

Ignominy of 'illiberal democracy'



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

under democratic sway in the recent past and has perhaps spawned an "illiberal democracy". Democracy, in our parlance, has not brought constitutional liberalism. This is not unusual as to date few illiberal democracies have matured into liberal democracies.

Assuming that Bangladesh is passing through the supposedly illiberal phase of democratisation, it is presumed that political instability that goes with the period of transition has security implications for the country. The sources of such instability are negative politics, lawlessness, misgovernance, patronising violence, keeping armed cadre in student labour fronts, boycotting parliament amongst others. The reasonably free and fair election in the yesteryears still remains open to question in terms of both input and output. The questionable input for our election has been money, including substantial amount of black money. Such money militates against the democratic spirit and impacts negatively on the quality of elected representatives.

Criminalised and commercialised politics

Discerning observers would agree that in recent times, middle class professionals with credentials and with roots to the people have been squeezed out of the political market to yield place to rich businessmen, industrialists or individuals with questionable means of income. The security ramifications of this phenomenon is that elected legislators having the backing of black money amassed through smuggling of narcotics or illegal arms can put the

country at the mercy of few powerful dons, pulling strings from behind. Fingers are already pointed at such elements. In the context of the violent trend in politics such accusations cannot be summarily ruled out. Therefore, the election system, vitiated by money-and-politics nexus and a literally non-performing parliament are factors sufficient to make politics volatile and unstable with serious long-range ramifications.

Our intolerant political conduct is

strain on scant resources to the detriment of felt needs of enforcement in critical sectors, in addition to spoiling the image. The armed students are protected by the regime and opposition. Some studies suggest a causal linkage between endemic violence and demise of democracy. The increasing incidences of violence in Bangladesh politics over the years are clouding the future of democracy.

loyal political associates.

Extremism and denominational politics

The ulterior use of religion for political ends and a constitutional provision for making Islam the state religion appear as an anathema for a country that started its journey as a secular polity. Bangladeshis were no less devout Muslims in 1972 than they have become in post 1988 under Islam as a state religion. Under cover of religion, in our fledgling polity,

intensities, on the other is provided by the underworld to which the political leaders of various statures are connected in a shady way. According to credible reports nearly 300 godfathers control criminal and terrorist activities across the country. The godfathers belonging to major political parties are actually mid and high level leaders of such parties.

The link between small arms and violence has given rise to organised crime which is sustaining due to triangular nexus among criminal underworld, power-hungry political elite and corrupt law enforcement agencies. The arms-violence linkage is assuming a permanent shape in our politics, economy and society. It has emerged as an internal dimension of our security concerns. Without a non-partisan political commitment it would not be possible to root out these menaces.

Bangladesh polity has failed to forge national cohesion on fundamental values. Inadequate nation building and state building processes are the cause. Lack of mutual trust and prevalence of hostile political attitude have resulted in weak political institutions and weak national capacity to resolve national issues. The process needs to be reversed.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former Secretary and IGP

STRAIGHT LINE

Bangladesh polity has failed to forge national cohesion on fundamental values. Inadequate nation building and state building processes are the cause. Lack of mutual trust and prevalence of hostile political attitude have resulted in weak political institutions and weak national capacity to resolve national issues. The process needs to be reversed.

Criminalised and vandalised politics is another indicator with political fall-out. Violence and politics have become almost synonymous. The emergence of political bully boys would not have been possible without patronisation by political parties. Violence has had serious negative impact on the political culture of the country.

Social cost and image

Media reports indicate that more than few hundred people die and few thousand suffer wounds in violent political clashes each year. The campus violence, an extension of violent politics at the national level, has seriously affected academic functioning. The twenty-four hour security patrol by the law enforcing agencies in campuses puts heavy

reflective of an immature political culture and politics is viewed as a game in which winner takes all in a zero-sum format. Political parties are found to contest elections as if they are fighting wars. Political divide and rivalry often degenerate into personal enmity, thus infusing an unhealthy element of acrimony that leads to violence. The party in power is mostly intolerant, arrogant and even feudalistic in attitude. The opposition mostly opposes the government for the sake of opposition and are in politics as if with the undertaking to bring down the government. Such a scenario has been described as "crisis of governance". A country with such a crisis in governance will be ill-equipped to face the challenges of management including those emanating from security environment.

marked by poverty and political instability, the country has become an easy base for extremist denominational politics. There is no denying that despite insignificant representation in the national legislature, religion-based politics has its socio-political base deep and wide across the country. The onslaught of bigotry has already devastated us and we can all see its retrograde effects when religion and state get mixed up.

Lack of inner democracy has retarded the growth of political. The weakness of inner party democracy is a serious constraint to the consolidation of a democratic culture and building of a national consensus. The survival of absolutism in our "illiberal democracy" has led to the re-appearance of the dictatorial culture of a coterie of civil servants or personally

social cohesion. Lacking in the much-needed social cohesion Bangladesh turns out to be a "weak state".

We have to admit that our ethnolinguistic and religious homogeneity factor has not succeeded to bring the dynamics of socio-political relations within a manageable limit. Presently, our society is characterised by significant élitemass gap. A small segment influences the decision making, allocation and distribution of resources. The failure of democratic experimentation in the initial years of independence led to a succession of military and quasi-military rule by a coalition of the higher echelon of the military and civil bureaucracy. Political leaders joined later to complete the "coalition of convenience". The first two groups remained dominant.

The interface between the political feuds and intense power struggle, on the one hand, and violence of different

Immigrants assert in America

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

WELL organised demonstrations all over the US in April by undocumented immigrants and a day without an immigrant on May 01, 2006 also coupled with massive demonstrations to register protests against proposed crackdown on illegal immigrants and to demonstrate the economic power of immigrants have caused their impact on the economy felt.

Historically America is country of immigrants since its inception as a nation state in the 18th century. It has often been called the melting pot. America has traditionally opened its doors to immigrants from all over the world. These immigrants migrated to America to improve their living conditions as most of them were poor in their country of origin. Backgrounds of immigrants are vastly different. Since 1780 complexion of immigrants has changed. Most of the immigrants were from Europe before 1780. The Europeans, particularly the Portuguese, began transatlantic slave trade that brought millions of Africans to America.

The backgrounds of today's immigrants expand beyond the European borders. Immigrants from Asia, Africa and Latin America are flocking to America to enjoy free life style, and to make money to have improved living condition. Racial discrimination and slavery in America were so focused that led to civil rights movement in 1955 which culminated in 1968 in poor peoples' march spearheaded by Martin Luther King. He was awarded Nobel peace prize in 1964 for his non-violent movement to establish the rights of black Americans. This non-violent campaign was adopted by him from Mahatma Gandhi's concept. Following his assassination in April, 1968 by white supremacist, riots broke out in every major city of America. The civil rights movement succeeded in bringing about such laws as Civil Rights Act of 1964 that banned discrimination in employment practices and public accommodations; Voting Rights Act of 1965; Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965 which changed immigration policy and Civil Rights Act of 1968 that banned discrimination in the sale or rental of housing.

Possibly this civil rights movement inspired undocumented immigrants in America to organise protest demonstrations on April 10. Massive gatherings turned up on the National Mall in Washington DC where tens of thousands peacefully demonstrated their view points. It was unprecedented. Similar demonstrations were also held on May 01 throughout the country. Bill H.R. 4437 was the cause of these demonstrations. The bill contains border protection, anti-terrorism, and illegal immigrant control act of 2005 which has a myriad of measures against illegal immigrants. It

out to be defeatism at its worst. Americans consider the 1986 amnesty designed mainly for the third world illegal aliens, mostly from Mexico and Central America, was a slap in the face of legal immigrants. On the other hand, business leaders and advocates for immigrants' rights argue that America's economy would collapse if all the illegal immigrants are deported.

It is estimated that illegal immigrants cover 25 percent of agricultural work; 17 percent of office and house cleaning positions; 14 percent construction jobs; 12 percent food preparation and servicing and 4.9 percent labor forces. 56 percent of the illegal immigrants are from Mexico. It was followed by 22 percent from Latin America; 13 percent from Asia and 6 percent from Europe and Canada. According to Bengali newspaper Thikana of New York, there are roughly 86,000 illegal Bangladeshi in America. They are mostly located in New York, Florida, Miami and Boston.

Population in America is increasing by leaps and bounds. It has increased by 100 million since 1970. The Census Bureau estimated projection of the population by 2050 will be 420 billion. A group of anti-immigration reform in America speaks that if any of those bills in the Senate is passed a minimum of six million wives and as high as another 10 million will cross from Mexico alone which will quadruplicate the Spanish speaking population. Apart from illegal immigrants, America is accepting a million legal aliens every year which speaks of population explosion in foreseeable future.

Over the past weekend hundreds of thousands illegal immigrants took to the streets in Los Angeles and other cities also to demonstrate to establish their rights to stay in America. But many demonstrators were chanting slogans in Spanish and waving flag of Mexico. That caused anxiety in American society. This reminds me of Professor Samuel Huntington's theory that Spanish speaking Mexicans have hidden agenda to recapture the territories which they lost during America-Mexican war in 1846-48.

Protest demonstrations by undocumented immigrants have shifted focus on a contentious issue in a way seen seldom in politics in America. Possibly the main purpose of these kinds of demonstrations is to convey their message to Americans to seek their understanding of the immigration problem. It is better late than never to resolve this problem as America could turn out to be Hispanic. Without proper diagnosis the issue would become explosive for America.

makes working class people felons and punishes any person or organisation that provides support of any kind to undocumented immigrants. The Bill would, among other things, build a 700-mile fence along the US-Mexico border, authorise local police to arrest illegal aliens, and make illegal presence a felony. While commenting on this bill, Hilary Clinton, Senator from Democratic Party said: this bill would make Jesus Christ a felon.

As a compromise solution to the existing immigration problem, Republican Senator John McCain and Democrat Senator Edward Kennedy placed a bill in the Senate, which, inter alia, provides scope to illegal immigrants to become citizen over a period of five plus years and a guest worker visa programme for future immigrants. If this bill is passed by the Senate, illegal immigrants would be required to pay a fine of \$ 2000 plus all back taxes. Already Senate Judiciary Committee has approved the bipartisan bill. Bill Frist, Republican Majority Leader

in the Senate circulated a proposal without guest worker programme. Neither the house bill nor the Senate proposed bills recognised President Bush's guest worker program. It seems that opinion at least is not divided on one count that no amnesty would be granted to illegal immigrants.

However, it seems that there is bipartisan consensus in the Senate in favour of some of the House measures to curtail illegal influx, but on balance the Senate is more inclined to regulate and regularise the presence of 10 to 12 million illegal immigrants. In a dramatic move the Senate passed a bill on April 26 to spend \$ 2 billion to stop illegal aliens entering Mexico and Canadian borders.

Since this year is the election year for the House of Representatives and Senate, Democrats took the opportunity to extend their support to the undocumented immigrants, but a good chunk of Americans do not support to extend a kind of amnesty to illegal immigrants. They are of the opinion that it makes no sense to legalise illegal aliens because they are here already. That turns

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