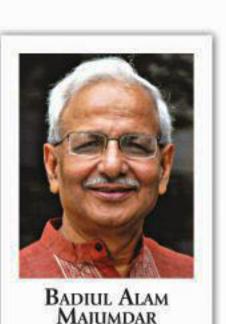
18 reforms that will change Bangladesh



URING last year's road safety movement, there was a demand raised by the student demonstrators that touched a chord with a wide cross-section of the population: "repair the state." Their demand seems most fitting

considering the controversies surrounding Bangladesh's recent national election and the waves of corruption and mis-governance that are breaking on our shore every day. In particular, it is a call to fix our democratic deficits and governance failures.

In the last few months, we, on behalf of SHUJAN, held ten consultations around the country to formulate a reform package for Bangladesh including 18 suggestions aimed at "repairing the state". These are:

Changing the political culture Bangladesh was founded on a vision of a democratic, secular and just society, but that vision remains unfulfilled. Democracy and social justice have remained largely elusive, and we could not prevent the use of religion in our politics. More seriously, the annihilation of opposition appears to have become a political obsession. If the founding ideals of Bangladesh are to be fulfilled, we must change our political culture and practice the politics of inclusiveness, tolerance and consensus.

Electoral reforms

Free, fair and credible elections are necessary to create a government with the consent of the people. The 11th parliamentary election was marred by allegations of the denial of people's voting rights. Based on its research of 50 constituencies, the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) questioned the credibility of the election, claiming that the fears about possible rigging under a party-based government had come true. Therefore, we must clean up our electoral process and seriously consider reforming our electoral system, including the adoption of a proportional representation system.

Effective parliament

We must make the parliament effective to ensure the transparency and accountability of the executive branch. We need a true and functional, rather than made-up, opposition in parliament. We must frame a Code of Conduct Act for Parliamentarians to prevent conflicts of interest and a Privilege Act to



ensure accountability, as mandated by our Constitution.

Independent judiciary

We must ensure the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law by separating the judiciary from the executive—by restoring the original Articles 115 and 116 of our Constitution. We must frame a law to appoint and remove judges in the upper judiciary. We must also stop influencing the judiciary, and end the practice of filing frivolous lawsuits and withdrawing cases based on political considerations.

Independent Election Commission We must enact a law, as mandated by the

Constitution, to constitute an independent Election Commission with persons of integrity. This must be done in a transparent manner. We must also provide the Commission with financial independence and autonomy to appoint its own functionaries to ensure its neutrality.

Constitutional reforms

We must engage an expert committee to recommend constitutional amendments. Potential areas of reforms include: ending the "imperial" premiership; creating a larger electoral college for electing the president; instituting term limits; reserving one-third seats of the parliament for women and electing them directly; creating an upper

house; reforming Article 70; and bringing back the referendum provision.

Democratic political parties

We must reform our political parties to ensure their internal democracy, transparency in their nomination process and financing, and the end of "partiarchy". They must renounce extremism, communalism, identity-based politics, and inter- and intra-party violence. Their associated and affiliated bodies must also be disbanded.

Independent statutory bodies We must amend the laws and appoint

appropriate persons to the statutory bodiesnamely the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Human Rights Commission, and the Information Commission—to ensure their independence and effectiveness.

Campaign against corruption

We must initiate an all-out campaign against corruption by creating special tribunals to try and deliver exemplary punishment to corrupt officials. We must take effective measures to prevent illicit transfer of money abroad and bring such money back. An ombudsman must also be appointed.

Reforming public service We must reform the Civic Service Act

and modernise the Police Act to ensure the neutrality and professionalism of the bureaucracy and members of the

law enforcement agencies, and end their politicisation. We must also end corruption in their appointments and transfers and make them truly service-oriented.

Decentralisation and local government

We must consistently pursue an agenda for decentralisation and make local government bodies autonomous and effective. We

must allocate 50 percent of the annual development budget and "localise" SDGs through local government bodies. We must also delink MPs from local governments, as per the High Court judgment. Independence of the media

We must ensure the independence of the

media through legal reforms including the amendment of the Digital Security Act. We must also form a Broadcast Commission to ensure objective reporting of the publiclyowned media.

Strong civil society

A strong civil society can help make democracy effective and achieve good governance by acting as a watchdog for the constitutional and statutory bodies. Thus, we must provide space and an enabling environment to ensure the effective functioning of the civil society.

Safeguarding human rights

We must safeguard the freedom of expression and other fundamental rights by amending

disappearances, abductions and extrajudicial killings.

all repressive laws. We must end involuntary

A new social contract

We must formulate a new "social contract" to ensure equal opportunity for the poor and guarantee their due share of national resources, including the provision of subsidised loans, crop insurance and similar facilities. Providing quality education and health care, including health insurance for families, must become our top national priority.

Environmental sustainability

We must ensure environmental sustainability and formulate long-term plans for the nation to cope with the effects of climate change. We must also reassess our development projects and abandon those that pose serious environmental risks to the country.

Reforming the financial sector

We must stop protecting the looters and plunderers, bring the violators of law to justice, and ensure good governance in the financial sector by creating an independent Banking Commission. We must ensure the independence of Bangladesh Bank and close supervision of the banking sector.

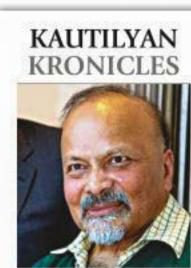
Investment in youth

We must invest in our youth to take advantage of the "demographic dividend" by making available high-quality education, health, nutrition and ensuring their safety. If such services cannot be ensured and the youth are derailed, the potential demographic dividend may become a demographic nightmare.

To sum up, the alleged irregularities that took place during the 11th parliamentary election have severely disturbed the balance in our politics, leaving us in uncertain territory. In the past, our leaders formulated solutions to crises through dialogue and discussion. For example, the leaders of Awami League and BNP signed the "Three Alliances' Outline" after the fall of Ershad (although their commitments remained largely unfulfilled). We hope that our leaders will now engage in dialogue, reach a political consensus on major issues, and sign a national charter to end the uncertainty. Our reform package could serve as the agenda for the desired dialogue.

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Angela Merkel's legacy: 'Holy roman empress'?



IMTIAZ A HUSSAIN

ISTORIANS are often bemused by how the millennia-old Holy Roman Emperor was not holy, nor Roman, nor even an emperor. True on all three counts, they ended up describing feuds between a host of princes, kings,

or would-be emperors, many of them of Germanic origin. Whether reeling from Europe's most magnificent city of the last millennium, Vienna, or, through marriage, from the continent's other citadel cities, Germanic people were writ large all over history books even before Germany was created by Otto von Bismarck, that too, in France's glorious Versailles Palace, in 1871.

Against that tapestry of European conflicts (managed by the fabled "Concert of Europe balance of power" that Count Klemens von Metternich developed and implemented throughout the first half of the 19th Century, which US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger tried to reproduce to stabilise the 1970s), it is fitting to dub Germany's outgoing Chancellor, Angela Merkel, as the Holy Roman Empress, perhaps history's one and only stamp of its kind there may ever be. Though she is endearingly called "Mutter" (Mother) by her people and across Europe, she has created a Germany capable of balancing a fractious 21st-century global power rivalry with a kind of balance and harmony that one typically gets from a mother at home.

As she prepares to exit the stage in 2021, this might be her swan song: solid countrybuilding leadership (as opposed to the

self-promoting inclination of so many of her global companions), partly inherited from her immediate predecessors; she is leaving Germany as one of the least internallycorroding democratic or industrialised countries in a panoply of many illustrious others. Germany faces neither the Brexit divisiveness, French yellow-jacket protests, Italian flirtations with economic insolvency, or Spain's bifurcating Damoclean Sword, or even as much of the populist plague enveloping Europe; and it depicts nothing like the "Me First" mindset of the current US leadership, the "We first" counterpart of the developing world's most powerful country, China, or even the demographic entrapment looking Japan directly in the eye.

"The old certainties of the post-war order no longer apply," she observed of the changing global order on the eve of the May 2019 European Parliament elections. Rather than Germany, the European Union, she continued, "needs to reposition itself in a changed world" (Stefan Kornelius, Nico Fried, and Philip Otterman, "Merkel: Europe must unite to stand up to China, Germany and US," The Guardian, May 15, 2019). Note one similar thread and one different strain: she identified Germany, not in the singular, but the plural, as part of Europe, a theme consistently pursued in her 14 years as chancellor, and almost as many in previous high official German politics, for instance, as Environment Minister for the chancellor who united Germany, Helmut Kohl. What is startlingly different, though not initiated at this particular juncture, is her not wanting to stand in the shadows of the Trump Administration in the United States. Until President Donald Trump's rambunctious presence behind US policy-making, Merkel's



German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

own administration always carried a

deferential and respectable US relationship. China, Russia, and the United States, she posited, "are forcing us, time and again, to find common [European] positions." China's undeterred march to the top global pedestal behind some very unilateral positions and undemocratic methods (in short, authoritarian streaks), may be beginning to sound European alarms now that the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) has penetrated Europe (through Italy) and seems poised to unravel an increasingly unpopular regional association through its very own people. Russia's Ukrainian infiltration also

bothers Germany but galvanised, as she acknowledged, a united European response. Eventually, the country that salvaged Germany from the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazism lost its place in the German firmament through several Trump actions, beginning with the US NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) retreat, resorting to imposing tariffs rather than negotiate, rejecting the P5+1 agreement with Iran, and befriending very questionable global leaders.

Of course, Merkel's positions will hardly be replicated with as much authority or genuineness as by the chancellor herself, but she has removed the lid behind threequarters of a century of bonded German-US relationship. Perhaps the proverbial deluge will follow her, not immediately but at some future point. Yet the more we look at German history after World War II, the more the signs of stability and maturity, behind an almost effortless ride to the global economic pinnacle, the less we may have to fear than if it were other major European countries today, even more so globally.

Germany clearly cannot match any of the three countries she identified as forcing Europeans to unite. Yet, Merkel could ramp up her and her country's credentials in other parts of the world. Given her keen desire to reach the zero-carbon emission by 2050 that her next-door neighbour, Emmanuel Macron, is championing, she could help many ground-zero climatechange countries such as Bangladesh to learn from German policies and practices. This could be extended to the rest of Asia and Africa, in both of which her softpedalling approach may actually out-wit and out-do China's BRI heavy-handedness. European unity also shows in that

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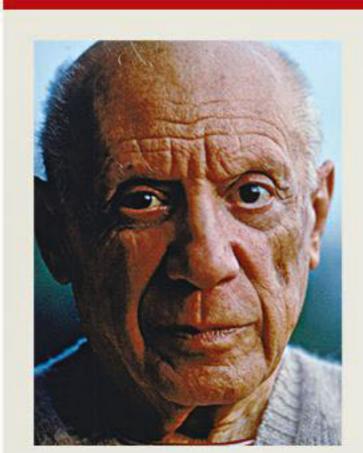
IS A FAMILY

continent's (Africa's) developmental plans and strategies.

If these are areas and issues where Europe, led by Germany, and hopefully leaders of the Merkel cut, can find the foothold to dangle close to the global pedestal, much will depend upon how the European Parliament election results alter the continent. Predicted to do well, and riding upon a groundswell of anger and frustration for reasons economic (nogrowth), social (refugee admission), and political (the advent of poor leaderships, almost all across Europe right now), the populists can claim the subjugation of Merkel's party in the last local elections as a pivotal turning point. Their noisy presence contrasts the affable, lovable Merkel personality. This, more than anything else, can save Europe from an irreversible regression into its dullest historical page in the Modern Age. Should the populists be contained, Merkel will get one last chance to put into place policies to push the green environmental button and elevate collective

action over the egoistic across Europe. Even if that does not transpire, no other European leader will have commanded so extensive a European support-base since those "Holy Roman Emperor's" days, and if we add her stint with Kohl, not a single other European leader commanded so admired a commitment to peace than Metternich did in his time. With her, an environmental champion singing Metternich's song shows how far Europe has retreated from battle-mindedness. Without her legacy, the drums may beat, harking of a perpetually forthcoming deluge.

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PABLO PICASSO (1881 - 1973)Spanish painter, sculptor, poet and playwright

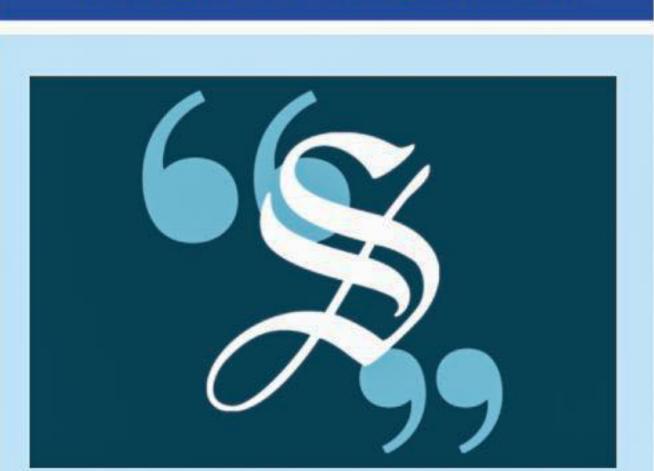
Every positive value has its price in negative terms... the genius of Einstein leads to Hiroshima.

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 I'LL SPREAD LOOKS LIKE SARGE HELP! HAS FALLEN OFF THE WORD THE CLIFF AGAIN 11-10 **BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES FROM NOW ON, I'M WELL, I GUESS YOU NEVER STOP .. BUT AT LEAST NOW NOW AND THEN .. LEARNING ABOUT PAPENTING. WE KNOW THAT NOT ONLY WATCHING EVERY ANIMAL SHOW

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