Power to the People! Power to Democracy!

Asrar Chowdhury

THE voice of the people is always heard. When the time is right, the people's voice is always the might. The voice of the people sends signals to the political market on how people's choice is to be allocated. Whether a status quo is to be maintained or whether there's a call for "winds of change". Failure to listen to and honour these signals can result in violent revolutions that lead to the birth of a new political institution or a new political nation. Simply look at history to verify.

The history of the Twentieth Century shows that, nations that have had stable political institutions are also nations that have moved forward. Barring few exceptions, democracy has proved to be the most stable political institution. Whether that's a Presidential form of democracy; a Parliamentarian form of democracy; or even a cross between the two. This, however, doesn't mean that a democracy can't and won't produce governments or political machines that can and do become leviathans.

It's a well-quoted phrase, incumbent governments don't win elections; they loose them. Failure of the previous democratic administration to live up to the overwhelming mandate the people of Bangladesh gave to them then, in more ways than not, has been the main reason for their shocking defeat and the unprecedented victory of their opponents in December 2008.

The Ninth Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh will go down in history as a victory of the people and a victory of democracy. Since December 1970, and December 1990, the people of Bangladesh have never sent such decisive signals to the political market for change as they did in December 2008. Awami League and the Grand Alliance received an unprecedented mandate to govern Bangladesh in the next five years. The real challenge, however, starts now. How can Bangladesh as a nation make an effort to move forward in the Twenty First Century? Today's piece is a brief introduction to the challenges that lie ahead not only for those who will form the next government, but also for those who won't.

There has never been doubt about the potential of Bangladesh as a nation. The Indian Statesman Gopal Krishna Gokhale didn't make his observation that "What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow" from emptiness. In spite of so many hiccups, Bangladesh has shown impressive performance in many economic and social indicators since independence in 1971. The question mark, however, remains. The most vulnerable area for Bangladesh lies in her non-stable political institutions. Now is the time for action. The 2008 Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh sent one very important signal to the political market. The electorate of Bangladesh think carefully and express their views intelligently in a free and fair election. This is a signal for a lesson to be learned not only for the victors, but also for those who have been defeated.

Awami League and the Grand Alliance has an almost absolute mandate of the electorate to make an effort to fulfil its pre-election promises. The fate of the nation now rests in the hands of the victors probably more than any other time in the 37 plus years of the existence of Bangladesh as an independent nation. If the Grand Alliance reads and responds to the political signals well they will be rehabilitated in the history of Bangladesh in golden letters. If history repeats itself to show the rivalry Bangladesh has been so familiar with, then the next five years will go down in history in rotten letters.

In democracy collective choices are allocated through a political market mechanism. The society also has its own mechanism in allocating collective choices in the absence of democratic institutions. Both the victors and the defeated of the 2008 Parliamentary Elections have records of history in front of them. If you fail to live up to the aspirations of the people of Bangladesh, you have to pay a very high price. History now shows that the Bangladesh electorate is far, far more intelligent than those of many countries, developed and developing. And also many established democracies. This is probably our greatest political asset. It remains to be seen how the next five years unfold. For the time being, let us hope our political leadership reads and responds to the collective choices of the Bangladesh electorate. Power to the People! Power to Democracy! Power to Bangladesh and 1971!

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to the point where it is embarrassing.

If the people vote to name one to lead the country, the other parties say it's a lie, a deception on the part of the winning party to attain power.

They do everything in their influence to interfere with the new government's reign. Most common act of disruption is the hartal. Now I have nothing against hartals. I used to thoroughly enjoy staying home in these days.

But conscious citizen as I am, I can't help but wonder: how can one swear his/her life to build the nation, to take it forward and far and at the same time destroy the means by which that could happen?

How does upsetting the educational, industrial and economic progress of a nation help in advancement?



Sameirah Nasrin Ahsan

Burning vehicles, injuring innocent civilians, blocking roads, all in all stopping the everyday life: is this how to build a nation? Doesn't this contradict their eloquent words expressing eternal love for Bangladesh?

It's amusing how they don't realize that. Bangladesh is a country born of a dream. I think it is our duty to lead it on, to a better future, for our own sake.

I hope this time, our leaders would put aside silly fancies and work together for the sake of Bangladesh, despite whoever wins or loses.

May Allah be with our leaders and with Bangladesh; may this time she find a leader, who will nurture, cherish and help her grow into the dream that we held so dear.

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