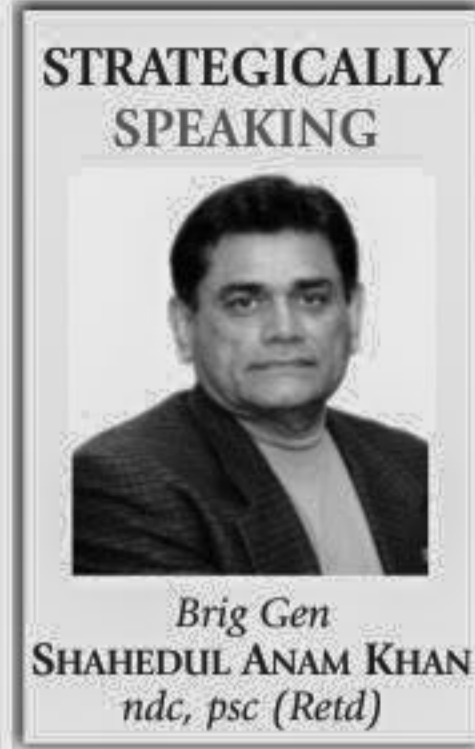


# How much democracy does a country need?



**STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING**  
 Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
*ndc, psc (Retd)*

**T**HE question is not easy to answer, and one hopes that one does not meet the fate of Pahom, of "How much land does a man need?" in trying to determine the optimum quantity of democracy for a country. After all, how much democracy is

that none can have absolute authority over state control. This would, as the protagonists of constitutional reforms aver, ensure good governance and equity.

The reaction of the AL was predictable and one can safely assert that had it been the BNP in place of AL, the reaction would not have been any different. After all, who would want to have his or her 'powers' clipped? However, the dislike of our political leaders of any suggestion of constitutional reform is inexplicable.

While there may be divided opinions in some countries on the very issue of constitutional reforms, there are instances of many countries that establish such a committee periodically to look at the constitution to infuse it with the dynamism to conform to the changing times. The contention that, "A Constitution is framed for ages to come and is designed to approach immortality as nearly as human institutions can approach it," (Chief Justice John Marshall of USA - 1821) risks rendering any constitution irrelevant if it fails to meet the basic propositions of the charter i.e. the greater good of the greater majority. And no good can come to the people if democracy suffers from shortcomings, some of which we are witnessing at the moment.

However, while one talks about constitutional reforms, one is not for a moment talking of 'revising' the Constitution but bringing in appropriate changes. After all, our constitution has seen fifteen amendments, the Indian constitution a hundred, some of which were based on suggestions made by constitutional reform committees set up from time to time by the government of the day in India. The regrettable aspect of the fifteen amendments to our constitution

is that none of them was generated by people's interest. On the contrary all, but one of them, was motivated by narrow partisan considerations.

Just to jog our memory, this is not the first time that the idea of constitutional reform has been raised. In 2008, the Election Commission had broached the idea of forming a constitution review commission to "recommend amendments critical to ensuring a strong parliamentary democracy." Some of the issues that came in for reckoning included: allowing lawmakers to play due role in parliament, increasing the number of parliamentary seats, introducing bicameral parliament and proportional representation, raising the number of reserved seats for women through direct election and restructuring power between the highest constitutional posts.

The EC's proposals also included the one on Article 70 of the constitution that says a lawmaker from a political party shall vacate his seat if he resigns from the party or votes against it in parliament. And the recommendations were the outcome of talks between the EC and the political parties on electoral reforms.

Obviously, our democracy can be improved in many ways. The highest court of the country felt constrained to offer formulas to tide over the burning electoral issue—conduct of the parliamentary election—as the High Court did in its full judgement on the Jan 5 elections. The recommendations of the Citizen's Committee contain very relevant issues that deserve serious consideration and not summary rejection.

The writer is Editor, Oped & Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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## Three pro-ruling party men killed by law enforcers

### Another blow dealt to rule of law

**W**E were outraged at the heinous crimes perpetrated by some pro-ruling party men in Magura, Hazaribagh and Kushtia. We wanted them to be punished. But instead what followed were some deaths in shootout under custody of law enforcers which we find totally unacceptable.

While we condemn the activities of the criminals, we cannot approve of 'death in gun-fight' of the perpetrators. These are nothing short of death in custody of which we have been consistently critical. We stand by the principle of full protection of an accused under law. Furthermore, the way the communication minister and health minister apparently lauded the action as the beginning of the 'corrective measures' against party miscreants can be seen as an indirect support to death in police custody. It may encourage the law enforcers to indulge in similar excesses. On the other hand, BCL leaders' attempt to condone Arzu Miah in the killing of a boy terming it as a lynching incident is equally condemnable.

What we have here is rampant lawlessness on the part of a section of ruling party cadres and equal abuse of law by law enforcers. Neither of the two trends can be helpful for a country under rule of law.

## Probir treated like a common criminal

### His being set on bail is small consolation

**W**E are relieved to learn that Probir Sikder, a seasoned and well known journalist who was a freedom fighter and who lost several members of his family in the liberation war, is out on bail. As any law abiding citizen, Mr. Sikder has the right to lodge a general diary (GD) with the police for feeling a threat to his personal safety. Instead of registering his GD, the police arrested him and transported him to Faridpur. Whether his act of posting a status update on Facebook constituted defamation is subject to a judge's ruling but the haste with which he was placed on remand was perhaps due to the fact that he named a minister among others.

We consider it to be a deliberate mistreatment of a journalist. And the manner in which he was incarcerated, produced in court in handcuffs and in shackles, even though he is physically challenged with only one leg, is outrageous. While it was the duty of the police to allay his fears of insecurity, the latter had detained him. This is yet another example of an attempt to harass journalists and we condemn it wholeheartedly. The message being sent out is that journalism has its limit and certain issues or powerful persons cannot be taken on any form without facing consequences.

# An unelectable candidate



AMITAVA KAR

**D**ONALD trump has defied the laws of political gravity. The real estate magnate/reality TV star is doing everything a US presidential hopeful is not supposed to do.

The loutish billionaire, however, has certain advantages over the other candidates. It's impossible for him to contradict himself because he has no ideological beliefs. His "ideas" are mostly boasts and his speeches showmanship. His vague tax position almost exactly copies Jeb Bush's. When asked how he would bring jobs back from China, he talked about buying a hotel in Miami.

For his audience, the only thing that matters is that he is assertive. He appeals to an admiration of supersized ego and machismo, however boorish in expression—in fact, the more vulgar and more preposter-

ous the better. He unleashes his aggression on the world, the aggression that others would be punished for; but he remains untouchable. His ability to get away with aggressiveness, insults, lies, and threats are exactly the attributes that attract his audience to him.

He has triumphed for them much like the bad guys in a movie who act out our darkest and most anarchic impulses. Trump's most loyal fans are white men without college degrees who feel that their position is slipping in an increasingly multicultural nation and believe only someone as "tough" as Donald Trump can regain America's rightful place in the world. To them he is a can-do capitalist success—unabashedly prosperous, fearlessly candid, hard-nosed negotiator who is, in his own words, "Really rich."

In his universe, Americans are victims of a "plot" and conspiring foreign governments is outsmarting the soft political elite in Washington. He talks a lot about his dealmaking skills—"I went to the Wharton School of Business," he told a rally in Arizona, "I'm, like, a really smart person."



Donald Trump

PHOTO: REUTERS

*His ability to get away with aggressiveness, insults, lies, and threats are exactly the attributes that attract his audience to him.*

the presumptive Democratic nominee. US Presidential politics is the ultimate reality show and gaudy Trump knows how to play. But his act will eventually become old and his fans, inevitably, will move onto someone else. So enjoy the joy ride, Mr smart guy, while it lasts.

Being horrible does have a political cost.

The writer is an engineer-turned-journalist.

## Reader's reaction

### "Which India is claiming to have been colonised?"

This refers to Hissam Khandker's write-up with the above title published in The Daily Star on 31 July 2015. I have not been able to download Dr. Tharoor's speech delivered at the Oxford Union debate mentioned by Mr. Khandker, but it seems from his write up that Dr. Tharoor has proposed that the British Government should, as a symbolic gesture, pay India at least one pound per year during the next two hundred years for colonising the country. Claiming compensation will be justified, for there is no doubt that England caused huge harm to India during the colonial rule although the colonial rulers did take certain positive step as well. Moreover, claiming a symbolic amount as reparation is reasonable, because we will never be able to arrive at a generally acceptable amount to be claimed as reparation (far from its acceptance by the British Government).

However, I would like to comment on several other aspects of Khandker's piece. Firstly, I know of only one author who mentions that India's share of world manufacturing output stood at about 20 percent in 1800 and then it declined steadily. But the author does not say that Mughal India may have 25 percent of the world GDP in the pre-colonial period. Secondly, according to Mr. Khandker, around 1700 Dhaka had a population of one million. But Manrique who came Dhaka in 1640 said that the "indigenous population of the city exceed 200 thousand". If that was the case, the population of the Dhaka city is highly unlikely to have increased to one million by 1700.

Thirdly, of all the different regions of India, Bengal was perhaps the largest supplier of textile goods, but how does Mr. Khandker come to the conclusion that Bengal's share was about 50 percent of the total Indian share? Fourthly, we have several opinions on Clive's share in the spoils of Bengal conquest. But our commentator accepts one particular opinion. It is useful to mention statistical data in any analytical exercise; however one should be very careful in handling those data. Fifthly, Mr. Khandker suggests that the tax rate in Mughal period was ten percent of the produce, but the generally accepted view is that it was much higher. Again, it appears from Mr. Khandker's write-up that Dr. Tharoor does not include "drain of wealth" from India and the loss of three to four million lives ("a genocide") as a result of Bengal famine of 1943 as reasons for claiming compensation. Mr. Khandker does not ask why. Finally if Mr. Khandker claims that Bangladesh should get a symbolic share of 45 pence per pound, it is not clear why our close neighbors Nepal and Bhutan and Pakistan should be deprived?

Professor M. Mufakharul Islam  
 On e-mail

## COMMENTS

### "Journo Probir sent to jail"

(August 18, 2015)

Ahmed Farhad Salim

So a person who spent his entire life tracking down war criminals and their collaborators is sent to jail?!

Pranta Banik

Bangladesh Minority Watch is very much concerned about the fabricated case against renowned journalist Probir Sikdar. We demand immediate release of him. It is also unfortunate that no lawyer stood for him fearing the reprisal of influential people.

### "He becomes blogger for Bangladesh"

(August 16, 2015)

Ahmed Farhad Salim

Words don't kill people. Fanatics with machetes do.

Asif Mehdi Tonoy

Yes, words can't kill people but sometimes they can provoke people.

Shuvonn Rezaa

Provoking and killing isn't the same thing.

### "National flag on MP's car!"

(August 16, 2015)

Fuad M M Ali

How couldn't she notice the flag on her vehicle?! What a lie!

Mithu Hassan Mahmood

It is very hard to believe that someone put the flag on her car without her permission.

Abdul Bahar

She did that to make her look more important.