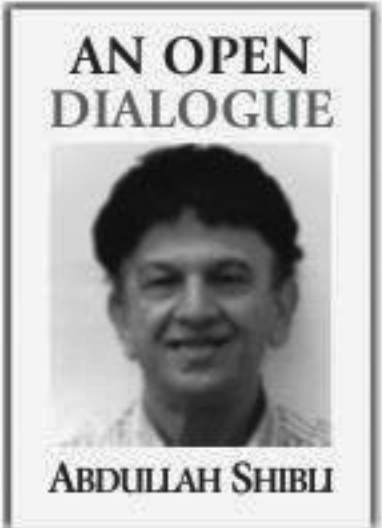


Election Day on the West Coast



AN OPEN DIALOGUE

I voted in the recently concluded midterm elections early in my home state before I boarded the flight to Los Angeles. It's a family trip, but there was an added incentive for me too. The two-week stay in Long Beach City provided me with an opportunity to observe the run-up to the midterm elections in the hotbed of resistance to President Trump: California. It also afforded me a chance to understand why Californians consider themselves so unique. It didn't hurt that three well-known women who made waves in the national scene recently are from California, and they are Nancy Pelosi (the incoming Speaker of the House), Diane Feinstein (who showed much poise during the Kavanaugh hearing), and Professor Christine Blasey Ford (who accused Brett Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her many years ago).

On election night, November 6, I stayed up way past my bedtime to learn if the "blue wave" will materialise. The "blue wave" is the name given by President Trump to the massive Democratic Party pushback of the Trump agenda. On November 7, in a press briefing after the results were announced, the president took credit for the election outcome, and bragged that he had "stopped the blue wave," referring to the expectation of big Democratic wins. Well, even if the blue wave fell short, the House of Representatives will now have a Democratic majority, and can be expected to slow down the Trump juggernaut that began to upend Obamacare, social programmes, financial reforms, soft immigration policy, and everything

taken on trade policy, multilateral treaties, and interventionism. This election, at the federal level, was for 35 Senators and 435 members of the House of Representatives. However, to help the Republicans retain the majority in the House, Trump embraced the midterms as a referendum on himself. "I'm on the ballot," he said in an election rally in Mississippi, hoping to ward off complacency among the Republicans. The Democrats fought back hard, and played their cards well. Barack Obama stumped for the Democrats furiously and reminded them, "The character of this country is on the ballot."

Coming back to this week's vote, I relished the prospect of spending the last few days before the US midterm elections in California. I am not a voter in California and, as mentioned, had already cast my vote in Massachusetts, where I live, on October 22, before I left for the West Coast, taking advantage of early voting practice. On Election Day, November 6, I spent the better part of my day going through a 96-page document, entitled "Official Voter Information Guide (OVIG)" published by the Secretary of State of California. Each state has an elected official, the Secretary of State, who maintains, among other things, the voter list and performs the role of state election commissioner.

After going through the OVIG, the California voting manifesto, I felt overwhelmed. While the document provides detailed information on each candidate, it also has details of the 11 items on the "ballot". A ballot measure is a piece of proposed legislation to be approved or rejected by eligible voters. Also known as "propositions" or simply "questions", the ballot initiative process, or referendum, gives Californian citizens a way to propose laws and constitutional



Dalits and Harijans form a human chain on DB Road in Gaibandha town.

PHOTO: STAR

The discrimination we allow

The rights of Dalits and plain land indigenous people must be ensured

IN light of the Constitution, the state has equal responsibility along with the citizens of the country to ensure the rights of the Dalits and plain land indigenous people (IP). The IP and Dalits are contributing significantly to the country in economic, social and political spheres. Despite this, they are not being able to assimilate with mainstream society. But if we are to uphold the spirit of the Constitution then we must take the initiative through a vision of inclusive development to include them in mainstream society.

On November 1, 2018 a day-long national convention was held in Dhaka to discuss the constitutional rights of Dalits and plain land indigenous people. More than 400 participants from these communities were present along with representatives of non-governmental development organisations working on rights protection issues of marginalised communities, civil society organisations, international development organisations, government officials, political leaders and youth groups from all over the country. A declaration has been formed and accepted from the resolution of the opening and closing sessions, six distinct papers of three parallel sessions, findings from the grassroots level, suggestions from marginalised groups and work experience from activists and experts. This write-up is based on that declaration.

It is surprising that the exact number of Dalits and plain land indigenous people living in Bangladesh has not been ascertained yet. There is a contradiction on the numbers that are currently available. Some say the number is between 3 million to 5.5 million. But some other sources claim the number is not more than 1.5 million. Whatever the number is, the fact remains that these people are neglected and deprived in numerous ways. There is a huge number of IP living in the plain lands of Bangladesh. Many communities live in 16 northwestern districts, nine mid-northern districts and four northeastern districts of Bangladesh including the Santal, Garo, Munda, Orao, Mahato, Turi, Paharia, Koch, Mal-paharis and others.

The huge number of Dalits and plain land IP of Bangladesh are deprived of some basic rights enjoyed by their fellow citizens in mainstream society. They are

deprived of education, healthcare and employment as well as basic human rights. Year after year they face discrimination and are deprived of basic civic rights.

The negative mindset of the society at large continues to keep them disadvantaged—a reality that casts a shadow on our successes in development. While we sing the "leave no one behind" motto, we should think about the inclusion of these people into mainstream society. If we want to ensure dignified and sustainable development for all, then we must ensure the rights of these disadvantaged people. Achieving the 2030 Agenda will not be possible if we do not meet at least these 9 SDGs (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 16). This will not happen if we do not keep in mind the dignified development of Dalits and plain land IP. Article 23A in the Constitution states: "The State shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities." This means, according to the commitment of the Constitution, without distinction of religion, colour, caste or creed, gender and birth place, all people are equal. Clearly, a fresh development perspective is needed and this can be introduced by taking initiatives to ensure the rights of disadvantaged groups like Dalits and IP.

Following this approach of inclusive development, we call for ensuring the constitutional rights of Dalits and plain land IP and propose some concrete demands. We hope, through this initiative, a united national call will create a collective voice in advocating for the establishment of institutional mechanisms. They are:

1. To ensure sustainable development of Dalits and Adivasis who are lagging behind for various reasons, there is a need for institutional mechanisms. Thus, the model of Chittagong Hill Tracts can be followed where there is a separate ministry and/or human rights commission for these communities.
2. A separate land commission for plain land Adivasis.
3. Major political parties should include rights-based demands of

- plain land Adivasis and Dalits in their election manifestos.
4. Dalits should get permanent housing facilities with legal ownership through government initiatives in places where they are currently living.
 5. The government should preserve certain quotas for Dalits and plain land Adivasis to avail government services and facilities as they lag behind the mainstream community.
 6. There should be special allocation for them in the Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP).
 7. Priority initiatives should be taken for Dalits and Adivasis so that they get affirmative benefits of education.
 8. There should be special allocation in the national budget in favour of them.
 9. Pass the anti-discriminatory law in parliament without any further delay.
 10. Conduct a rigorous national survey programme to assess the actual number of plain land Adivasis and Dalits.
 11. Develop a comprehensive plan of action to overcome negative impacts of climate change, ensure sustainable adaptation, ensure access to finance, and formulate necessary policy and institutional frameworks for Dalits and plain land Adivasis.
 12. Establish a time-bound national development plan for them.
 13. Start positive dissemination of knowledge about these people in mass media with a view to get rid of the negative attitudes towards them.
- After 47 years of liberation, the state should be unbiased regarding race, caste, language, gender and sexuality. Bangladesh is a country with a rich history of diverse cultures, languages, religions and ethnicities. Our expectation is that the state authorities would encourage this diversity keeping in line with the Constitution and also recognise the equal rights of the Dalits and the indigenous people. Only then can a nation be "for all"—for the youth, for the elders and for the poor.
- This is a joint article by Sultana Kamal, Mizanur Rahman, Meghnagha Thakurta, Khushi Kabir, Mamunur Rashid, Sara Hossain, Mezbah Kamal, Shishir Shil, Anik Asad, Sanjeeb Drong, Shamsul Huda, Nirmal Chandra Das, Bichitra Tirkil, Alnoor Naher, Rabindranath Soren and Robaet Ferdous.



Voters cast their ballots for Early Voting at the Los Angeles County Registrar's Office in Norwalk, California on November 5, 2018, a day ahead of the November 6 midterm elections.

PHOTO: FREDERIC J BROWN/AFP

else that the liberals have built up over the years. A little bit of nostalgia here. Election seasons, since I was very young, have been exciting times for my family for four generations. My earliest recollections are from the January 2, 1965 presidential elections in Pakistan when there was the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) including Awami-League-fielded Fatima Jinnah as a candidate to run against dictator Ayub Khan of the Convention Muslim League. As a student of Class VIII in Dhaka, I took a lot of interest in that election. I can recall that on election night, which I spent in Sylhet's Dargah Mahallah with some diehard supporters of COP, I was awake past midnight hoping that the "lantern", the symbol for COP, will emerge victorious. But then we heard on the radio that Ayub Khan held on to power by securing the majority vote in the Electoral College consisting of Basic Democrats! Since then, Election Day has been a special day for me and my family.

These midterm elections were watched very nervously not only by American citizens, but also around the globe. Following the election of Donald Trump in 2016, there was been non-stop speculation as to whether the midterms would reverse the trend that he triggered—a nationalistic, "America First" mindset, that has

amendments without the support of the governor or the legislature. As a result, California has evolved into one of the most liberal, environmentally conscious, and politically active corners of the country. Its political system is a manifestation of people's power. With enough support, i.e. voter signatures, almost anything can be placed on the California ballot.

On the downside, while it might be easy to get on the ballot, you need money to have a shot at getting any initiative passed. For example, as soon as voters pass a piece of legislation curbing big business, the big industries band together, raise a lot of money, and manage to upturn the earlier regulatory measure at the next ballot. However, the ballot process is also credited with enabling the citizens to pass many environment-friendly laws and has created a fertile climate for funding avant-garde research studies on science and technology. This year, of the 11 questions on the ballot, only six were approved by the electorate. Which ones? I will write about them in future if my readers express enough interest!

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist, and Senior Research Fellow, International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think-tank in Boston, USA. His new book *Economic Crosscurrents* will be published later this year.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

NOVEMBER 9, 1980
IRAQ DECLARED WAR AGAINST IRAN

Iraq's President Saddam Hussein declared "Jihad," or Islamic holy war, against Iran to "defend the ideals of the Prophet Mohammad." The war, marked by the extensive use of chemical weapons by Iraq, killed an estimated number of 500,000 soldiers, in addition to a smaller number of civilians. It ended in 1988 through a UN-brokered ceasefire.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	27 Back at sea	7 Blunder
1 Convoy trucks	30 Torch's kin	8 Mechanic's place
6 Kick off	31 Shop tool	
11 Carroll heroine	32 Trickery	9 Weather map
12 Make blank	33 Seuss title	line
13 "Olympia" painter	35 Chelsea chip	10 Informative character
14 Directional sign	38 Wild card, at times	16 "Stay out" sign
	39 Seoul setting	20 Irritate
	40 Board	21 High trains
	41 Adorable	24 Derby, e.g.
	42 Perfect places	25 Constricted
		26 Whole
		27 Crafty
		28 Bird of prey
		29 Eleven-year-olds, e.g.
		30 Is missing
		34 Clarinet part
		36 Visit
		37 Contrived

DOWN

1 Strong fellow	2 Jerry's friend	3 Made money	4 Frozen treats	5 Light	6 Arthur of TV
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Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

C	A	C	H	E		L	E	V	E	R
U	S	H	E	R		A	M	A	Z	E
P	H	O	T	O		G	E	N	R	E
		C	U	S	P		R	I	A	L
P	L	O	P		O	P	A	L		
A	I	L		S	P	E	L	L	E	R
P	L	A	N	T		A	D	A	G	E
A	T	T	A	I	N	S		W	O	N
		E	T	R	E		P	A	S	T
B	A	M	A		T		U	R	F	
E	X	I	L	E		T	E	E	N	Y
E	L	L	I	S		A	G	R	E	E
P	E	K	E	S		H	O	S	E	S

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

I THINK SARGE JUST CAUGHT BEETLE GOOFING OFF. HOW DO YOU KNOW? BEETLE TEXTED ME. ALL IT SAID WAS "OUCH!"

GREG+MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

BOY! IT'S HOT OUT HERE TODAY! YES, IT IS. SO IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT THAT WE STAY HYDRATED. I'M ON IT.