Do shifting alliances signal a bigger change in Bangladeshi politics?

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Supporters of the Jatiya Party outside a polling station in Dhaka on December 30, 2018. FILE PHOTO: AFP

Every region in the world has its own brand of politics. While there may be some interregional commonalities, it is always the uncommon factors that define the politics of a particular region. For example, one of the key characteristics of South Asian politics is the tendency to form alliances before a major election. While occasionally the allies may have strong ideological similarities, in most cases, the partnerships are held with loose, common threads.

Bangladesh, being a part of South Asia, is no different. With the next parliamentary election set to be held in a year or so, the ruling Awami League and the BNP, the two dominant political forces in the country, have once again started rallying lesser and sometimes even completely unknown political parties to form alliances.

Eventually, it's all about numbers. Before the 2001 general election, the then main opposition in parliament, BNP, formed a four-party alliance with three other like-minded right-wing parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami. BNP and its allies swept that election with a two-third majority and ended up forming a coalition government. Before the following election in 2008, the Awami League took a page out of their archrival's books and formed a bigger alliance with 14 like-minded parties, who were mostly left and centre-left in terms of political ideology. That coalition later came to be known as the "grand alliance" and it ended up winning an even bigger majority in parliament than what the four-party alliance did in 2001.

After a disastrous defeat in the 2008 election, the BNP took a couple of years to regroup and decided to form an even bigger alliance, this time with as many as 19 parties, in 2012. Apart from Jamaat-e-Islami, the remaining 18 parties were either one-man shows or existed only on papers and signboards, let alone having any significant vote bank.

Around the same time, the ruling Awami League revived the long-pending 1971 war crimes trial against top leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami. By the time the next general election rolled around in 2014, some of the top Jamaat leaders had already been executed for their war crimes, and some others, alongside a number of BNP stalwarts, were awaiting the same fate, which significantly curtailed the impact that the 20-party alliance could have had.

While some smaller left-wing parties have started to side with the BNP, which has always been centre-right, some right-wing parties are getting closer to the Awami League, which has been historically centre-left.

The BNP-led alliance tried to retaliate by launching violent protests, aiming for two objectives: 1) to somehow prevent the execution of the Jamaat and BNP leaders; and 2) to prevent the Awami League from holding one-sided elections. None of those objectives were achieved, and the BNP-led alliance only drew fierce criticisms from both home and abroad for their bloody means. Since then, Jamaat has been stripped off their right to participate in elections, and the 20-party alliance nosedived into the ground.

If we analyse the results of some of these elections, we will see that only about a few parties actually have vote banks big enough to have any impact on the overall outcomes. Some of the other, lesser known parties have even been known to have given up their own symbols and chose to run with the symbols of the dominant parties in the alliance. Some of them have even won in elections as well because they received votes from the dominant parties' supporters due to their association with the alliance.

In the ninth parliamentary election in 2008, a total of 38 parties took part. One of those parties had the organisational strength to nominate a candidate for just one seat in parliament, and there, too, that candidate managed to bag 297 votes only. In 2014, at least five among the 12 parties who took part in the election received less than 10,000 votes combined. In some cases, the smaller parties were the ones who were the beneficiaries. For example, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Workers Party, and Bangladesh Tarikat Federation contested in the election with the Awami League's "boat" symbol in the 2014 election and bagged only 1.75 percent, 2.06 percent and 0.3 percent votes, respectively. But the alliance head, Awami League, accommodated their leaders in the cabinet and some of them became ministers as well, which, quite understandably, they would have never been able to achieve had they contested on their own.

However, as the 12th parliamentary election draws nearer, we are observing an incredible reversal of the trend. While some smaller left-wing parties have started to side with the BNP, which has always been centre-right, some right-wing parties are getting closer to the Awami League, which has been historically centre-left. It is going to be quite hard to tell what this would eventually transpire to, simply because this has never happened before in Bangladesh.

Alliances are a tested strategy to win elections all over the world. However, alliances between parties with completely opposite standings are not very common, and it is hard to tell how well party members at the grassroots level would gel given their ideological differences, especially during election campaigns. Probably, only time will tell.

Faculty recruitment at universities: Are we doing it right?

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NURUL KABIR *and* QUAZI TAFSIRUL ISLAM

The current state of faculty recruitment at universities in Bangladesh is far from ideal, with the recruitment process mired in allegations of corruption. In order to reap the benefits of our outstanding economic growth, we must improve the quality of education by improving the standards of our teaching staff and researchers. If the education providers are well-prepared, they will prepare our future generations better.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has guidelines for the recruitment of faculty members – from lecturers to professors – at both public and private universities. While there is a common policy for private universities to recruit faculty members, public universities usually follow their own regulations and systems. There has been a debate over a unified faculty recruitment policy for all public universities in Bangladesh, and the policy is supposed to include not only the recruitment of teaching and research staff, but also the promotion and dismissal of the staff.

The existing guideline for recruitment at private universities is not concrete either – it does not cover each and every aspect of recruitment and leaves a lot of room for interpretation. While it does cover a wide array of good recommendations, there is a big scope for improvement.

In order to improve, we need to adopt the best international practices and adapt them to fit the Bangladeshi context. Only a handful of universities have a recruitment policy that is comparable to top global institutions. This is also evident as only a handful of institutions in Bangladesh have global accreditation. Receiving these accreditations requires a university to meet global recruitment standards as well – at least to some extent.

If you look at top-ranking universities in the UK, Australia, US and China, you will see a distinct difference in the calibre, profiles, research output, and degrees of the academics. At North South University (NSU) in Bangladesh, for example, as per global practice, it is mandatory for a faculty member to have a PhD from a globally reputed institution to become an assistant professor; even a lecturer must possess a degree from an institution that is internationally ranked.

An unwritten rule in Bangladesh is the fact that you will only be recruited by certain public universities if you have been a student and graduated from the same. This discourages a diverse and inclusive recruitment standard, which in 2022 is a shame.

While this may not be feasible for all institutions in Bangladesh, we can make some changes at least. For lecturer recruitment, we can make research experience a priority, along with experience as a teaching assistant or a research assistant, and publications and conference proceedings may also be considered. If an institution intends to accommodate only PhD recipients for assistant professorship, it can introduce positions such as associate lecturer and senior lecturer before promoting them to assistant professor based on research and teaching experience.

Recruitment requirements should not be identical across the country. A university that is recently established and another that has been around for five decades will never have similar resources, recognition, and facilities to attract and retain the same level of staff. Thus, policies should be competitive and flexible.

Another major concern which is an unwritten rule in Bangladesh is the fact that you will only be recruited by certain public universities if you have been a student and graduated from the same. This discourages a diverse and inclusive recruitment standard, which in 2022 is a shame. There should be a clear policy of cross-university recruitment or assignment that will help qualified faculty members to easily move across organisations and share their expertise.

If we look at the most recent developments regarding university ranking by Times Higher Education, NSU, being considerably younger than its many counterparts in this region, has achieved an impeccable feat. A strong faculty pool enables NSU, like many others, to achieve impactful research output that ultimately benefited the university to perform better in the ranking.

A more capable and better equipped teaching staff is a precursor to helping university students perform better and realise their own potential. We need to raise the bar of our recruitment standards so that we can develop our human capital to serve the nation in the best possible ways. In today's Bangladesh, when the level of brain drain is extremely high, we must be equipped to better treat the future of this country. Our young ones must not suffer.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Local Government COVID-19 Response & Recovery Project (LGCRRP)
LGED-RDEC Bhaban, Agargaon,
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No: 46.02.0000.660.03.006.22.26 Date: 16-10-2022

Invitation for Tenders (Outsourcing)

1	Ministry/Division	Local Government Rural Development & Co-operative, Local Government Division.			
2	Agency	Local Government Engineering Department			
3	Procuring Entity Name	Project Director, Local Government COVID-19 Response & Recovery Project (LGCRRP)			
4	Procuring Entity Code	Not used at present			
5	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka			
6	Invitation for	Procurement of Physical Services			
7	Invitation Ref No	46.02.0000.660.03.006.22.26			
8	Date	16.10.2022			
KEY INFORMATION					
9	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method			
FUNDING INFORMATION					
10	Budget and Source of Funds	GoB			
11	Development Partners	World Bank			
PARTICULAR INFORMATION					
12	Project / Program Code	224364300			
13	Project Name	Local Government COVID-19 Response & Recovery Project (LGCRRP)			
14	Tender Package No.	NS-101			
15	Tender Package Name	Selection and Employment of a Firm for Outsourcing Support Staff.			
		Date			
16	Tender Publication Date	16.10.2022			
17	Tender Last Selling Date	09.11.2022 (During Office hour) 3.00pm			
		Date	**Time**		
18	Tender Closing Date and Time	10.11.2022	12.00Noon		
19	Tender Opening Date and Time	10.11.2022	1.00pm		
20	Name & Address of the office(s)	Office of the Project Director, Local Government COVID-19 Response & Recovery Project (LGCRRP), LGED-RDEC Bhaban (Level-07), Agargaon, Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.			
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER					
21	Eligibility of Tenderer	• Tenderers shall have the legal capacity to enter into the Contract under the Applicable Law. • Tenderers shall be enrolled in the relevant professional or trade organizations registered in Bangladesh. • Tenderers shall have fulfilled its obligations to pay taxes under the provisions of laws and regulations of Bangladesh			
22	Brief Description of Services	Providing support for the position of 4 nos. Computing, 4 nos. Work Associate, 1 no. Security Guard, 1 no. Cleaning under the project for 36 months.			
23	Price of Tender Document (Tk)	Tk. 2000.00			
	Package No	Identification of Package	Location	Tender Security Amount (Tk)	Completion Time in Weeks / Months
24	1	NS-101	Dhaka	1,50,000.00	36 Months
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS					
25	Name of Official Inviting Tender	**Nazmus Sadat Md. Zillur Rahman**			
26	Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Project Director			
27	Address of Official Inviting Tender	LGED-RDEC Bhaban (Level-07), Agargaon, Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.			
28	Contact details of Official Inviting Tender	Ph: 02-44826494	e-mail: pd.lgcrrp@lged.gov.bd		
29	The Procuring Entity reserves the right to reject all the Tenders or annul the Tender proceedings				

16.10.2022
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