

Waltzing in dynastic politics

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THE inevitable is happening: Dynastic lineage is coming on to the frontline of national politics. Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia slipping into their twilight years are looking to their progeny to take up their mantles. But it is hardly swan song for them if the fiesta with which they are going about their respective jobs is any indicator of what remains of their staying power.

Sajeed Wazed Joy and Tareque Rahman are on the spotlight. The first has been formally introduced at Pirganj, Joy's paternal home, supposed to be a constituency to flag off his candidature for the upcoming national polls. And Tareque Rahman has made public appearance twice in London to share his visions with the party followers in anticipation of homecoming. When that will be is a matter of guesswork.

Tareque Zia has 16/17 cases hanging against him. In 13 cases he has been set on bail and three are ongoing. These relate to money laundering, alleged Zia Orphanage embezzlement, tax evasion and illegal possession of money. Most of the cases were filed by the military-backed caretaker government. But in two cases, one on money laundering and the second on August 21 grenade attack, arrest warrants are pending against him courtesy of the present government. Tareque Zia, therefore, faces a baptism by fire so far as his reentry into Bangladesh and its politics go. It seems as though his return to active politics is predicated on Khaleda Zia's coming to power.

In such a context, Sajeed Wazed Joy has a clear vantage point. But among the BNP loyalists, Tareque Zia has a cer-



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tain image of victimhood, a card that they may like to play as a promo strategy. Even so, the reservations about his disreputable conduct in running parallel government from Hawa Bhaban wouldn't be so easy to live down.

Quite naturally, comparisons are being drawn between

Sajeed Wazed Joy and Tareque Zia, not so dispassionately one would say. The BNP camp claims Joy is no match for Tareque who has had a longer association with politics than Sajeed. But the latter is no greenhorn in politics given the political family he belongs to. He is also highly educated

and an IT specialist. How their credentials are going to breathe fresh air in Bangladesh politics remains in doubt since their legacies and narratives will be same as before. Only the style and form may change but the real test will be unshackling the burden of the past.

On the other hand, the ramping up of youth leadership conforms to the demographic reality of 40 percent of the population comprising below 35 age groups. But, can dynastic politics ensure the reaping of such potential demographic dividends or will it be a roadblock to it? Let's not forget, galvanisation of the youth power hinges on high morality and purposeful commitment of the leadership at the top coupled with complete absence of we-they differentiations.

Dynastic politics in South Asia has not helped democratic consolidation through institutional underpinnings simply because it has meant personal rule of the incumbents. It has by its very nature spawned sycophancy, cronyism, abuse of power and corruption. Dynastic politics has led to assassination of national leaders with the results that their successors have been chary of security concerns.

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The perpetuation of lineage in politics essentially draws on chronic lack of intra-party democracy. There is no room for grooming leadership when the same person is party leader as well as the chief executive of the state.

So long as equality of opportunity, level playing field and meritocracy take the centre stage of political dispensation we will have to be content with middling quality of performance as a nation.

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Powerless EC

SAKHAWAT HUSSAIN

THE recent decision of the Election Commission (EC) and the remarks of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) to the media have created apprehensions in the mind of the public, particularly about its decision to shed its powers.

I wish to first dwell on Article 91E which was formulated in 2001 by the then CEC, late Abu Syed, and made into an ordinance. But neither the AL nor BNP wanted the EC to have this power

During the reform of 2008, Article 91E again came back to us, and we expanded it and made it more applicable. The issue was discussed with all the political parties, the civil society and journalists. We formulated the changes after getting feedback from all quarters. And this was made into an ordinance.

Though BNP did not join in those formal discussions, it gave its reactions to our proposals which we sent to them by post. However, BNP did send a delegation just before the schedule of election, because one of their conditions was to annul this article. It identified areas in the amendments where it needed assurance that Article 91 would not be misused.

Accordingly, all those areas were modified, and this was when we said that if there were two candidates contesting and one's candidacy was cancelled, then the other person would not be declared elected unopposed, and the election would be rescheduled as per Article 17.

Article 17 says that if a valid candidate dies, election to that constituency should be rescheduled with re-filing of fresh nominations. We changed that and we came up with what is now in Article 91, where there are lots of steps which have to be taken before cancellation of candidature.

After the election, the present parliament made it into law without changing a single word of the ordinance. But, surprisingly, the EC, without even discussing with anybody, has suggested the amendment. They perhaps initially felt the need for an amendment that if only one candidate was left in the race, he/she should be declared unopposed.

The argument that the rule cannot be applied and so it is not required is not convincing. There are laws which are supposed to act as deterrents. And they may not be applied in one's lifetime. We saw how effectively it acted as deterrent in maintaining law and order, and in keeping electoral discipline.

The reasons given by the EC are contradictory. At one time they are talking about Article 17, then they are talking about Article 19 and they are also talking about Article 66. As for Articles 17 and 19, the former deals with the death of a valid candidate and the latter deals with the nomination and declaration of the final candidatures, in which nomination of many candidates may be cancelled for many reasons.

If there is only one candidate left, he is declared unopposed, but that is at the nomination stage. But, the Election Commission had no power, after someone is accepted as a candidate, to control his activity. Whatever power is given has to be executed either by magistrates or by the judicial magistrate or by the court. Article 19 is one article which has given the EC some power.

Everybody is talking about powerful EC, but instead, whatever little power the EC had is being annulled. This is a self-defeating proposal, and will create questions in people's mind about the

motives of the EC.

We had certain proposals to further strengthen the EC, and those proposals were approved and sent to be long-listed a month or 15 days before being handed over to the new Commission. In the proposals, there were a few important clauses, like consultation of the ministry with the EC before implementing any decision of the government. We identified four major areas so that they consult with the EC because our experience was that these ministries send some sort of signals and letters direct to the people who are connected with the EC, and there is posting/transfer of the officers. The idea was that whatever decisions the government takes it should seek clearance of the EC. This is one way of strengthening the EC. Unfortunately, our suggestion has fallen through.

There was also another suggestion we made regarding monitoring election expenditure of the candidates. They had to submit daily expenditure bills to the committee; the committee would then verify on ground, if need be, and then send its comments to the EC so that when the candidates gave the final expenditure statement to the Commission, it could tally with the one they had got from the committee. We suggested that there should be a committee for overseeing the expenditure of the candidates at the ground level. That has also not been included I believe. There were a few other very important points like post-election action regarding false declaration. I think this has not been included in the recommended amendments.

We have also been emphasising on the deployment of the army, which is required from the EC side for the Parliament election because of paucity of other law enforcement agencies. There will be about 60,000 centres, and they will have to be guarded. The army is deployed to augment/supplement the other agencies. And the armed forces were only given duty as a reserve force and as

a show of force so that the police and the other elements could be deployed in the centres. Now, if army is not included in the definition of law enforcement agency, then two things will happen. First of all, their deployment has to be done under the Cr. P(c), and for that it is the deputy commissioner who can call in the army or the government has to give a blanket declaration that the army is standby in aid of civil power. In that case, the army will not have power like the police and will need the consent of a magistrate to go into action. And it will be difficult to allot so many magistrates with each of the army contingents. The government has already said that election will take place without the army. And the LGRD minister has said something which is supposed to be told by the EC.

If the army is not deployed in the next election it will be very difficult for the EC to control and conduct the election peacefully with the small number of law enforcement personnel. And we cannot overlook the psychological aspect. It is the trust of the people in the army, that this is one institution that is neutral because all other forces belong to ministry of home affairs. It seems that this EC is not interested in strengthening itself as an institution.

The writer is a former Election Commissioner.

Astala Teesta Baby

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

IT'S 2011. Manmohan Singh to Indian newspaper editors: "We must reckon that at least 25% of the population of Bangladesh swear by the Jamaat-e-Islami and they are very anti-Indian and they are in the clutches, many times, of the ISI. So, a political landscape in Bangladesh can change at any time."

The next day, the landscape in Bangladesh does change -- 100% Bangladeshis reckon that the Indian PM's name is Manmohan W. Singh.

And then starts damage control. Singh's media advisor Haresh Khare: "The PM's remark was off the record." Try saying something 'off the record' to a room full of people whose sole job is to report. And don't forget Wiki Leaks...

Indian External Affairs Ministry: "These attributed remarks were by no means intended to be judgmental." Perhaps Dr. Singh needs to remain in his shell as the reluctant politician. I am not being 'judgmental,' I simply say this 'off the record.'

Press release of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka: "The PM, his government and the people of India have the greatest affection for the people of Bangladesh." As a goodwill gesture, BSF shoots five.

Two months later, Dr. Singh visits Dhaka. It is the M&M trip - both Manmohan and Messi are in town. Someone must have said Dhaka cannot handle 3M (or that the 3rd M would be overshadowed). So, Mamata (Banerjee) bails out. There goes the Teesta deal. Astala Teesta Baby!

A few days ago, Dr Singh tries one more time to help, at least through rhetoric, while meeting Dr. Dipu Moni. But, she returns home empty handed and comments on BJP's opposition to the Teesta deal and the Land Boundary Agreement

(LBA): "Sometimes domestic political compulsion does not allow one to see the larger picture." Uhm...exactly!

BJP fears India will concede more than what they will get from Bangladesh. Quite the contrary. Here is the Top 10 List of arguments in favour of Teesta and LBA bringing back a balance:

1. Increasing viewership of Doordarshan. Remember the pots and pans on bamboo poles -- the make-shift satellite dishes to catch the channel's grainy reception?
2. Trade imbalance. Indian TV channels import Bangladeshi artists, produce Indian shows, export the shows back to Bangladesh. Bangladesh then supplies TV audiences.
3. Due to their immense popularity in Bangladesh, Indian mega serials are now giga serials.
4. Kids here still believe Doraemon is Indian.
5. Lots of gold going to India. Makes Bappi Lahiri happy.
6. India gains vast new territories. The majority of multi-national companies in Bangladesh report to the India sales region.
7. T for T: Teesta for Transit.
8. December is the month when India comes to Bangladesh and Pakistan exits. I'm talking about Airtel and Warid.
9. Without a water treaty, Bangladeshi rivers dry up. Hilsa goes to Myanmar for spawning. (That's nature protesting). Myanmar gets the Hilsa. No Hilsa goes into West Bengal. BSF may have to tackle the Rohingya influx.
10. Water stifling dries up the Padma. No can drive/walk across the river. No Indian funding for the Padma Bridge.

Ms. Banerjee!! You belong to the Trinomool. Help! It's just water and soil we're talking about. Besides, Bangladesh and West Bengal are separated merely by the same language.

Radio silence... Oh well. Maybe a second Concert for Bangladesh at the Madison Square Garden. This time, it's Madonna, singing "La Teesta Mamata."

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice) and the host of NTV's Grameenphone Presents The Naveed Mahbub Show.

QUOTABLE Quotes

"For every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

BEETLE BAILY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte

