar vein, British politics, which normally distances itself from dynastic ambitions, has watched how the Churchills over the last hundred years (grandfather, father and grandson), have uncommonly and actively engaged themselves with the activities of the Conservative party and national politics.

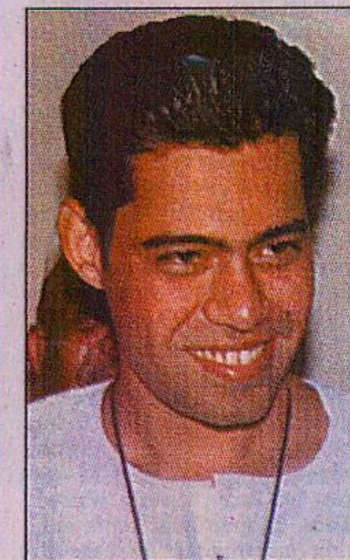
Nearer home we have watched political dynasties evolve across the horizon. It seems to have been more of a norm than a

been the sole exception, given the fact that Bhutan and Nepal are monarchies.

Motilal Nehru started it off within the Congress Party in British India. His interest in politics found root in his son Jawaharlal Nehru, who became the first Prime Minister of independent India. This continued with his daughter Indira Gandhi. She played a crucial role in defining India's image abroad. Next came her son Rajiv Gandhi because of his mother's untimely assassination. He might not have been chosen. The odds on his favourite was the younger son



departure. It started in undivided India almost a hundred years ago, and spread its wings over time, in more than one country of South Asia. Maldives has



Sanjay, but he had already met a tragic death. The interesting fact however was the introduction of the foreign origin factor. Rajiv's wife Sonia was of Italian origin,

tion has ruled that Stalinist country more than half a century. Control of the State has resided in the hands of only one family. The larger picture has been sacrificed and growth of institutions stifled to avoid any problem for the limited leadership.

It is clear that dynastic politics has many facets -- some good and some bad. This format possesses interesting connotations. There is also a built-in advantage that cannot be overlooked. As has been evidenced in India, this arrangement might also not be a bad thing, if the next generation can leverage the existing richness of the family experience.

In this context, the comment made by Sajib Wazed Joy, on his arrival was most revealing. Talking to journalists at Zia International Airport on 22 December, 2004 he made two observations. He noted that he did not think 'there is democracy in the country' and mentioned that -- 'my mother is here to give a lead. If needed, I will help her and hope the situation will change. I would like to contribute to the development of the country'.

Most interesting. Sajib Wazed has already had some experience in assisting his mother as an unofficial advisor when she was Prime Minister. Now, his objective is probably to get more involved with the direct functioning and formulation of the party's strategy. Juxtaposed with this is the prospect of providing indirect leadership to the younger activists of the Awami League. In this regard, he will most likely be doing what Tarique