

The constitution has made people of Bangladesh rich in terms of possession of the state powers! And the powers must be exercised on their behalf and under the authority of the constitution. People are empowered to authorise someone or a group of individuals to exercise the powers on their behalf. The constitution stipulates the mechanisms for election to this effect.

But when the constitutional provisions are not honoured, people have become helpless. And the possession of the state powers has appeared as a curse. It has happened several times in past. The present political situation has been a glaring example of it.

A year ago, the Awami League-led government had systemically managed the January 5 parliamentary election and retained state power. It had succeeded in denying people, owners of the state powers, to exercise their rights to elect their representatives to govern them. At that time, the BNP-led alliance had announced to resist the government from holding that election. The AL-led government was the enemy of the BNP-led alliance. But the BNP-led alliance had enforced mindless hartals holding people hostage. The political landscape was flooded with people's blood. More than 507 people including 196 innocents who did not belong to any political party were killed. The AL-led government has won the battle.

A year after the situation appeared as a curse for people again. Mercury in the political landscape started rising centring the first anniversary of the January 5 parliamentary election. The BNP had planned to hold a rally to denounce the January 5 election while the ruling AL had announced to celebrate it as a day of victory of democracy. The AL-led government has abused the state powers, which belong to people, and kept Khaleda confined to her Gulshan officer for more than two weeks and kept the BNP office under key and lock. The ruling party has celebrated the victory on the day taking the streets under its control.

Confined Khaleda has opted for protesting the government measures and called for country wide non-stop blockade from January 6. But the blockade stood against the people. The programme has jeopardised people's lives. The spate of violence particularly arson has traumatized people. More than two dozen

have already been killed, the majority of the victims not affiliated with any political party. Yet they had to pay heavily for the violent politics.

Nobody knows how and when the situation will be normal. Both sides have flexed their muscles to defeat the other. The ruling AL men have already taken to the streets and started working to form committees across the country to resist their rivals. BNP chief Khaleda Zia who appeared in public on Monday evening after more than two weeks has

announced that the blockade will continue until the government creates an atmosphere for holding a free and fair election. Her announcement has made it clear that her party wants to go to the state power and an election is now the only way for it. On the other hand, the AL wants to retain the power anyhow and many of its senior leaders have announced that no election will be held before 2019. Both sides have made it clear that neither of them care about the people, who are fortunately or unfortunately, the owners of the state powers.

The country's people has faced almost the same situation several times in past. Only three years after the country's independence, they had been denied their democratic rights as the then government had introduced a one-party government system discarding the multiparty democracy. The violent end to the one-party system had given birth to a long dark chapter for the people. The military rulers and dictators had continued to rule the country until December in 1990. People had to pay heavily in the street agitations to oust the autocratic ruler at the end of 1990. Many people were killed and their properties were damaged. The restoration of democracy in 1991 however could not give people much comfort. The consequent battle for power took on a new shape with AL and BNP as the main contenders of it.

As a result of their struggle for power, the country has got a perverted democracy with a confrontational culture in politics. The party in power abuses the state powers to suppress the opposition movement. And the party in opposition has opted to counter the government by holding the people hostage. As if both sides have fixed their strategy to wage the war on people to achieve their partisan purpose. This is going on and will continue to go on until the politicians fall in love with the people they are supposed to represent.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

A WAR ON PEOPLE

SHAKHAWAT LITON



PHOTO: STAR FILE

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