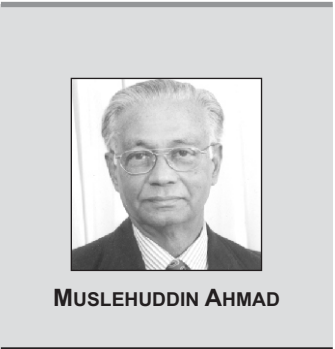


New democratic system that may suit Bangladesh!



THE Oxford dictionary meaning of democracy is -- "a system of government by all people of a country, usually through representatives whom they elect." But do all people participate in the election? No. Only a percentage which again varies from country to country. So the variation starts from there. Apart from this, there are various types of democracies: Presidential form which makes at least one President the most powerful man on earth; democracy with one candidate to vote for; democracy where the president continues to be elected for decades; military style of democracy where military chief is president (accepted as most trustworthy friend by the democratic countries); western style of democracy where sovereign is powerless, UNSC democracy where nuclear permanent members have dictatorial veto, democracy under occupation forces' tanks and bullets, and yet another kind of democracy as in our country, election for which is conducted under the unique caretaker government system. So, there are various kinds of democracies around the world and nobody can say which kind of democracy is the best.

**Political culture changed for bad**  
Whatever might be the types of democracies, one thing should remain constant and that is the people must have the final say in all affairs and there must be ways to bring that to actual practice. Today, Bangladesh faces the greatest challenge in its democratic practices. We achieved democracy through great sacrifices. It is gratifying to look back and see how the various political parties and particularly two major political parties worked together with the people to bring the downfall of the dictatorship. But the political culture in Bangladesh has unfortunately taken a bad turn where political parties feel that they must

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

We must not give any opportunity to others to lecture on us that Bangladesh does not have real democracy. We must be fully conscious of our rights and obligations and uphold our hard earned sovereignty and democracy.

remain in power or come to power whatever may be the cost to the nation and that has led us to this position today. The people are absolutely flabbergasted by the political situation in the country.

**Endless problems for citizens**  
There is a long list of problems that the citizens face: no culture of political tolerance and wild accusations and indeed abuses inflicted on political parties by other parties, parliament boycott, absence of democracy in the major political parties leading to extreme frustrations among the promising and dedicated politicians, successive bad governance. And also recent disturbing episodes: assassinations during successive governments including assassination of a former Finance Minister belonging to Awami League, killing of journalists, particularly investigative journalists, and killers hardly brought to justice, shameful grenade attack on a diplomat and several political and other killings that led to unwanted and undiplomatic open criticisms by the diplomats of some countries that infringe on our sovereignty (diplomats are certainly entitled to protest through diplomatic means i.e. through the Foreign Office. No diplomat of any country in the US could ever speak openly about America's human rights violations and particularly those in Guantanamo Bay and Afghan and Iraqi prisons ), urban corruption of unacceptable proportions, bribery and extortions, nepotism, continuous hartals in the name of democratic right, street battles of the political activists with the police as even peaceful hartal processions are not allowed to proceed, police excesses on opposition sometimes even without provocation, extreme politicisation of the bureaucracy including the security apparatus, unnecessary and increased politicisation of practically all other organs of the society relating to business, lawyers, doctors, engineers, media, teachers and students etc, weakness in the legal system and alleged corruption at lower judiciary while there is still no separation of Judiciary from the Executives.  
It's an endless list of grievances and people have been talking about

them through print media, particularly through private electronic media (TV channels) with a view to bringing them to the notice of the political parties but there is hardly any effect and hence the present unrest in the country. The people feel that this might take an undesirable turn any time. So it is high time for the civil society to come forward and talk to the political parties and suggest means that could bring an end to the present deadly political situation.

**New system to end unrest**  
In this context I would venture the following suggestions keeping in view the demands of the Opposition. Majority of the demands deserve favourable consideration by parties in power as many of these appear reasonable. But for that the parties must go to the parliament, debate them there for a solution or sit across the table for the same. This is what needs to be done in a democracy. The continued pressure for resignation and the ruling party's refusal to do so has put the country on to a destructive path.  
Bangladesh has been experiencing such political unrest for many years and the people have been suffering untold miseries. Therefore, it would be quite in order to go for a new kind of democracy which may

bring an end to the present political tussle for power. If power is the main concern and not people's interest and welfare, then the two parties the ruling coalition and the opposition coalition -- should choose to go for dividing the term of five years on the basis of the total popular votes or number of seats grabbed by each side. If, for example, coalition A gets 35 percent of the popular votes or say 250 seats and coalition B gets 32 percent votes or 175 seats in the parliament (the exact numbers may be different), then coalition A would govern for say three years and the other B say for two years. In other words, coalition A would hand over power to coalition B immediately after three years. So there would be no bloodshed for mid-term elections. This would obviously be a departure from the traditional democratic form. But, as stated above, the types of democracy differ from country to country and if sticking to the traditional type leads to political unrest and bloodshed, then the best course would be to do away with it and go for the one that suits the people and saves their lives. We already have the undemocratic system of caretaker government. So there should be no problem to choose something that is somewhat

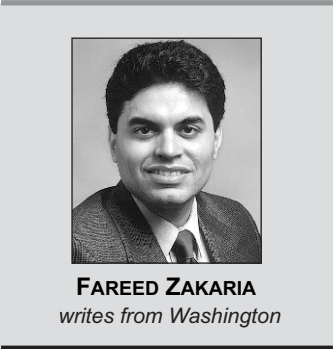
different from the traditional one. This may be tried for say two/three terms to see how it works and also go on plugging the loopholes, if any.

The argument is that such a system may not have regular opposition in the parliament and it may look like a national government. Yes, this is what is needed when our politicians are unable to work together amicably in a democratic manner. Anyway, have we ever been really having effective opposition in the parliament? Indeed, the new system would encourage members of the political parties to work as per their conscience within the party and voice opposition wherever necessary. It's high time to do that.

Showing respect to the leader(s) of parties is certainly important, but not at the expense of members' own conscience which Almighty Allah has bestowed on human beings to make them superior to the Angels. Today, there is practically no democracy in our political parties. The political parties should encourage opposition within their organisation so that real democratic system is established. We must not give any opportunity to others to lecture on us that Bangladesh does not have real democracy. We must be fully conscious of our rights and obligations and uphold our hard earned sovereignty and democracy. Only then we will show proper respect to the martyrs and be able to maintain the spirit of Liberation War.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary, Ambassador and Founder VC of NSU and Presidency University. He is also the Chairman of Civic Watch Bangladesh.

Standing up for people power



THE last time I saw Rafik Hariri, he stood up to Syria. It was two months ago in Dubai at the Arab Strategy Forum. One of my duties there was to chair a session with Hariri, the former prime minister of Lebanon. A few hours earlier, a senior Syrian official had made some disgraceful remarks, essentially endorsing dictatorships. Meeting with Hariri before the session, I let him know that I was going to ask him to react to those comments. Hariri said, "Fine, I have no problem disagreeing with the Syrians. I've been doing it a lot recently." He added, "They have become a big problem for us in Lebanon. A big problem."

The United States has reacted with appropriate outrage at Hariri's assassination last week. But beyond angry words, both the administration and Congress seem to have decided to pressure Syria (the suspected culprit) by ratcheting up the economic sanctions already in place against it. This is pointless, because economic sanctions, particularly unilateral American ones, have an unblemished record of failure. They will cost American companies, hurt ordinary Syrians, and do virtually no damage to the regime.

Consider the record. Sanctions were put in place to get Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, stop Iran from going nuclear, deter Pakistan from proliferating, force Haiti's junta out of power, get Serbia to stop ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, and force China to reverse its post-Tiananmen clampdown. In the few cases where those results were achieved -- Saddam out of Kuwait, Milosevic out of Bosnia -- it was because the sanctions route was abandoned in favor of military force and coercive diplomacy. The most stunning case of ineffectiveness is surely the sanctions regime against Fidel Castro's Cuba. These sanctions were put in place in 1960. Today Castro is the world's longest-serving head of government. You would think that's pretty compelling evidence that sanctions have not worked. Yet whenever we confront a rogue regime, our immediate impulse is to slap sanctions on it.

When sanctions have worked, it is because they have been multilateral sanctions, usually authorized through

Throughout the Arab world we are beginning to see people power at work. And strikingly, the autocrats who have long claimed to understand the Arab Street are bewildered by it.

the United Nations. The United States has begun to try to gather an international coalition against Syria. It is unlikely to produce UN sanctions, but it might put real pressure on the Syrian regime politically. If Bashar Assad were to get the cold shoulder from all of Europe and much of Asia, it would make a difference. Syria does not think of itself as a pariah state like North Korea -- and if it does not stop funding terrorists, occupying Lebanon and crushing all dissent, it should be treated as such.

Washington has many gripes with Syria -- its support for the insurgency in Iraq being the biggest -- but it should focus single-mindedly on one issue that can gain international support: getting Syria out of Lebanon. Last week the geopolitical equivalent of a solar eclipse took place. France and the United States cosponsored a Security Council resolution demanding that Syria withdraw from Lebanon. This could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Bashar Assad has blundered. Nasty despot though he was, Hafez Assad was admired by many observers for his "salami style" tactics. He worked slowly and piecemeal, never doing something dramatic abroad that could force a crisis and give outsiders a reason to form an alliance against him. (Internal policy was another matter; Assad's brutality was legendary.) His son is clearly less skillful or powerful. If Bashar Assad did indeed order

Hariri's assassination, he has handed the world an opportunity to confront Syria's de facto occupation of Lebanon. Most significantly, he has ignited anti-Syrian feelings in Lebanon. Syria will have to tread carefully in the face of this rising Lebanese

nationalism. Throughout the Arab world we are beginning to see people power at work. And strikingly, the autocrats who have long claimed to understand the Arab Street are bewildered by it. The Shia are rising but acting with restraint, the Palestinians are voting freely but endorsing diplomacy, the Lebanese speak up -- not about Israel or America, but rather about Syria. Arab rulers will increasingly have to adjust to the actual feelings of their people rather than the caricatures that they have drawn up.

America, too, needs to understand better people power. President Bush is on a kiss-and-make-up trip to Europe, following Condoleezza Rice's highly successful tour. He wants cooperation on Syria, Iran, and many other issues. But the US confronts a real problem, made much, much worse by four years of utterly insensitive American diplomacy. Policy elites may make up with us, but the public has not. Polls taken over the last month show that throughout Europe -- from Britain to Poland -- people are blisteringly critical of US foreign policy. America's role in the world, and George W. Bush. This pervasive anger and distrust limits how actively and publicly countries can support American initiatives and efforts. For every European leader, allying with Bush has costs domestically. If Bush

wants to get Europe's help, he needs to talk not just to its rulers but to its people.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.  
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Studying social entrepreneurship

SAFI RAHMAN KHAN

BANGLADESH, with its high population density, widespread poverty, and susceptibility to natural disasters, is a challenging environment for development initiatives. Yet, over the past quarter of a century it has been home to some of the world's most innovative social enterprises led by some truly remarkable social entrepreneurs. Two of the largest ones, Brac and Grameen Bank, have also been the focus of study in western business schools.

The study of social entrepreneurship as an academic course has recently been gaining popularity in European and North American universities. Leading schools like Harvard and Oxford have even established social entrepreneurship centres. This interest is especially encouraging considering that in 1989 a proposed course on social entrepreneurship was rejected at the Harvard Business School. The change in mindset can perhaps be attributed to the realization that notwithstanding advances in scientific, social, political, and economic systems, the gap between rich and poor seems to be widening. With many social problems continuing to plague societies, and some even worsening, concern regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of governmental and welfare based approaches to social problems has increased. This in turn has directed greater attention to the work of social entrepreneurs. The increasing number of entrepreneurial people entering and innovating within the social sector is influencing how communities and societies view public resources, services and their use. From adapting market based approaches to experimenting with for-profit income generating ventures to employing modern management methods to developing indicators for measuring social impact, social entrepreneurs are making the social sector more efficient. These experiences are not lost among academics, private sector, government and others; and are reflected in the growing recognition that valuable lessons can be drawn from studying and documenting the work of social entrepreneurs.

Justification for a course

A 1986 study suggests that there is empirical evidence pointing to entrepreneurship courses as influencing more students to become entrepreneurs. It is also acknowledged that motivating individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activities can contribute to economic development. This may explain why various governments around the world have promoted small businesses as a strategy for generating employment. The study of entrepreneurship in educational institutions can therefore have a direct positive impact on a country's economy.

An increasing number of organizations and individuals are using entrepreneurial skills and strategies to tackle different social problems. Some of these have been transplanted from and to business enterprises. This cross sector learning and exchange is said to be "blurring the boundaries" between the social and private sector. A course on social entrepreneurship would thus be able to cut across both social and business studies and hopefully spur the creation of new ventures.

The academic study of entrepreneurship in Bangladesh is primarily limited to professional degree programs such as the MBA or BBA. These courses tend to focus on the economics and management of the entrepreneurial process and venture and not as much, if at all, on the entrepreneur driving the idea. Generally speaking, this has been a trait fairly common to entrepreneurship courses across the world. In countries where the study of entrepreneurship is more advanced, there is now greater attention paid to the entrepreneur and in integrating his/her experiences within the course curriculum.

In terms of Bangladesh's experience with entrepreneurship, it would be difficult to challenge the assertion that Bangladeshi social entrepreneurs have made a stronger mark globally or regionally than their business counterparts. A number of them have gained international recognition including the replication of their strategies in different countries. It therefore makes greater sense to tap this knowledge base in designing any course on entrepreneurship than merely borrowing materials and cases from elsewhere.

Safi Rahman Khan works in social development.

