

DHAKA TUESDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2009

Politics of confrontation



FROM PAGE 61
election, they will paralyze the government's capacity to introduce reforms which are necessary in the long run but politically unpopular in the short run.

Prisoner's dilemma

The current standoff between two major political parties in Bangladesh may be compared to a game which is

known in economic theory as prisoner's dilemma. In this game, two prisoners who jointly committed a crime are caught. The police do not have enough evidence to prove the case against them without their confession. They are kept in two separate rooms so that they cannot collude. The Police give them separately three choices: (1) if your partner

confesses and you remain silent, you'll get five years in prison. (2) if both of you confess, you will get three years (3) if both of you remain silent you will be in jail for one year. The best strategy for both the prisoners is to remain silent and get a sentence for a year. Both of them suspect each other and are afraid that if one remains silent, his partner

may confess and get away with a three month term while he will get a sentence of five years. Because they cannot conspire in physical isolation of separate rooms, both usually confess and get three years though both them would have got only a year's jail by remaining silent. Because of mutual distrust, both parties end up with the worst outcome where their combined sentence is the highest. According to economists this outcome remains unchanged in the short run though after innumerable repetitions the parties in the long run may arrive at the correct decision by learning from the past. In Bangladesh neither political party is gaining from the political standoff. The tit for tat is the best policy for their survival. The political situation in Bangladesh today is comparable to Cold War in the second half of twentieth century. In 1981 Robert Axelrod wrote a monograph entitled The Evolution of Cooperation to explore how cooperation could be promoted among contending parties in a prisoner's dilemma situation. Many of his recommendations are valid for the political standoff in Bangladesh today.

The implications of some of Axelrod's recommendations for political impasse in Bangladesh are as follows:

(a) The parties are likely to cooperate if there is frequent and continuous interaction. For example, in the First World War, the combatants in the trenches who were supposed to kill each other cooperated with each other by arranging surreptitious truces. Unfortunately, the distrust between the members of opposing political parties in Bangladesh is so deep that there is hardly any meaningful interaction among them at social and political levels. Such interactions are also

frowned upon by top political leadership. Measures should be taken for increasing the social interaction of the members of opposing political parties.

(b) The prospects of cooperation are better if payoffs are lowered. This could be done by (1) reducing the term of the government (2) reducing the power of the executive and (3) strict enforcement of Anti-corruption laws.

(c) Teach people to care about each other. These values could be propagated by civil society.

(d) Reciprocity among contending parties promote cooperation. This implies that parties should respond to gestures by each other.

In Axelrod's analysis, lack of cooperation is not a product of system failure alone; it is perpetuated by human failure. The most effective remedy for bitter political confrontation is the foresight of political leaders and their capacity to reciprocate with each other. The political leaders must realize that democracy means much more than an elected government. Democracy in the classical sense connotes liberal democracy which is concerned less with accumulation of power and more with the limitation of power. The strengths of Athenian democracy which were identified by Pericles 2438 years ago in his famous Funeral Speech honoring the Athenian Martyrs should be the guiding principles of democratic leaders throughout the world: "We give our obedience to those whom we put in possession of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break" (Thucydides, 145).

Akbar Ali Khan is a former Adviser to Caretaker government.

www.thecitybank.com

Soaring up high

They all say, 'Sky is the limit'. But, we believe the other way. We set for the kind of height only few can dare to imagine. And in doing so, at **City**, we make sense defying all the limits towards our pursuit of attaining the greatest height.

Dhaka - making sense for last 400 years

Kite Flying is one of the traditional festivities in Dhaka dating back to the Mughal Era. The old town skyline still goes ablaze with kites of different colors, sizes and shapes during Poush Sankranti, the last day of Bangla year.


city bank
making sense of money