

Reforming the election system



DR. NAZMUL AHSAN KALIMULLAH

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THE 10th Parliament elections have added some unique dimensions to the history of elections in Bangladesh. For the first time, 153 candidates have won uncontested. BNP-led opposition parties opted for widespread violence to obstruct the elction process. Fear of violence restrained people from going to polling booths. Initially presence of voters was very thin. Later visibility of voters increased. Government ensured tight security. We also found presence of striking forces around polling booths. Increased presence of law enforcing agencies appeared unusual to people. It further increased uncertainty among voters. This election exposes some basic flaws of our election system. We cannot deny the reality that voters are habituated to a festive mood of election where candidates will spend generously to bribe the voters and

bring them to polling booths. This time number of candidates was the lowest ever and some of them withdrew at the last moment. As most candidates were assured of victory they spent very little to attract voters. In Gazipur City Corporation poll held last July, reportedly voters even got 5000 taka for each vote. In this reality why people will come to the poll risking their life where there is no compensation package in return. Our election is based on 'First past the post' principle. That's why our candidates desperately use money, muscle power, kinship and whatever they have in their stock to get at least one more vote than his contenders. But in many cases it is found that more votes are being cast against the winning candidate. That means the elected candidate represent the minority. It infringes upon the very concept of democracy. To come out of this situation we need to reform the election system. This is more important than the ongoing debate for and against caretaker government.

Our electoral system should deliver meaningful result otherwise following rituals of voting will not bring any positive change. We should adopt proportional system of representation. In proportional sytem, party gets priority over person. People will compare manifestos of the contending parties. Parties will also be sincere in making their pledges. In the present system of election, we follow an anachronistic system of loyalty to a person. It is denial of plural space. And thus our democracy has degraded into electing an absolute leader. Another important point is increasing the number of seats in parliament. In 1973, there were 300 seats for 7.5 crore people. Over the years the population has doubled but the number of seats remains same. In House of Commons number of seats increases in proportion to number of voters. We should also think of the same. We should also ensure participation of non-resident Bangladeshis in election. They are our significant source of foreign currency. They also represent our country in abroad. In Mozambique there are two seats reserved for non residents. We should rethink over the constitutional impediment on electing dual citizens. If a person can hold responsible position in abroad why he would not be allowed to represent in his own country. In our country, many candidates have dual citizenship but they have to hide the information. Our election should be vibrant, relevant and responsive. Civil society and academicians should be included in election commission. In our country it has become a tradition that only people from civil service, military and judiciary get appointment in election commission. It narrows the scope of a credible election commission. Finally we have to create a space for plurality of thoughts. People have to be encouraged to ask questions about their rights.

The writer is Chairman , JANIPOR.

What does a credible election mean?

MD. ABDUL ALIM

THE conduct of free and fair elections is at the heart of the democratic process. But when an election is conducted in a non-inclusive way, it leads to the loss of confidence with the results, escalates structural disparities and inequalities which stimulates violence and sometimes leads to the civil war. Hence, it is important to conduct a free, fair and credible election. But what are the characteristics of a credible election? Although there is no standard definition of a credible election, there are some aspects of a credible election. The first and foremost feature of a credible elec-

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tion is that it must have the reflection of the will of the people. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures. In the 5th January election as there was unopposed elections in 153 constituencies, more than 50% voters could not be able to exercise their voting rights; hence the election doesn't reflect the will of the people. The second important criterion of a credible election is that it must be participated by all qualified political parties. The UN in its principles declared that "political contestants (parties, candidates and supporters of positions on referenda) have vested interests in the electoral pro-

cess through their rights to be elected and to participate directly in government." In the 5th January election only 12 political parties out of 41 took part; hence less than 50% registered political parties are taking part. The third fundamental ingredient of a credible election is that the electoral process must be trusted by the citizens. "Building the public's trust in the election process is of the utmost importance to election management bodies around the world". The credibility of an election largely depends on the actual and perceived integrity of the electoral process. More specifically, if citizens believe the electoral process is defective, dishonest, or less than free and fair, they may not accept the outcome. Ensuring fair competition among the political parties and candidates is another attributes of a credible election. It is evident that there is no fair competition even among the parties which are participating in the 10th parliamentary election as there was "compromise" among the parties. On 14th December, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said her party had reached a compromise and withdrawn their candidatures from some seats after liaising with other parties participated in the polls-time government. She also proposed "walkover" to the BNP in some constituencies if it had joined the "all-party polls-time government." Another characteristic of a credible election is the acceptable voter turnout. The 5th January election left a very low turnout throughout the country. In the last two elections held in 2001 and 2008 the turnout 74.37% and 85.93% respectively. Moreover, the usual enthusiasm and festive mood from voters and other citizens were not found this time. The writer is an international election expert, currently working as Director, Election Working Group; This article is the views of the writer himself; E-mail: alim.abdul3492@gmail.com



Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd. Voltaire (1694 - 1778)

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS
- 1 Constellation makeup
- 6 No longer fizzy
- 10 Suggest
- 11 Move smoothly
- 12 Prepared
- 13 Grapevine item
- 14 Concerning
- 15 Alternative to briefs
- 16 Letter after sigma
- 17 Do yard work
- 18 Spot
- 19 Too many to count
- 22 Free from fat
- 23 Gumbo vegetable
- 26 Passenger seats on motor-cycles
- 29 Work wk. start
- 32 Zeus or Apollo
- 33 Guide-book feature
- 34 Counterpart
- 36 Cook's mint
- 37 Competitor
- 38 Director Kurosawa
- 39 Neck wrap
- 40 Kuwaiti coin
- 41 Grasped
- 42 Flower parts
- DOWN
- 1 Use a mister on
- 2 Pedicure target
- 3 Generally
- 4 Take the bus
- 5 Pig's digs
- 6 State of change
- 7 Bar fruits
- 8 Cherish
- 9 Not wordy
- 11 Aged
- 15 Scary cry
- 17 It often includes a windmill
- 20 Pet perch
- 21 Enjoy Aspen
- 24 Lettuce variety
- 25 Rues, for sure
- 27 Firplace item
- 28 Harpoons
- 29 Swampy area
- 30 Chilled
- 31 Fleet-related
- 35 Cooking fat
- 36 Revue piece
- 38 Spots on TV



CRYPTOQUOTE 12-2

EFKQK CQK EHZ EFSTBU
HQZTB HSEF CJPZUE CJI JKBCJ
HQSESTB. ZTK SU SEU UENJK.
EFK ZEFKQ SU SEU ZXTKTE.
- DQKI QZIKJI

PREVIOUS CRYPTOQUOTE:
Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style.
-- Matthew Arnold

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

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