What is at Stake

Only the Awami League can put Bangladesh back on track, argues SAJEEB WAZED

OVER the past two years we have heard many times how our politics needs a revolutionary change. We need to throw out all the old politicians and start fresh. How our political system, and indeed our constitution, needs to be rewritten in order to create a utopia, where everyone will live happily ever after.

After two years of suspended rights, blatant abuse of justice and harassment of our leaders and businessmen, it turns out that 96% of our people cannot wait for a return to democracy. Our economy, already hurting from the unbridled corruption of the immediate past BNP-Jamaat alliance government, has sunk further despite the best efforts of several highly educated people. Even our political scene is pretty much back to square one. The revolution is dead.

Time and again I see opinions published, usually by the same authors, about how both political parties are the same, both "begums" are the same, etc. This has become a chant for a select few critics. It is as if they cannot find anything else to say.

Why do I bring this up right after my opening paragraph? It is because both camps have been clamouring for a revolution, the first in our country and the second within the political parties. Despite the best efforts of men with guns, neither of these has taken place. The reason for this is something those of us involved in politics understand, which cannot be learned through a degree, even one from Princeton or Oxford.

The secret we politicians know that others do not is this: Revolutions only work when a government has become autocratic. It does not work against a democracy. A revolution only succeeds if the common man joins in. Without this, even the massive organisation of the largest political party cannot bring about a revolution. A democracy can only be changed through another means. The technical name for this is election.

In a democracy, leaders and parties who improve the lot of the people survive and grow stronger. Those who do not, slowly lose their popular support and fade into insignificance.

The only way to improve a democracy is through evolution. Evolution, as opposed to revolution, is a much more gradual, long-term process. At times it appears that nothing is changing. However, change eventually comes, often in fits and starts. After all, you do need periods of stability. Otherwise nothing would ever get done.

Most importantly, at its core, evolution improves the system through survival of the fittest. In a democracy, leaders and parties who improve the lot of the people survive and grow stronger. Those who do not, slowly lose their popular support and fade into insignificance. This is how political evolution works.

In this regard, the Awami League has proven itself to be an extraordinary survivor. Not counting its travails through our quarter century struggle for independence, it has endured the murder en masse of its entire top tier of leadership. This was followed by 15 years of political persecution by dictators. It has survived two attempts by the BNP to retain power through massively rigged elections. Now, it has survived two years of a variety of schemes cooked up by the brightest minds in our country to destroy it under a quasi-military regime.