

Salvaging the flawed governance

Those that still fancy that their unreformed ways will prevail are chasing a chimera, and are at odds with the popular will. So let us chastise them and commit ourselves to reform whatever is untenable to make our living just and worthy, and let us pledge "yes we can."

Z.A. KHAN

PRIOR to the last national election to the Jatiya Sangshad (Parliament), major political parties made loads of promises of reform, probably in the belief that "promises are meant to be broken." The Election Commission (EC) made it mandatory for parties to make amendments in the party constitutions so that political parties could follow democratic practice, which was almost absent.

The parties castigate each other for threatening the country's democracy, which was brought about after years of movement against Gen. Ershad's brand of non-populist oligarchy, but do not practice democracy within the party for the fear that it could threaten the leadership's hold on absolute power.

Obligated by the EC's mandatory stipulations, the parties pledged that democratic practice would be restored as soon as possible. There have been a few feeble attempts to do so, but the exuberant party rank and file voluntarily bestowed upon their leaders the wisdom and judgment to take decisions on their own. We have been waiting in vain to see the sea changes promised by the parties. At this stage I remember Coleridge, who expressed his frustration at not seeing reform in British culture:

*Day after day, day after day
We stuck, nor breath nor motion
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.*

Our civil society, which boasts of wisdom and intellectual enlightenment, and our media bigwigs, who are known to be the conscious keepers of the society, fell way behind in discharging their role "to lead the way and to do the way," which would have made them worthy of the trust and faith reposed in them.

So the politics of our nation was taken captive by a band of oligarchs who rarely felt any obligation to think of or take measures for people's welfare. Death due to hunger, militancy and political differences became the order of the day. People wanted some miracle to happen, or a messiah to save them from the worsening insularity that prevailed in the society, because they did not want to witness bloodletting anymore.

When our country became a hotbed of crime and criminality that went with impunity because of the sliding grip of the government on the law and order situation, the president felt compelled to declare a state of emergency. The armed forces quickly promised to support the government in its effort to restore law and order. The government

pledged to stamp out the sources of unfairness and injustice and to ensure good governance.

A demand for a comprehensive reform to remove the social ills that had overtaken our way of life echoed all-round. The demand for reform resulted from widespread recognition that the traditional use of state power and resources for partisan purposes had led to commission of excesses.

The major premise of democracy as we know is protection of life and liberty, which entails reform from time to time to suit the need of the hour keeping in view the attitude towards ethical values and socio-cultural evolution. All these seem to be descending into oblivion. At concrete historical level what should have broken the spell of despair and frustration of our people were narrowing the poverty line and giving the people freedom of choice.

The people's demands for freedom from servitude were subverted by the leaders, who made lofty promises but did little. The emerging political elites have imposed a sanction on anything that could release their hold by generating vast quantities of new money and an entirely new political culture, which values legacy regardless of its wisdom and concern for good of the people. They believe that "he who is not with me is against me."

Our intellectuals, whom we consider to be "priests of culture and progress," seem to be at a loss with regard to recommending any corrective move. And most of them are allegedly hitching their horses to the king's caravan. When the politicians flirt with the people and the civil society eulogises the singer (politicians in power), though expressing

veiled dislike for the song, the society is sure to decay. This consequently results in anarchy.

Those that believe that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the powerful -- legitimate or otherwise -- should rise and work for others to rise. They should do so to restore the wrecked political culture so that we do not feel politically destitute and homeless in our own homes. We must gather now to bury the myth of legacy so that only the deserving ones survive. It is time to ensure that the conscious mind does not go blank so that foreboding that the political elements will distort the ethical values of politics does not prevail.

Much brainstorming was conducted to find what to reform and the ways to reform. Reform proposals mooted during the rule of caretaker government, like formation of the Anti-Corruption Commission and creation of an independent judiciary, reformation of the Public Service Commission with more independence etc., were widely applauded, and the people waited eagerly to see those implemented.

Unfortunately, those that took charge to do so gave way in fear of possible turmoil. Some allege that they fell prey to enticement and cajoling by vested circles. Hopefully, their nemesis will follow their shadows till they understand that they should have been truly committed to their task.

All is not lost yet. We have an elected government that, hopefully, will at least implement the provisions of the Representation of the People's Order (RPO), which portrays the people's rights and desires. Those that are not in charge of governance should also join hands with the forces of goodness to



The people deserve better governance.

formulate legal compulsions for one and all in line with the RPO.

We hope that the leadership that believes in the upliftment of human rights, which means the liberation of our people from the shackles of poverty, servitude and enslavement of conscience, will unseat those that have so far contrived to disrupt the compelling writs of social behaviour. The new version of political conduct must promise that its premise will be founded on justice and fairplay, which are the sine qua non of good governance.

The people's desire for peace and development will certainly waken our slumbering leadership to rescind the

writs of ill that they followed to pursue self-aggrandisement. I sincerely hope that the people at large will rise to carry one simple message to the ones that ignored us for long to pursue self-gratification that "what does not show glory of man, do not do it."

Those that still fancy that their unreformed ways will prevail are chasing a chimera, and are at odds with the popular will. So let us chastise them and commit ourselves to reform whatever is untenable to make our living just and worthy, and let us pledge "yes we can."

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Gubernatorial election wakens Democratic Party

The results of the well-publicised election of governors have turned out to be as the Gallup polls suggested only days before the election on November 3. Robert McDonnell, attorney general in Virginia State defeated Democratic candidate Creigh Deeds, state senator, while Republican Chris Christie unseated sitting governor Jon Corzine, a Democrat in New Jersey.

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IT is very difficult to keep track of the cycle of elections in the United States of America. Almost every year, elections are taking place either for the Congress or in the states. That is the beauty of the democratic style of governing the country.

Since the presidential and congressional elections in November, 2008, elections to elect governors in Virginia and New Jersey, and special election to 23rd congressional district of New York, have taken place in November this year. The election of governors in Virginia and New Jersey has not gener-

ated as much enthusiasm as was witnessed in the presidential and congressional elections last year. In Virginia, the turnout dropped from 76 to 39 percent from last year's presidential election. Governors are executive heads who govern the states independent of the Federal government. Every state in the United States enjoys autonomous status.

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while Republican Chris Christie unseated sitting governor Jon Corzine, a Democrat in New Jersey. The Republican party bagged all three important posts in Virginia State, including Lt. governor and attorney general.

This has happened despite President Barack Obama's crossing the Potomac River into Virginia twice to weigh the gubernatorial race in favour of Democratic nominee Creigh Deeds, while vice-president Joe Biden and former president Bill Clinton campaigned in Virginia. The only good news that emerged from the election in the 23rd congressional district of New York, where Democratic candidate Bill Owens won. He will succeed Republican Representative John M. McHugh, who was selected by President Obama to be secretary of the army.

As a matter of historical fact, Virginia became a blue state when President Obama won majority votes in 2008. Democrats have been enjoying an unbroken string of victories in state election since Mark Wagner's election as governor in 2001, followed by victo-

ries for Governor Tim Kaine, Senator Jim Web in 2006, and Mark Wagner as senator in 2008. That string remained broken in state election this year.

There have been suggestions, both from media pundits and the Republican party, that the results of the elections in two important states could be interpreted as a referendum on President Barack Obama. According to a survey conducted by CNN during election day, the economy and jobs were the main concern for voters in those states. 26 percent voters in New Jersey thought that property taxes were a major issue and another 20 percent blamed corruption. In Virginia, health care, taxes and transportation problem were the major concern of the voters.

Democrat activists paint another picture. They are of the opinion that both Creigh Deeds and the sitting governor in New Jersey failed to provide independent voters appropriate reasons to support them.

The Republican party has staged a comeback in both states, and is looking forward to the 2010 congressional elections. Young Turks and sopho-

mores in the Democratic party were apparently scared after seeing the big margins in the election, while they themselves got elected by narrow margins in 2006 and 2008 in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

It appears that young activists in the Republican party drove independent voters to cast votes in favour of their candidates. Independent voters were a major factor in installing President Obama in the Oval Office. 66 percent and 60 percent independent voters switched their allegiance to the candidates of the Republican party in Virginia and New Jersey respectively. House Representative Democrat Gerry Connolly from Virginia holds the opinion that the Republicans were more disciplined and energised while Democrats were not successful at sustaining the momentum from last year's election.

Many Democrat pundits are suggesting that elections were held on the basis of local issues and performance of the candidates. It would be naïve to suggest that it is a referendum on the President Obama. This has been

reflected in the survey conducted by CNN, which indicated that this election was not solely focused on Obama. 56 percent of voters in Virginia did not count President Obama as a factor while 60 percent in New Jersey dismissed that notion.

It is an eye opener for the Democratic Party to initiate action to help improve economic conditions, although President Obama began his journey with a huge budget deficit, huge foreign debt, great economic depression and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that he inherited from the Republican President George W. Bush. Democrats need to create more job opportunities in the country if they intend to retain majority seats in the congress in 2010. Corruption at state and federal level should also be stopped to restore confidence in voters. The results of the gubernatorial elections in Virginia and New Jersey should not be taken lightly.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, retired Bangladesh diplomat and past President of Nova Toastmasters International Club, writes from Virginia.

The potential of soybean

With nearly 42% protein and 20% oil on a dry weight basis, soybean is the most energy-packed major crop in the world. Soybean has nearly five times more protein than rice and nearly twice the protein of meat and most pulses.

ROUF MIAN

A former American president, Harry Truman, called soybean the miracle crop. With nearly 42% protein and 20% oil on a dry weight basis, soybean is the most energy-packed major crop in the world. Soybean has nearly five times more protein than rice and nearly twice the protein of meat and most pulses. It is probably the most affordable and healthy solution for solving the chronic protein deficiency in the Bangladeshi diet. Because of the high-energy packed in the 20% soybean oil, it can provide much needed fat energy to the millions of manual labourers and farmers in Bangladesh. Compared to artery clogging saturated animal fats, soybean fat is high in unsaturated fat and, thus, a much healthier source of fat for human consumption.

Worldwide, soybean is:

- The number one edible oil and protein source for poultry, fisheries and livestock farms;
- A major protein source in human food for countries in east Asia, including Japan, Korea and China;
- A health food against many diseases including heart disease, diabetes

osteoporosis, menopausal symptoms, etc.;

- And an industrial raw material for bio-diesel, plastics, etc.

The end uses for soybean are growing very fast as are the demands for it. The high demand for soybean worldwide is driving prices almost out of reach of developing countries like Bangladesh. Almost all soybeans used in Bangladesh are imported. Due to limited lands available for the entire agriculture, Bangladesh may not be able to grow all the soybeans it may need, but it will be possible to greatly increase production in the country in a matter of years. Bangladesh needs to focus on the production and utilisation of food-type soybean. It is not the "silver" bullet, but it can be a big part of the solution to the nutritional and health problems that Bangladesh faces today.

As eluded above, soybean can play a very important role in healthy diets for patients with chronic diseases. Diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, osteoporosis and other preventable diseases among people in Bangladesh are happening at an alarming rate. Most of these diseases are preventable through proper diet and lifestyle

changes. Also, the profound effect of malnutrition on Bangladeshis is well known. The shortage of protein in the Bangladeshi diet is playing a negative role on the physical and mental development of the next generation, i.e. our children. Fortunately, soybean can be an affordable and healthy source of much needed protein in Bangladeshi diet.

My recent visits to South Korea granted me a first-hand experience about the extensive use of soybean and soybean products in Korean diets. Korean people consume several soybean food products every day. The same is true for other oriental countries, including Japan, Taiwan and China. It is well known that the longevity of people in these countries is among the highest in the world and these people have the least occurrences of the chronic diseases mentioned above. Incidentally, they also have the lowest cases of various cancers compared to most developed countries in the world.

Soybean uses the nitrogen from the air so there is little or no need to apply urea to its fields, and soybean gives off residual nitrogen for the crop that is planted after it. Nitrogen (Urea) is the most expensive input for crop production in Bangladesh. In 2008 alone the government subsidy for urea fertilisers was more than Tk4000 crores. Soybean can fix up to 270 kg nitrogen per hectare from the air, much higher than other legume crops (58 to 157 kg per hectare) generally grown in Bangladesh. Also, use of a suitable legume crop in the



Soybean, for better health.

cropping system is part of any sustainable cropping system. For example, in the USA, the most commonly used crop rotation includes growing corn followed by soybean followed by corn or wheat. The predominant crop rotation in Bangladesh is now rice followed by wheat followed by rice. A crop rotation that only includes cereal crops and excludes legumes are not sustainable in

the long run, and can prove to be devastating for the long-term health and nutrients balance of crop lands. This is another compelling reason for growing soybean in Bangladesh.

The author hopes that policymakers, agriculturists, farmers and consumers of Bangladesh will consider the great potential of soybean for Bangladesh and act accordingly to make the best use of

soybean in Bangladesh. The government will need to allocate necessary funds and human resources for vigorous and sustained research activities on cultivation and utilisation of soybean in the country.

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