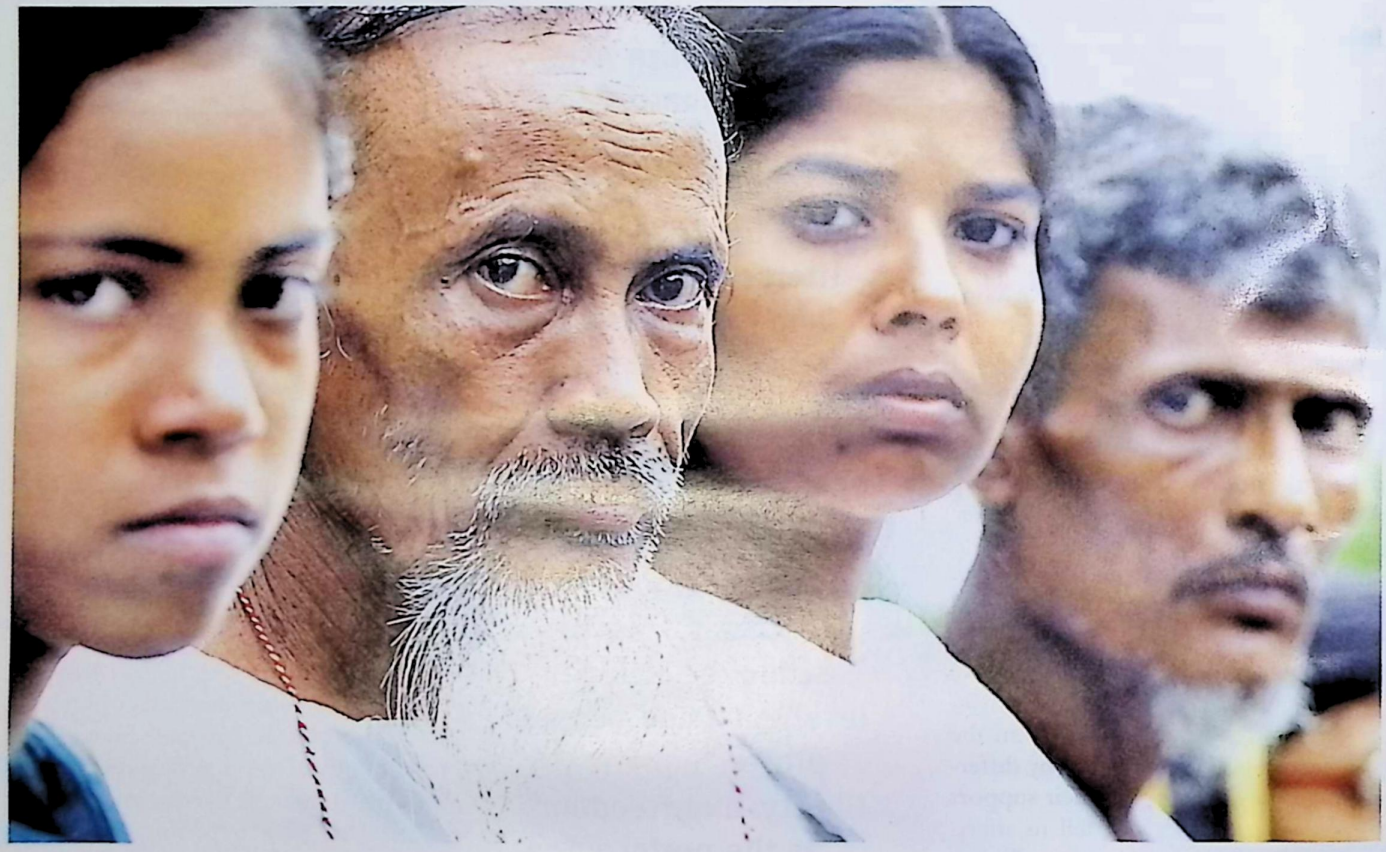
among the respondents. Data for two groups were generated for this -- one, 25 years and below, while the other, 55 years and above. The comparison between the two age groups makes it clear that there are no significant differences between them. They differ marginally in understanding democracy in terms of fundamentals and "equality, liberty, and freedom" in particular. While the lower age group had a tendency to understand democracy as "equality, liberty, and freedom" (15 percent against 11.4 percent of higher age group), the higher age group shown a higher level of awareness of democracy, followed by that of Dhaka region. The respondents of Chittagong and Rajshashi regions turned out to be most unaware of the concept, as about 50 percent of the respondents of both the regions failed to give any meaning to democracy. Rate of literacy was initially thought to be the main reason for this, but that may not entirely explain the cause, as Sylhet is the most non-literate zone in Bangladesh.

However, democracy has the highest meaning as "equality, liberty, and freedom" in Barisal region (18.6 percent) followed by Dhaka (14.8 percent), Sylhet (13.6 percent), and Chittagong (11.5 percent). Again, respondents in Sylhet (6.8 percent) and Barisal (4.8 percent) understood democracy as the rule of people. Understandably, the meaning of democracy is equated with "free and fair elections" as it is the most exercised means through which the respondents, like most of the people in the country, enjoy democracy. This is reflected throughout the country.

What is the meaning of democracy to the minorities in Bangladesh? With 595 respondents, with about equal numbers from Hindu, Garo, and Hill-people communities (as part of a booster survey), there was an attempt to take up this question. The respondents of these communities seem to be more conscious about the meaning of democracy as 70 percent of them gave some kind of response to this question. Majority of them (19.7 percent) understand democracy as "equality, liberty and freedom" while 16 percent of them understood democracy in popular terms. Again, "free and fair elections" was understood as democracy by about 8 percent of the respondents. The understanding of democracy therefore remained very much in line with the overall understanding of democracy found in the country.



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respondents meant "election" as the meaning of democracy (5.9 percent against 3.9 percent of lower age group). Overall, the lower age group showed marginally better performance in giving a meaning to democracy than the higher age group. This is indicative of the fact that they have a higher literacy rate than the older respondents.

A region-wise analysis of the survey brings out some interesting observations about the understanding of democracy in different administrative regions of Bangladesh. The respondents of Sylhet and Barisal regions have

The survey also opined in favour of democratic futures. When three statements were given to the respondents for identifying the most agreed one from them, 38.8 percent identified that "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government." But the level of despondency with democracy was also reflected in the response as 14.3 percent