

Compromise as art in democratic politics

A compromise can help to reach a mutually agreed upon decision, for which one has to surrender some of his ideas to get things done in the most desired way. For a political party, it should be always for the welfare of the people and the nation as a whole, and to allow democracy to take root in the minds and ways of life of its citizen.

DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

FORMER president of USA Thomas Jefferson once said: "I see the necessity of sacrificing our opinions to the opinions of others for the sake of harmony." Creation of an atmosphere of harmony is a necessity in politics, if not always but obviously at certain critical stages, for the sake of democracy.

Compromise is an art to convince others or impress upon others to agree to the views of a party, and to bring them under the same umbrella with argument and justification. It is the acumen and prudence of a politician to enlarge the spectrum of his sphere and broaden his base of supporters.

Politicians unwilling to compromise are typically labelled ideologues or impractical speculators -- a label not regarded as a badge of honour among members of the political class. Politicians who refuse to compromise seldom win, or hold on to office for long. Moreover, uncompromising politicians garner too little to send home to their voters since they remain in opposition. Successful politicians learn quickly the survival

value of compromise.

Political philosopher Jean Bethke Elstain was rhapsodic about democratic compromise. According to him: "Compromise is not a mediocre way to do politics; it is an adventure, the only way to do democratic politics." Economist Donald Wittman correctly observed: "That is what good politicians do; create coalitions and find acceptable compromises."

In fact, politics is the art of compromise at the level of legislative functions to get a job done with little resistance or unnecessary criticism from the opposition and, at the same time, to continue in power with popularity and pave the way for the next election. But it should be so articulated that voters must believe that the compromise or alliance was necessary for the benefit of the party and the country as a whole. Politics is not compromise at the ballot box, where it is a fight to earn the right to rule.

Nowadays, parliamentary sessions are held but the seats of oppositions remain vacant since no compromise takes place to bring the opposition back to the sessions.

Negotiation in politics is more difficult than negotiations with the World Bank or



Let us meet halfway.

Asian Development Bank or any other development partner. Officers of cadre services get training at BPATC or elsewhere on how to negotiate with different development partners or entrepreneurs, but politicians must acquire this wisdom by themselves and after much discussion with fellow politicians and followers.

In Bangladesh politics there is perhaps acute scarcity of such negotiating skill, as

was observed in the months of September and October of 2006 when renowned and honoured politicians like Late Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Abdul Jalil met at least six times to agree to the formation of the caretaker government, but failed. The reasons for their failure might be many or unknown, but the reality was that they could not succeed in the art of compromise.

In a democratic parliamentary environment there is little scope to show vanity or arrogance as people's representatives. Here, money matters little and inheritance or permanent leadership has no value. Those who do not realise this truth are not truly democratic in mind and in spirit. The communicating skill of a politician can win the confidence of voters with the impression that their

elected representative is man of principle, justice and equity. In such a situation, the attitude of compromise gets public support in general.

Compromise is not a weakness, it is, rather, a diplomatic overture to gain or opponents. Within parliament and outside, it is the prudence of a politician that wins debates and impresses upon the public in general his party's stand on a particular national issue.

Many ministers lost their portfolio due to irrelevant utterances while many were upgraded for prudent and remarkable presentation in a dignified manner. This was the situation during Ershad's regime, where ministers were censured frequently. Even now, some state ministers speak too much without understanding the implications of their utterances. Thus, a public representative holding a ministerial post or a high post needs to be more sensible and careful in making any remarks.

A compromise can help to reach a mutually agreed upon decision, for which one has to surrender some of his ideas to get things done in the most desired way. For a political party, it should be always for the welfare of the people and the nation as a whole, and to allow democracy to take root in the minds and ways of life of its citizen. This may happen in the parliament or public place, but must be transparent to the people so that they can realise that the attempt is for the welfare of the public and not a palace deal at the cost of the nation.

Dhiraj Kumar Nath is the former adviser to the previous caretaker government.

Cleaning up 'hot spots' will cost 300 million more

As part of a US/Vietnam dialogue group, and as an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War, Clinton expressed her support in endorsing \$300 million 10 year plan to be developed by the Aspen Institute for the clean-up of "hot spots" in Vietnam.

ZEENAT KHAN

War doesn't really end when the last soldier leaves the battlefield and goes home. Rebuilding in the aftermath of the destruction a war leaves behind can be a monumental task to undertake. A war ends with terrible costs to both the winner and the loser. There can never be any lasting happiness about the effects of war.

The war in Vietnam didn't end with the fall of Saigon. America spent \$165 billion dollars to finance the Vietnam War. The casualties on both sides were enormous. On the US side 58,000 died. On the Vietnamese side over 2 million -- including civilians -- people died. After fighting in Vietnam from the 1960s to 1975, US forces withdrew from South Vietnam.

July 22 marked the 15th year of US/Vietnam diplomatic ties. At that time US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was on an Asian tour. The last

stop for Clinton was Hanoi. There, in a joint statement with the Vietnamese foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem, she addressed the impact of Agent Orange -- the dioxin that was used during the Vietnam War.

As part of a US/Vietnam dialogue group, and as an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War, Clinton expressed her support in endorsing \$300 million 10 year plan to be developed by the Aspen Institute for the clean-up of "hot spots" in Vietnam.

In a press conference Clinton said: "We have been working with Vietnam for about nine years to try to remedy the effects of Agent Orange. I will work to increase our operation and making even greater progress together."

This issue has been a lingering source of bitterness between the two countries even after they established normal relationship. Vietnam demands that US must pay reparation because of the damage dioxin caused.

This cancer-causing substance was sprayed over the foliage of Vietnam. The herbicides were used to remove dense jungle cover, to destroy crops and clear vegetation from the nearby areas of the US bases in order to prevent the Viet Cong guerrillas from taking cover. The spraying was done systematically from 1962-1971.

The airport in Bien Hoa near Ho Chi Minh city was most contaminated. Even to this day, people have to wear waterproof disposable shoes when they land at the airport. The two other US army bases that are referred as "hot spots" are Da Nang and Phu Cat, with high levels of dioxin contamination.

In Da Nang, which is a major port city, there is still a lingering smell of the defoliant. Da Nang airport was a major US base and a supply depot for the US troops. Now, less than a hundred yards away from this danger zone, people are living and children playing.

Known as Operation Ranch Hand, the Army Chemical Corps sprayed dioxin from airplanes, helicopters. For some areas boats were used and the soldiers sprayed them with backpack sprayers that were especially designed to carry out this task.

The elite members of the Special Forces were called in to clear of some of

the dense forest foliage. These herbicides came in huge drums with orange stripes -- hence the name.

"Dioxin is a dangerous and powerful hormone disrupting chemical. By binding to a cell's hormone receptor, it literally modifies the functioning and genetic mechanism of the cell, causing a wide range of effects, from cancer to reduce immunity to nervous system disorders to miscarriages and birth deformity." Human bodies have no defence against this toxic compound.

A Red Cross report said on its website: "About three million people are victims of Agent Orange, including some 150,000 children with genetic defects." The samples that were collected from soil, sediment, food and human blood for a study, showed elevated concentrations of toxic chemicals, which were much higher than the normal limit.

During the Vietnam War about a third of the land was sprayed. At the time the risk to health from dioxin was not a major concern. The drug manufacturing companies conducted tests on lab animals and humans, and assured the military of its safety.

Some years after the Vietnam War ended members of US army and Vietnamese people became victims of dioxin. That dangerous chemical

entered the body through breathing and contaminated food and water, and was also absorbed through the pores of the skin.

Over the years Vietnam, has blamed dioxin mixture as the cause of birth deformities, and it has also been linked to cancer. Some studies performed by the National Academy of Sciences in the US found three types of cancer in American soldiers who served in Vietnam.

Dioxin studies were also conducted outside of US. A study at Massey University in New Zealand showed that their soldiers who fought in Vietnam had disrupted DNA.

It is also believed that the cases of spinal bifida were also the result of dioxin. Vietnam's main concern now is that, without immediate clean-up, dioxin will keep on contaminating the environment. More people will be exposed to it.

A Vietnamese doctor testified before the joint session of Congress last week that more than three million Vietnamese have suffered because of dioxin.

So far, the US Congress has allotted \$9 million to clean-up dioxin in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government has spent about \$5 million in cleaning Bien-Hoa airport. UNDP, along with the Global

Environment Facility, will fund a project for cleaning. Vietnam's Ministry of Natural Resource will administer the project. The UN recently put up another \$5 million for the clean-up operation at Bien Hoa airport.

Apart from the Vietnamese people, neighbouring countries have also raised concerns about health related issues. They want the clean-up to be done as soon as possible. Agent Orange was stored in other countries as well.

Along with the Vietnamese people, thousands of military families in US are suffering because of the aftermath of Agent Orange.

During the Vietnam War, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Elmo Zumwalt accepted the drug manufacturers' assurance that Agent Orange was safe enough to be used by the army. His son served in Vietnam. He became ill at age 42, and died. His grandson was born with birth defects.

In his own words: "I cannot prove in court that Agent Orange is the cause of all medical problems, disorders and cancers reported by Vietnam veterans, or of their children's severe birth defects. But I am convinced that it is."

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Healthy habits in our children

Good health allows children to function effectively with their peers as well as live the life they aspire to have for as long as they can. Planning and providing appropriate health education for young children serves as a foundation for lifelong healthy habits which ultimately help build a strong healthy future generation.

KHANDAKER ZIA HASAN

CHILDREN across the world are gaining more weight than ever before, and so are the ones in Bangladesh. Of course I'm talking about the children who come from well-off families. They consume a lot of high-fat and high-sugar food and spend less time being physically active. This is really posing a big threat to our future generation.

Children in urban areas take in a lot of farm chicken and later behave like them; involving themselves in no physical movement, and turn into computer and TV buffs. Of course there are exceptions but at least I have one example, my 11 year old son! We are sometimes about to scuffle when I call him a farm chicken. Even in this month of Ramadan, he takes a sole interest in chicken and rice only! Seeing his food habits over the last two years has really set me thinking and got me interested in writing something on

this issue.

I believe most parents are facing similar challenges. So at any cost we have to win over this battle and get our children a balanced-food diet as well as a balanced lifestyle to help them become an overall balanced human being in every sphere of life.

Parents share an enormous responsibility in teaching children healthy habits, values, and attitudes about their lives. But healthy eating and the need for physical activity don't become habits overnight. It takes time and effort to make them a part of our daily routine. Early childhood is a prime time to help children establish healthy behaviours which will promote a fit lifestyle. Here are some ways to put healthy practices into your child's routine:

Teach the importance of a balanced diet: Many studies have shown the importance of healthy diets in regular mental and physical development. Discuss the good choices he or she can

make for her diet. Children need to understand that their food choices directly impact their health, and parents have a responsibility to teach them how to make informed decisions. Teach your kids to avoid the high-calorie food often advertised on television.

Be a role model: You are the teacher. Remember, action is more powerful than speech. You should exhibit good hygiene and safety behaviour so that your child can learn and follow suit.

Eat meals together: Eating at least one meal together everyday gives you a chance to serve as a healthy eating role model and helps your child develop a healthy attitude towards food. Research also shows that children who eat regularly with their families do better in school than children who do not. Eat meals in the dining room or kitchen and avoid eating in front of the television.

Get them involved: Getting children involved in the kitchen is an excellent way to change your fussy eater. Play with your kids outside, take them to the grocery store, let them create a meal, and let them help you in the kitchen. Involving children in the purchasing and preparation process will enable them to make healthy choices away from home.

Exercise together: If your child is spending too much time on video games and is not getting enough exercise, explain that exercise feels good and gives you more energy. Make physical activity part of your family's routine. Take a walk

or go for a bike ride together. Limit the amount of time your children spend using the computer, watching television or playing video games to a maximum of 2 hours per day. All children aged 2 and older should participate in at least 30 minutes of enjoyable, moderate-intensity activities everyday.

Teach good hygiene habits: It is important to teach your kids how to avoid germs. Make a daily routine for your kid that includes hygiene activities like brushing teeth, washing hands, toilet, taking a bath etc. The key is to practice and ritualise some good behaviours. Along with cleaning body, children will need to learn about clean clothing.

Avoid giving empty calories: Sugar beverages such as soft drinks and sweet, artificial fruit juices, as well as high sugar items such as candy bars or sugar cereals have a high caloric content without the nutritional benefit. It is best to keep your child away from all this and make it a rare treat instead of everyday occurrence. Encourage your child to drink plenty of water or milk.

Sometimes be strict: Especially with habits like tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, there's no room for anything but firmness. Explain why these substances are harmful and encourage them to ask questions. Establish clear consequences if these rules are broken.

Reward them: When your child chooses a healthy activity over an



unhealthy on reward him/her with a fun physical activity, such as cricket set, movies etc. but don't use food to reward your child. Acknowledge their effort and accomplishment, not just their potential.

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as they can. Planning and providing appropriate health education for young children serves as a foundation for lifelong healthy habits which ultimately help build a strong healthy future generation.

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