Constitution, democracy and development

MASHIUR RAHMAN

Successes of 2009-13

THE period 2009-13 was remarkable for many reasons. The economy attained sustained high growth rate exceeding 6 percent and sometimes close to 7 percent; all primary school cohort, both boys and girls, went to school and received books for free; enrolment ratio at secondary level rose and reached gender parity; child and maternal mortality declined; poverty ratio dropped to just over 26 percent; and larger proportions of incremental national income accrued to the middle income groups, signifying reduced inequality. It was a period of stability and growth, not without occasional minor hiccups.

Towards the end of 2013, however, there was violence which -- in intensity, scale and targeting -- was similar to the communal riots before and after 1947 and the atrocities of 1971 and 2001 following the general election. This time around, the violence erupted over whether a caretaker government would replace an elected government during election. A caretaker government, in fact, is government by a handful of persons chosen through partisan bargaining.

We have left that behind. Following election 2014, the nation can look forward to political stability, accelerated and sustained growth, and consolidation of the ideological aspirations which inspired the war of liberation and led to creation of Independent Bangladesh.

Recovery and entrenchment of the constitutional values

These ideological foundations are democracy, secularism, socialism meaning social justice, and Bangalee nationalism. The assassination of Bangabandhu along with his family members barring two daughters (15th August 1975) was an attempt to annihilate the ideological basis of Bangladesh. Since then the enemies of independence of Bangladesh seized the state power and pushed the country backwards.

The Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution has reinstated those values and set on strong foundations those values and the basic structures of Democratic Republic. Overthrow of or attempt to undermine the Constitution has been criminalised.

With the Constitution now providing the basis for governance and preventing praetorian adventures, the nation can engage in pursuit of *progress*. John Stuart Mill gave to the term a comprehensive and teleological meaning. *Progress includes order.* Order is a necessary -- but not a sufficient -- condition for progress. There is need for more: vision, strategy, policy, commitment, and leadership.

Constitutional anchor of policy

'Vision 2021' aimed at reaching the level of middle income country by 2021. The successes of 2009-14 provide the basis and encouragement to advance to 'Vision 2041' which aims at reaching the level of developed economy within ten years following 2021'. These are aspirations presented to the nation -- and feasible. Such goals are necessary to mobilise the energy of the people purposively

towards the teleological ends.

The visions are the goals that steer us in the right direction, and are important for efficient management of the economy. There is no economy which does not encounter problems or shocks from time to time. In an open global economic regime, the art of economic management lies in strategically steering the economy to the chosen goal. Without visions a nation wanders around, getting nowhere.

The Fundamental Principles of State Policy (Chapter II) in the Constitution lays out basis of the policies that government would pursue. The Vision 2021 and the Vision 2041 reflect those principles. The Fundamental Rights (Chapter III) reflect liberalism which emphasises individual liberties. Individual liberty remains a mirage for the people if they do not acquire the capability. The Fundamental Principles aim at policies to develop the capability and welfare for the people.

Demographic and land-water dynamics

While doing research for the Awami League Election Manifesto 2014, two features of the society and economy struck as the most significant: the demographic dynamics and the land-water use dynamics. There are interactions among the elements in each set and between the two sets. Land and water are deeply inter-connected in their use.

The demographics show that birth rate is declining and population growth decelerating. For the next four decades or so the working age population will rise. The two significant aspects of the demographic dynamics are deceleration of population growth and expansion of the labour force.

The large labour force will encourage industrialization, including relocation of industries from other places, and sending workers abroad. However, the low level of skill and the corresponding low labour productivity will restrain output below the potential. Policies for expansion of education and skill development will remove these constraints. Government has already initiated programmes to that end.

Land is scarce -- and the scarcity is being accentuated by growing human settlements, industrialisation, and infrastructures. These are inevitable: growth of population requires more places to live; industrialization is necessary for raising national output and employment; and infrastructure and utilities are necessary for development. We cannot whine them away. On the contrary, managed intelligently, these are resources for development.

Scarcity of land entails efficient land use and urban development planning supported by rational control system. Such an approach imposes control over exercise of ownership right, but no more than is required to avoid negative social externalities. Inadequate professional competence and capture of the regulatory system are risks, however. Bangladesh is not unique in this -- the risk is a world-wide phenomenon.

The large rivers constitute a system and intervention in one impact the others, which entail that water resource management be planned and executed on a systemic basis. River system management has multi-sectoral implications -- it provides irrigation, drainage, electricity. The large rivers in Bangladesh have international dimen-

sions, too.

Government recognises the need for spatial decentralization. Mid-level urban centers, which broadly include the divisional and the old district towns, will be developed with provision of a wide variety of civic amenities such as universities and schools, technical training institutions, hospitals, connectivity infrastructures and utilities. Rural towns and cluster townships will be set up at upazila headquarters and rural areas. Supply of infrastructure services and utilities is economic in dense settlements. This will also attenuate rural out-migration and enhance efficiency of the rural sector.

Spatial decentralisation will not be meaningful without de-concentration of decision-making in both government and private institutions. Elected local government institutions will provide the organisational framework for decentralisation of government decisional power of a wide variety and range. The extent of such decentralisation should be commensurate with their capability and supplemented by pragmatic accountability procedures.

It is necessary carefully to differentiate between programmes or projects which are better implemented centrally because these are nation-building in nature or have scale advantage. The education and skill development programmes, national highway, electricity, large-scale water management structures -- these have nation-building implications and scale advantage.

Jeffrey Sacks observed that a country need to adopt a limited number of strategic policies to address its problems -- not too many and one adapted to each sector. In case of Bangladesh it seems education including skill development and optimal use of land and water define the basic strategy. Occam's Razor like rule is a good way to chose strategy.

Thanks to remittances from the workers abroad, the comfortable foreign currency reserve and excess liquidity with commercial banks allow expansionary policy, albeit limited by the real sector's capacity for output response. The private sector's appetite for investment is weak at the moment. Besides fiscal measures to stimulate the economy, steps may be necessary to encourage private investment, subject to responsible limits of expansionary policy. Simultaneous monetary and fiscal expansion is recipe for inflation.

Political stability & policy continuity

Political stability -- and more importantly policy continuity -- is important for achieving the goals which have been set for the economy. Economies in transformation -- and those transforming to a higher trajectory of growth in particular -- need political stability and policy continuity more than others.

In United Kingdom, for instance, Margaret Thatcher (1979-90) and Tony Blair (1997-2007) had been prime ministers long enough to bring about critical changes in policy paradigms. The Thatcher Revolution installed libertarian policy. The New Labour dropped from the Labour Charter nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy or key industries. 'The third way' is the New Labour's search for a new paradigm of social democracy.

UMNO (United Malayan National

Organization) has governed Malaysia since independence in 1957. UMNO is a broad church that brings together the Malayans, the Chinese, and the Indians, each representing overlapping ethnic-religious-economic interests. UMNO in the early years successfully put down Communist uprising, resolved conflicts of interests and avoided racial riots.

The development of Malaysia accelerated under the long and strong leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad (1981-2003). Many Western observers alleged that the democratic and human rights records of Malaysia during Mahathir were patchy. But mutually beneficial economic transactions never stopped.

Germany offers a unique case of governing Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD, which ordinarily alternate as party in government and opposition. CDU/CSU and SPD had formed Grand Coalition twice before (1966-69 & 2005-10) and are partners in the current coalition government led by Chancellor Angela Merkel. CDU /CSU could form coalition with a smaller party but preferred SPD. Grand Coalition follows broad policy agenda and thus ensures continuity of policy. An opposition party does not exist in Germany now, which however does not affect the quality of governance.

Incidentally, Budesarat has declared that it would petition the Constitutional Court to ban ultra-rightist party which inclines towards Nazi-like ethnic prejudice and violence. The resolution of the European Parliament critical of JI seems to reflect the sensitivity to traces of Nazi-like ethnic hatred and violence.

Party system in democracy

Participation in election by political parties contributes to consolidation of democracy in two major ways -- bounded uncertainty and contingent consent. Bounded uncertainty implies reduced uncertainty as to the methods of election and governance post-election. Caretaker government enhances uncertainty. At each election there is negotiation to choose the persons who would constitute the ad hoc caretaker government. There is no guarantee that the persons are competent or can conduct the election in a neutral manner.

Contingent consent entails prior acceptance of the result of election -- not stipulating change of the rules and the governing structures for participation or accepting the outcome as a condition. The ground rules for election have been explicated in the Constitution; refusal to go by those rules amounts to refusal to accept the Constitution.

Election plays a critical role in developing the party system. According to Giovanni Sartori, an Italian-born professor of politics in USA, party system is defined by intra-party competition to win election and influence public policy. The ways of the parties that want to overthrow government by brute force and of the parties that want to win democratic elections are different. A party that does not take part in election also opts out of the party system and democratic politics. It is a hard and steep climb for such a party to establish its credibility and re-enter democratic politics.

The writer is economic adviser to the PM.

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From fear to fearlessness
Roadmarch to Obhoynagar

AUDITY FALGUNI

"WITHIN a system which denies the existence of basic human rights, fear tends to be the order of the day. Fear of imprisonment, fear of torture, fear of death, fear of losing friends, family, property or means of livelihood, fear of poverty, fear of isolation, fear of failure." -- *Aung San Suu Kyi, Freedom from Fear.*

The Bengali term "Obhoynagar" is a compound word literally meaning "the city of fearlessness." But what's about Obhoynagar in Jessore where the recent mayhem on Hindus took place? Can Biswajit Sarker from Malopara, Champatola village, offer an answer? He is still coughing fresh blood due to the severe beating he received on the day of election, i.e., January 5 by BNP-Jamat armed cadres. Can Sunil Kumar Biswas, Sushil Kumar Sarker , Shyamal Kumar Biswas , lying with fractured legs and crutches beside the hospital beds, and who also sustained dagger blows on their heads, say what is "Abhay" or "fearlessness?"

I visited Malopara in Obhoynagar on January 11 as one of the hundreds of participants of Gono Jagoran Moncha's road march from Dhaka to the affected areas. I visited Nawapara government hospital too where some severely wounded Hindu men and even Muslim grass-root Awami League activists like Taslim Hossain and Imdadul Khan were gasping for breath.

The house of a Hindu family in Malopara village in Jessore bears the signs of a post-polls attack.

"It was January 5 morning. The polling booth is just 10 minute away from our village. No sooner had I gone to the polling center than I saw Jamaat leader Aziz Yousuf Mowlana and some Shibir cadres in front the Champatola Alia Madrasha. I burst into tears and pleaded saying, "if you don't wish, we will not cast our votes. But please don't attack our village." They started beating us up and I ran to save my life. Later I lost sense and found myself in hospital," said Bishwajit Sarker.

His daughter Priya Sarker somehow saved herself from the BNP-Jamaat wrath by jumping on a boat and fleeing across the Bhairab.

Sunil Kumar Biswas told us that his village

Uttar Para was attacked soon after the election ended. Another victim, Shyamal Kumar Biswas, said, "Ward Secretary of local BNP and his men attacked me with a dagger and stabbed on my head. I somehow managed to save my life and crossed the river with sever head injury."

Mukul Sarker was in charge of preparing slips for the voters at the polling booth. He was injured during the third round of attack in the evening on his village. He crossed the river to save his life.

Before visiting Nawapara hospital I went to Champatola village of Obhoynagar. A local housewife Minu Sarker informed us that the first attack on their village came at around 11:00 am on the day of vote. "When the attack began we started fleeing across the river. Some of our men tried to resist the attack. But the attackers spread a rumour that three Muslims were killed by Hindus. Then more of them joined in the mayhem. The attack continued till evening."

On our way back home I was simply pondering whether it was possible to establish "secularism" through state security only unless we uprooted religious extremism from the society. Till then the profound lyrics of Tagore, "Give us a new birth from fear to fearlessness" will remain as mere words confined to pages of the books.

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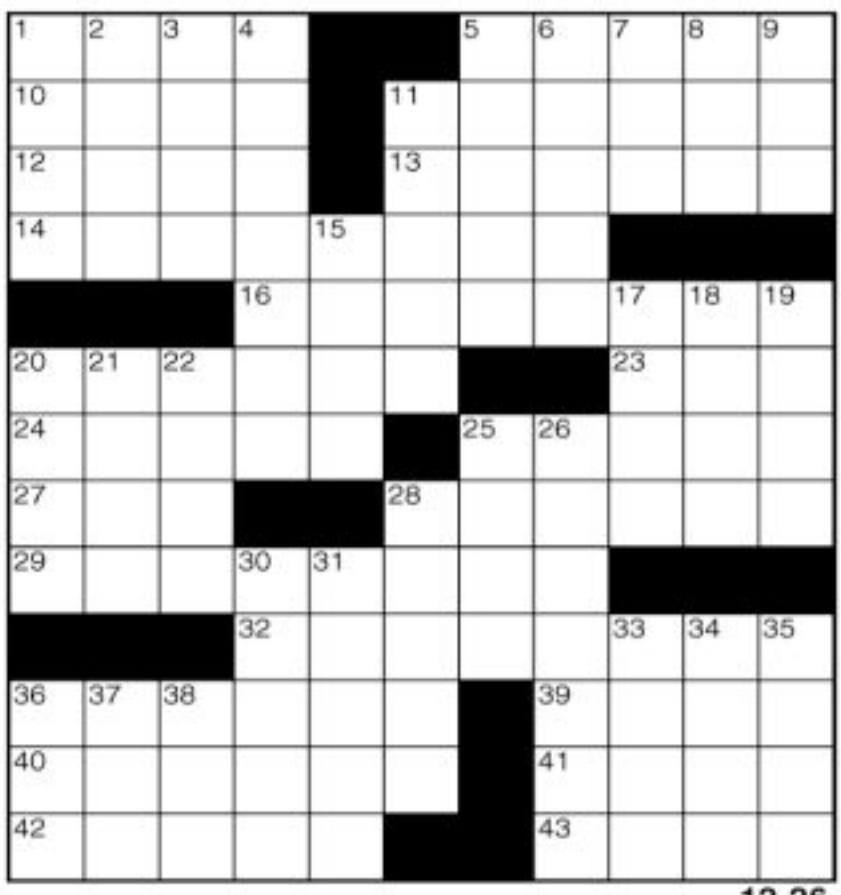

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS
1 Dealer's need
5 Book makeup
10 Massage target
11 Good name
12 Scuffle
13 Right away
14 Bakery pastry
16 Reverse, as a ruling
20 Defeated
23 Sturgeon eggs
24 Burns' partner
25 Radio divisions
27 Espionage org.
28 Comes up
29 Post-party woe
32 Roof eave, e.g.
36 Film set on Pandora
39 War of 1812 port
40 Rise up
41 Writer Rice
42 Where-withal
43 Female rabbits

DOWN
1 Silly
2 Stocking shade
3 Burn a bit
4 Convention highlight
5 Friend of Wendy
6 Left at sea
7 Colt creation
8 List-ending abbr.
9 Spot
11 Ominous bird
15 Kitchen sight
17 Fancy planters
18 Took the trolley
19 Capone's foe
20 "Art of the Fugue" composer
21 Lamb's alias
22 Astronaut Shepard
25 _ Rabbit
26 Ditz
28 Turn aside
30 Boarded
31 Squashed circles
33 Florence's river
34 Inverted six
35 Turns right
36 Painter's pride
37 Geese formation
38 Gardner of movies

Yesterday's answer

S	A	P	S			T	A	I	L
T	R	O	U	T		D	O	N	N	E
R	A	L	P	H		A	N	I	T	A
A	M	I		A	R	M	Y	M	E	N
W	I	S	E	M	E	N		A	N	T
		S	H	R	E	D		A	L	T
	A	S	W	A	N				
A	L	S		I	D	E	A	L
A	T	E		S	N	O	W	M	E	N
W	O	R	K	M	E	N		E	G	O
A	N	N	I	E		I	S	L	E	T
S	C	E	N	E		S	E	I	N	E
H	E	R	D			W	A	D	S

12-26

CRYPTOQUOTE   12-17

DTS QNSHDSID QCCX PCR WHL XC BCN HLCDTSN UI LCD ORID DC ITHNS PCRN NUWTSI ARD DC NSYSHG DC TUK TUI CVL. -- ASLOHKUL XUINHSGU

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IF WE TREAT PEOPLE AS THEY OUGHT TO BE, WE HELP THEM BECOME WHAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF BECOMING. -- GOETHE
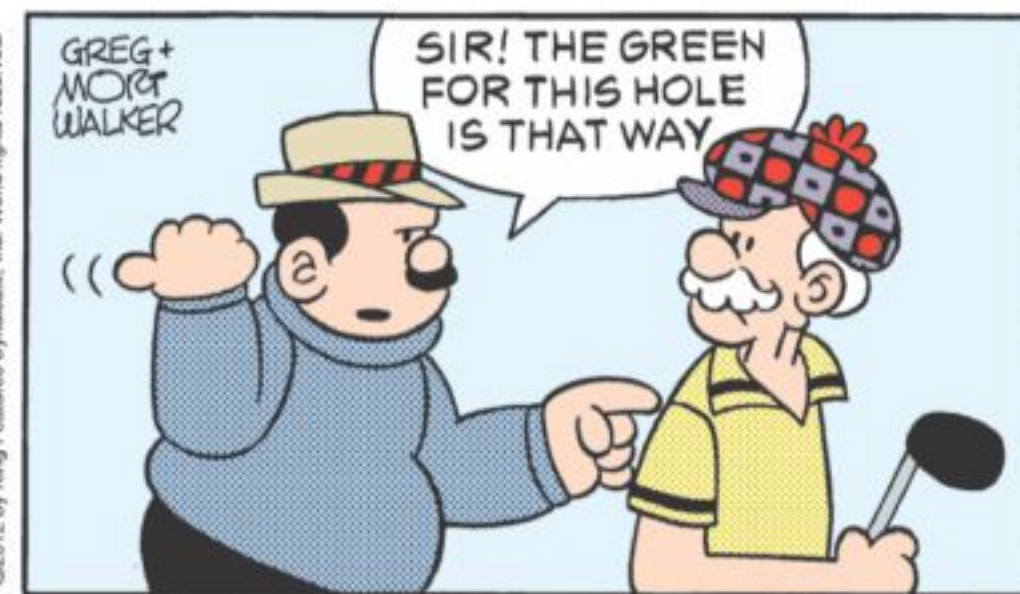
A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

BEETLE BAILEY   by Mort Walker

HENRY   by Don Tranchte