

Which way is pluralistic democracy headed?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

WE have known democratic pluralism, pluralistic democracy and multi-party system to be synonymous terminologies. But is it as simplistic as that? Conceptually and ideally, it is; but in practice and real-world situations, it may not be so!

There has been a quiet but irrepressible systemic transformation over the years—in matters mainly political. Although we are wedded to pluralistic democracy and the recent general election has seen multiple parties across the political spectrum throw their hats in the ring, the outcome has been singularly one-sided to the exclusion of any opposition political party. But multi-party system

Landslide victory of a political party, if history is any guide, may lead a parliamentary autocracy with a majoritarian approach. An answer lies in enhancing intra-party democracy.

in politics is a governance paradigm in which more than two parties truly have a chance to get to real political power.

One could say *jote* politics is an expression of political pluralism; theoretically yes, but as days go by, the predominance of the one or the other major party, even if the latter might have been weakened, is depended on a win at the election. The scramble for



contesting on either of the two major parties' electoral symbol—*Nouka* or *Dhaner Shish*—exposed the lack of identity recognition on the part of smaller parties.

In India, despite the dominant political presence of national political parties like the BJP and a somewhat resurrected Congress Party, an admixture of social caste-centric and regional dynamics has shaped coalition of political forces. With the Left in an equation of its own, sometimes the socio-regional forces have welded together, and sometimes not; even so they remain a force to reckon with at the state, and even central politics. Obviously, a coalition government in the truest sense of the term did not exist in independent Bangladesh; yet electoral alliances have been the order of the day.

That said, even the semblance of bi-

partisanship as part of a two-party system that had been in vogue here like in the Anglo-Saxon world—the US and UK—has been missing. And when not missing, it had taken an aberrant form marking a rise of partisanship or bias in favour of a particular party-turned-loyalist opposition- government mix. For the ruling party derived a relaxation from parliamentary boycott or walkout from the opposition.

So it is neither dispassionately pluralistic nor binary in the sense of an alternating hold on power but hopefully potentially nurturing an emergence of youth power.

Does it mean, however, a politically conscious person would have preferred anything short of a strongly mandated government to take the nation forward? Not at all—only “electoral engineering and overkill” could have set a bad precedent that the government should

be wary of in its best long-term interest. Independent observers and well-wishers of Bangladesh feel that way, one can sense that! As a marker, it is worth noticing that even those who eulogised the PM's developmental and counter-terrorism successes (in terrorism and passport indices Dhaka is a few notches higher!) wanted a credible probe into the allegations raised in the media. On the other hand, it is unfortunate that we would be counselled on a fallout of our conduct of the election which we should have kept above reproach of our own volition.

The Victorian Era Prime Minister of Britain Benjamin Disraeli with a philosophical flourish once said, “No government can be long secure without a formidable opposition.” It is in the best interest of the party in power to foster constructive dissent in and

outside of the parliament in order to benefit thereby, going forward. Taking a cue from the artistes, litterateurs, intellectuals, academics who had backed up the prime ministers' re-election campaign, one likes to hope the PM would reach out to the broader civil society.

In this context, we welcome the PM's offer of continuing structured dialogue with the political parties—BNP, Oikyafront, needless to say, minus Jamaat-e-Islami elements. As hinted by her, Sheikh Hasina is looking for recommendations from the elderly politicians of all stripes.

To my mind, the PM has beamed two profoundly positive signals; these could be termed a statement of intent. One, she has emphasised that she is the prime minister of the whole country and the people; and two, her fourth term increases her “responsibility”.

Since peace dividends have been an acknowledged fact, all political classes must abjure the path of violence which they have been doing scrupulously since participating in the election. Let the spirit of live-and-let-live triumph. Landslide victory of a political party, if history is any guide, may lead a parliamentary autocracy with a majoritarian approach. An answer lies in enhancing intra-party democracy.

Broadly, an inspiration may perhaps be drawn from the following quote: “Generosity is the highest form of intelligence.” This high objective may be meshed with the more pragmatic definition of politics being an art of the “attainable”. But Albert Einstein has the final word: “The state is made for man, and not man for the state.”

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Protecting the constitutional rights of senior citizens



MOHAMMED MAMUN RASHID

ACCORDING to “World Population Prospects: the 2017 Revision,” the number of older persons (those aged 60 years or over) is expected to more than double by 2050 and more than triple by 2100, rising from 962 million globally in 2017 to 2.1 billion in 2050. Globally, the population aged 60 or over is growing faster than all younger age groups.

Due to the improved quality of life in Bangladesh, people now live longer. There is a sizeable ageing population in the country today and the number of people over 60 years of age is increasing. For example, 6.8 percent of the population was aged over 60 years in 2010. Now the percentage is nearly 7.82. However, this rate in rural areas is comparatively higher, at 8.48 percent.

Most elderly people in Bangladesh suffer from problems such as lack of financial support, chronic diseases and absence of proper health and medicine facilities, exclusion and negligence, deprivation and socio-economic insecurity. The degree and extent of these vulnerabilities would likely intensify in near future. The plight of the elderly is extreme in villages. One of the most common tasks of the elderly is taking care of their grandsons and granddaughters. However, traditional family bonds and the community-based care system are gradually breaking down. And many elderly persons are neglected by their own children, be it in villages or cities.

Outside the household, there's little in terms of transport, healthcare and other infrastructure to make the lives of elderly people easier. For example, reserved seats for elderly citizens are barely ever “reserved” for them.

Although this is a positive initiative in theory, in practice this is never implemented as many people end up occupying those reserved seats.

The Old Age Allowance (OAA) scheme is a significant one in terms of coverage, as it provides social protection in old age. The tax-funded OAA is a social pension paid to poor older people. The scheme which was introduced in 1998 currently covers 40 percent of the population aged 60 and over with a low monthly transfer amount of Tk 500 per beneficiary. However, the majority of poor older people in Bangladesh miss out on OAA benefits mainly due to targeting errors (over 50 percent of benefits go to non-poor older people and almost a third of the benefits go to those below the age of eligibility).

Let's not forget that elderly people have constitutional rights. The right to

social security through public assistance in case of poverty arising from unemployment, illness or disablement, and other cases is mentioned in Section 15(d) under “Provision of Basic Necessities” of Part II of the Constitution. The right to basic necessities for all citizens such as food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care and the right to work and employment, recreation and leisure are mentioned in Sections 15(a), 15(b) and 15(c) as well.

Although the main emphasis of the Bangladesh Population Policy-2012 is to improve the status of family planning, maternal and child health including reproductive health services, it has paid considerable attention to the welfare of elderly people in the country. It emphasises upon measures to provide food and social security and

shelter for the disadvantaged including the elderly, destitute, physically and mentally challenged persons, and to ensure a conducive environment for improved quality of life.

The National Health Policy-2011 sets 19 specific objectives for quality healthcare. Significant issues and concerns like accessibility to disadvantaged people, gender equity, immunisation, family planning, mobile clinics, climate-change-induced diseases and e-health have been addressed. Resource constraints, weak management, climate change, and unplanned urbanisation are some major challenges. Though this policy focuses on many aspects, it does not clearly explain health rights, psychosocial support, and care for elderly people.

The National Social Security Strategy

(NSSS) of Bangladesh has committed to undertake many initiatives for the welfare of elderly people. The ruling Awami League government prepared a national policy for the aged and enacted the Parents Care Act 2013. A provision for Integrated Pension Scheme is envisaged in the Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-2020) of Bangladesh. The ruling party also made commitments in its present election manifesto to expand the social safety net for the elderly, raise awareness, earmark seats in public transports and residential establishments, provide healthcare at the grassroots level, and ensure senior-friendly entrances in hospitals, airports, buildings and different transports.

All these commitments will hopefully be translated into action. Life for the elderly, particularly those belonging to lower income groups, is extremely tough in Bangladesh and they are often mistreated by family members as well as the society. Neither do we have a culture where nursing homes are looked at in a positive light nor do we seem to have the will to build such homes to accommodate the large number of elderly people suffering in their own homes. The government has taken up a limited number of initiatives to establish homes for the elderly with modern amenities. With the ageing population in the country increasing, it is more important than ever for the government to design innovative policies, build more nursing homes with the required facilities where proper care will be given to the elderly, provide public services specifically targeted to older persons, and implement policies that address housing, employment, healthcare, infrastructure and social protection, among others.

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QUOTABLE Quote

ALDOUS HUXLEY
(1894-1963)
English writer and philosopher

The propagandist's purpose is to make one set of people forget that certain other sets of people are human.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Open-handed hit

5 Patisserie worker

10 One of a bear trio

11 Comes up

13 Resting on

14 Tourist's car

15 Brain parts

17 In the style of

18 Main dishes

19 Bauxite product

20 Animator's frame

21 Nuisance

22 Misbehave

25 Acting groups

26 Bend out of shape

27 Atlas page

28 Lawyers' org.

29 Pretends to be

33 Novak of "Vertigo"

34 Run

35 Concert bonus

38 Drew close to

39 Foot or fathom

40 Lock of hair

41 Folded food

DOWN

1 Word separator

2 Grow toward

night

3 Left, at sea

4 Disposable vessel

5 Keg

6 Provinces

7 Family

8 Fancy homes

9 Pragmatic person

12 Inclines

16 Horn sound

21 Painful injury

22 Come to

23 China holder

24 Mine transport

25 Lawyer's job

27 Scooter's cousins

29 Tiny holes

30 Spa room

31 Top floor

32 Take care of

36 Mine matter

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

SO, THAT'S IT, MEN. ANY MORE QUESTIONS?

YES, SIR. DO YOU REALLY SHOOT 125 IN GOLF?

THANKS FOR YOUR QUESTIONS. WE'LL MEET AGAIN NEXT MONTH

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

PLEASE, DADDY? PLEASE? PLEASE? PLEEEEEEASE!

OH, ALL RIGHT.

I HOPE YOU REALIZE YOUR DAUGHTER WAS YOU WRAPPED AROUND HER LITTLE FINGER.

NO SHE DOESN'T.

NO SHE DOESN'T.