

INDONESIAN GENERAL ELECTION 2019

The cross-currents of Indonesian politics



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General Elections Commission (KPU); in both the elections, hardliner former general Subianto rejected the election results and declared himself the winner; and in both the elections, he challenged the results at the Constitutional Court of Indonesia.

Despite all these parallels, there is a critical difference between these two elections: the bloody riots that broke out on the bustling streets of Jakarta, and some other cities, in the wake of Subianto rejecting the election results beginning May 21.

Till the recent bloodshed, Indonesia's young democracy—which came into existence after the resignation of Indonesia's President Suharto in 1998 after a three-decade rule—had seen little election-related violence. One might wonder what had happened this time around that led to the recent violent protests in Indonesia.

To understand the recent riots, one needs to look back at the first major political crisis of Jokowi's previous term—the protests that rocked the country's capital in 2016. As reported by many local and international newspapers, including *The New York Times*, while campaigning during the bitterly fought gubernatorial election, the popular incumbent and Jokowi ally Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (also known as Ahok), a Christian of Chinese descent, cited a verse from the Holy Quran at a public gathering, while trying to suggest that he understands why some people may not vote for him which did not go down well with the Muslim

community that accounts for the majority of the population. Hardline Muslim groups that already nurtured a dislike for Ahok because of his religion and liberal policies did not let go of this opportunity. They took to the streets together, forming a movement called the 212 Action, demanding the removal of Ahok.

The radical Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), a Muslim group which had previously only organised small rallies against Ahok in Jakarta, started staging demonstrations with a newfound fervour, rallying support from other Muslim groups, calling for the punishment of Ahok, and soon the streets of Jakarta were full of people, many from outside the capital, chanting slogans seeking Ahok's trial. It did not take long for the protests to spiral and eventually Jokowi, Ahok's biggest ally, had to leave his side.

The matter of fact remains that the "double minority" Ahok had always been a target of not only many Muslim groups but also a powerful group of political elites who considered him a threat and an outsider. Ahok was not a career politician, rising from the ranks and file of a specific political party; he was an independent politician who had received the backing of Jokowi, first as his deputy as governor of Jakarta, and later was endorsed to run for governorship.

Ahok's liberal policies and his hardline stance to clamp down on corruption were a matter of contention for the political establishment. It has been reported by many independent sources, including Australian academic Damien Kingsbury in his Deakin University blog, that in the lead-up to the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election campaign, a former army general of Indonesia, Suryo Prabowo, made threats saying that Ahok should "know his place lest the Indonesian Chinese face the consequences of his action." If true, such comments only go to show the almost racist attitude a political quarter of Indonesia nurtured towards Ahok.

Ahok did pay the price for his transgressions against the established order:



Indonesian President Joko Widodo (L) with his vice-presidential running mate for the 2019 presidential election, Islamic cleric Ma'ruf Amin, in Jakarta.

PHOTO: REUTERS

he not only lost an election that he should have won easily, given his success as governor of Jakarta, but he was also slapped with a two-year prison term by the Indonesian court.

Many analysts see the fall of Ahok as a worrying sign of a possible reemergence of hardline Islamist ideology in the politics of the world's largest Muslim-majority country. The dichotomy of the aspiration for a pluralistic democratic society and a traditional way of life dominated by conservative Islamist beliefs has been a bone of contention between the conservatives and the reformists since the independence of Indonesia in 1945. In order to address this wedge, secular Muslim political leaders like Sukarno and Hatta convinced fellow

members of the Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence (PPKI) to adopt the Pancasila, a philosophical theory for the new state of Indonesia that encompassed the values of monotheism and nationalism.

Later, Suharto's "New Order" regime muzzled the powers of the Islamic political parties over time; he merged them into the United Development Party (PPP) and made them adopt the Pancasila as their ideology.

However, the growing influence of parties like Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), the 212 movement that led to the fall of Ahok and the increasingly hardline Islamist narratives of politicians like Prabowo Subianto might signal the reemergence of Islamist ideologies in the pluralistic democracy of Indonesia.

According to an article published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, in the wave of the systematic circulation of disinformation on social media during the 2019 election campaign, Joko Widodo has been portrayed as a closet Christian who would steer the country away from Islam. According to the same source, in another doctored video, the leader of the Indonesian Solidarity Party, an ally of Jokowi, was shown inviting people to eat pork with her, whereas in reality she was only inviting people to eat noodles.

Both Jokowi and Subianto rode high on their narratives on religion during the election campaign. In order to consolidate support from Muslim voters, Jokowi, to the disappointment of many of his liberal allies, chose the 75-year-old Ma'ruf Amin, chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), as his running mate. Many see Amin as the most influential Muslim figure in Indonesia.

Subianto, following his 2014 playbook, has challenged the recent election results in the Indonesian Constitutional Court, and if the court decides in favour of Jokowi, like it did in 2014, then he will have the tough challenge ahead of steering the country towards growth with all parties on board, in the light of the Pancasila. Winning the most divisive election in the history of Indonesia is only the beginning of a long and arduous journey ahead of the winning candidate.

A day after Ahok lost the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, US Vice President Mike Pence, during his Indonesia visit, said, "Indonesia's tradition of moderate Islam, frankly, is an inspiration to the world." According to international media, including the CNN, he further added, "In your nation as in mine, religion unifies—it doesn't divide." Given what had happened just the day before, the vice president's comment could not have been more ironic.

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Charting Bangladesh's economic growth

SALEHUDDIN AHMED

THE recently published book *Bangladesh's Road to Long-term Economic Prosperity*, written by Professor MG Quibria, is a precise, concise and fairly down-to-earth presentation of the story of Bangladesh's development from its birth to the present.

The book begins with a sketch of the state of economic development in Bangladesh during its founding in 1971. The nation inherited a devastated economy—there was no growth of per-capita income for two decades pre-1971, and 55,000 square miles of Bangladesh had 75 million people. In 1971, the vast majority lived in poverty, with a large proportion of them living in abject poverty.

Agriculture was the main source of income for the people contributing 56 percent of the GDP. The country had a relatively small manufacturing sector. Manufacturing and jute processing were largely synonymous.

Then the book takes a "fast-forward" and describes the situation in 2018, when Bangladesh emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. It has made great strides in social and economic transformation. Since 2005, Bangladesh has grown at an average rate of 6-plus percent annually. Bangladesh is no longer the "test-case" of development; it has already "managed to place its foot on the first rung of the ladder of development." In 2015, the country graduated from the World Bank-defined low-income group to the lower-middle-income group.

The major factor for such a development is Bangladesh's remarkable progress in poverty

reduction. In 2000, almost half of the population lived in poverty. In 2016, the percentage declined to about 25. Bangladesh has also made significant strides in health and education. The improvements exceeded those of its South Asian neighbours India and Pakistan.

The author discusses the political development of Bangladesh since its independence. It is followed by an overview of the economic progress of the country in terms of growth and structural change, and finally the author provides a brief comparison of the economic performances of Bangladesh and Vietnam through an international perspective. The chapter

is enriched by the use and analysis of data and presentations in graphs on foreign aid inflow to Bangladesh (1971-2016), GDP of Bangladesh and Vietnam (1990-2015), export earnings of Bangladesh and Vietnam (1990-2016), FDI in Bangladesh and Vietnam (1990-2017), etc. These were extremely relevant and valuable.

It was interesting to read the analysis of the book on the "four drivers of development in Bangladesh." The author has rightly mentioned these as the "serendipitous" things that happened in the 1970s. The drivers were mostly unforeseen by the economists, and disconnected from the political

*Notwithstanding various challenges, these four drivers of development are present till this day and have contributed to the country's economic and social progress.*

may be challenged in the future. The book identifies the "trifecta" of major risks, which are exogenous to the government and largely beyond its ability to manipulate. These are rooted, first, in the rapidly changing technology in robotics and artificial intelligence; second, in the evolving global political and economic environment; and third, in climate change and natural disaster. Going forward with sustained growth, the country needs to diversify further which will require addressing various social and political policies, and institutional challenges facing the economy, including poor governance, inadequate physical infrastructure, skill and educational bottlenecks, demographic burden, dwindling social capital and lack of transformational challenges.

In the paragraphs that follow, the author identifies the number of risks for each of the four drivers and goes into the details of the implications of those impacting the future course of the economy. The author further clarifies the challenges that are "intractable", i.e. poor governance, infrastructural bottlenecks, dwindling social capital and myopic leadership. The challenges are further exemplified by the tables: (i) Indicators of Governance: Bangladesh and India, 2016; (ii) State of Infrastructure in South Asia (2017-2018); (iii) Human Capital Scores and Indexes of Selected Countries (2018), e.g., Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Cambodia and Vietnam; and (iv) Growth of Per Capita Income of Singapore and Zimbabwe (1960-2016).

Finally, the book strings together the major conclusions of the study. It also provides some observations on political, social and institutional

challenges for the country going forward. These relate to such factors as governance, political institutions, economic openness, industrial policy, labour market and human development policy, investments in physical infrastructure and the role of leadership. The chapter concludes with some meaningful suggestions and recommendations on these factors.

This book is written in a lucid manner and understandable English. It is a useful resource for not only economists and specialists but also for common readers as it will help them understand the essence of Bangladesh's economy—the "what, why and how" of the country.

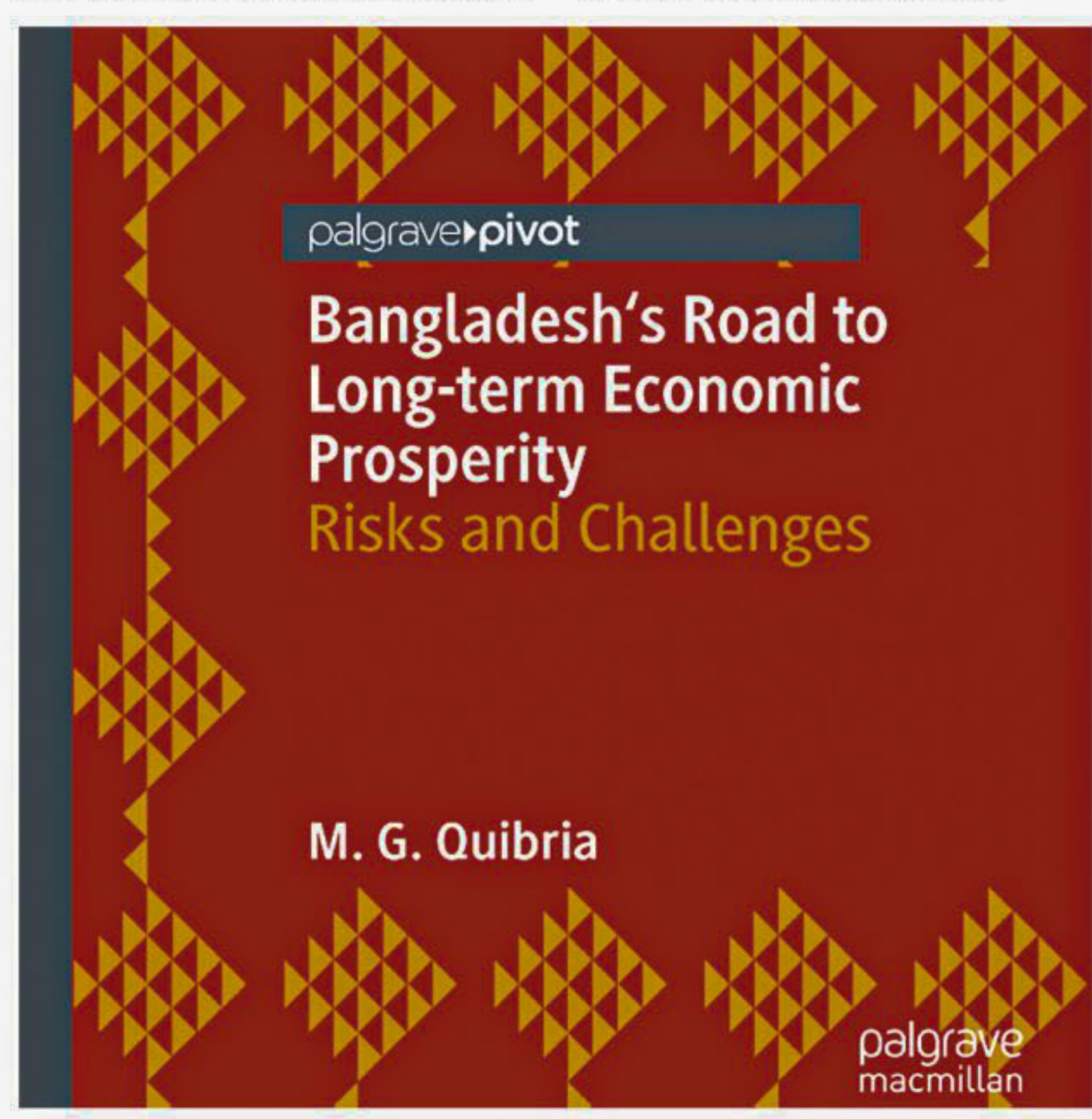
The contents of the book will be very useful in taking strategic decisions on how the country could go forward. Therefore, policymakers, researchers, journalists, teachers and students will immensely benefit in understanding the messages of the book.

Moreover, the author has done a commendable job of historically analysing the economic, social and political status of the country, and suggested some pragmatic ways to go forward. It would be worthwhile for universities and colleges to use the contents of the book for educational purposes.

The book has done justice to the readers by writing precisely, concisely, without beating around the bush, and keeping it focused on the major issues, risks, challenges and future policy implications.

The author deserves congratulations for skillfully presenting his research-based thoughts and analyses in the book.

Salehuddin Ahmed is a former managing editor of *The Daily Star*.



ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

JUNE 2, 1953  
First Coronation of Elizabeth II in Westminster Abbey

Queen Elizabeth II's crowning ceremony was the first ever British coronation to appear on television. More than 66 years on the throne, she is now the longest-reigning British monarch in history.

NOTICE

Dear readers, due to some unavoidable circumstances, we have not been able to publish the crosswords for some time. We hope to publish the next crossword very soon.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

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