administrative competence of judicial and bureaucratic institutions.

For this, three prerequisites have to be met. One is an independent, politically neutral, and competent judiciary. The second is a strong, non-partisan Election Commission. The third is an effective Anti-Corruption Commission. Although recent ordinances are directed toward that goal, it would be difficult to realise it without basic structural, procedural, and attitudinal changes, ensuring autonomy of these institutions from executive and legislative branches of government. Such checks are needed for political stability and social justice, which are important dimensions of national security.

Institutional checks on leaders also are needed to prevent absolute personalisation of power, which ultimately leads to gross abuses and rampant corruption. The unpalatable fact is power is poisonous to those who exert it. The prolonged, unchecked exercise of power destroys the leader and seriously hurts the organisation itself. Term limit of elected as well as certain non-elected offices is one way of addressing the sensitive issue. Reducing the duration of each term of elected offices could be another way to ensure greater accountability.

Once a generally acceptable environment is created to hold a free and fair election, an all-party convention could be held where all duly elected representatives of registered political parties would engage in deliberations on issues and problems which they see affecting vital national goals and suggest means to resolve them. Widely covered in depth by electronic and print media, voters would get the opportunity to assess plans and programs of participating politicians, helping them to make better choices. And participating party leaders and delegates would get the opportunity to clarify and improve their positions through political deliberations and dialogues on various issues and problems. By this, they would ensure not only a level playing field but also a high quality field for their future electoral contests.

The following is a sample of issues they might engage in deliberation. Some of the issues, such as term limit, changes in the electoral



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rules, bicameral legislature, presidential election and tactics of direct democracy, among others, could be addressed in a constitutional convention following the general election, if elected representatives so desire.

These are but a random sample of issues political leaders could address in a pre-election, all-party conference of registered political parties, which would help clarify the relationships between their party goals and what they see as shared national goals. It could also serve as critical confidence building and consensus building measures. After getting elected, they could consider convening a constitutional convention in order to engage in debates and dialogues with the specific purpose of converting their promised reforms into political reality by enacting specific laws to more effectively implement constitutional provisions and/or amending the constitution itself, if deemed necessary.

But the appropriate political environment would be needed for an all-party convention as well as the general elections in December 2008. For this, both the caretaker government and political parties must strive for a consensus approximating the "background justice," whereby political parties can enjoy freedom of assembly and speech without undermining electoral rules established by the Election Commission. The caretaker government on its part must repeal the emergency rule removing all restrictions on the activities of political parties. Only then justice for democratic elections could become an acceptable reality.

Hopefully, future elected leaders would strive for justice in defining the relationships between themselves and their constituents. They may not reach certain political goals needed for a functional democracy based on the principle of fairness, such as: mutual tolerance and accommodation, respect for individual rights and opposition parties, free and fair electoral system, independence of the judiciary, and constitutional limits on excesses of power by any branch of government.

But by at least striving for them they could accomplish some fundamental changes, which would advance the cause of justice for democracy, ensuring a quality of life hitherto denied to most Bangladeshis.

Zillur R. Khan *is Rosebush Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin.*