

‘If an election is not participatory, it is neither free nor fair’

Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain, former election commissioner and senior fellow at the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) of North South University (NSU), talks about the latest amendment to the Representation of the People Order (RPO) and what the Election Commission’s role should be in the coming months, in an interview with Mohiuddin Alamgir of The Daily Star.

The latest RPO amendment has allegedly curtailed the Election Commission’s power to suspend voting and withhold results. What is your take on the issue?

There are some laws that are in black and white and do not require any interpretations. In 2008, during the tenure of ATM Shamsul Huda, an amendment of Section 90A of the RPO was made so that the commission could stop or withhold polls in some centres or in an entire constituency during the election process (after the announcement of the election schedule), in case of any violence, or if an environment is created where there can be no free and fair election.

This provision has been in place since 2008, and even the incumbent EC has utilised it. Now the commission says that they proposed the amendment for clarification of the law. With the new change, the EC would be able to suspend the election only on the polling day.

The amendment also bars the EC from cancelling election results and allows it to withhold polling only at specific centres where irregularities occur. So, they tied their hands.

The EC has also added 91AA, a new sub-section, to the RPO, which says the EC cannot take any actions between the announcement of unofficial results by returning officers and the publication of the gazette notification. As far as I know, the EC desires the power to withhold results of parts of or an entire constituency if there are any complaints and a subsequent probe. But, after the amendment, they have the power to withhold election results only for specific centres and not an entire constituency.

Is the amendment actually needed ahead of this important national election, when the last two elections – in 2014 and 2018 – already faced much questioning?

Besides what the RPO grants, the EC also has the inherent power to make decisions. I don’t understand what the need was for such an amendment to the RPO. Since 2008, three Election Commissions performed their duties without facing any problems.

Many election experts point out that, according to the RPO, ‘election’ means the election of a member to a seat held under this order. Some say the definition of election in the RPO is not clear. What do you think?

This definition should be changed. An election means the entire

period from the announcement of the election schedule to the announcement of the result.

How much of an impact will such a curtailing of power have on polls, including the next general election?

The international spotlight is trained on our upcoming general election. Those who monitor the election process can see whether there is any intimidation from the government pre- and post-polls. If they find that the government has changed the law to get the election atmosphere to be in its favour, the monitors might cite it as an element of intimidation.

After this amendment, if the commission thinks that they will need to investigate and suspend the election due to violence or anything else, it will not be able to do so under the RPO. But the EC will still be able to investigate and suspend an



FILE PHOTO: STAR

M Sakhawat Hossain

election using its inherent power.

Of course, if it makes use of its inherent power (in line with Article 119 of the constitution), many might go to court against the EC’s decision of suspending elections.

About six months away from the next general polls, is the EC on the right track?

It is known to all that people hardly have confidence in the EC. The incumbent commission has tried to earn people’s confidence back. But they have been showing some weakness since the Gaibandha-5 by-polls. A candidate of the Barishal City Corporation election was beaten on polling day. But we did not see the suspension of polling at that centre, what was investigated, or if anyone was found responsible.

Even in connection with election irregularities during the

Gaibandha-5 by-polls, many were found to be involved and their information had been forwarded to the concerned departments, but we don’t know anything further. No action was taken against any candidates. It’s like the EC is going one step forward and two steps back.

The Election Commission should be transparent to voters, who should be briefed about what has happened. The EC is not a ministry. Even if one person is punished, that should be presented as an example and a warning.

Election commissioners often say that it is not their job to ensure all political parties’ participation in the national polls. What do you think?

Legally, no. But morally, yes. The EC doesn’t have a legal obligation to ensure that all parties participate in the elections. The only legal instrument that the EC has is that they can scrap the registration of a political party if they don’t take part in two consecutive national polls.

Political parties are one of the major stakeholders in elections. The commission should have constant liaison with all political parties. If the EC wants to hold an inclusive election, it will need to make an all-out effort to ensure that.

There are two parties in Bangladesh, Awami League and BNP, that have the strength to field formidable candidates in all 300 parliamentary seats.

Only sending out a letter that says when the EC will hold talks with a party is not enough. I believe election commissioners must maintain acquaintance with leaders of different political parties. This kind of personal liaison works. Therefore, they have a moral responsibility to try to hold unofficial talks with the parties.

But we don’t see any such efforts, as the EC has taken a stance that it is not their responsibility to bring all political parties to the election.

What are the challenges for the EC in holding the next general polls in a free, fair, participatory, and acceptable manner?

Usually, holding a parliamentary election is a challenge. But this time it is more challenging, when the whole world is watching us and they all want a free and fair election in Bangladesh. Besides, people’s confidence in elections and the EC is being eroded. The EC has to work hard. If an election is not participatory, it is neither free nor fair.

MANDELA DAY

He exemplified the power of resistance against oppression



Sayeeda Fatima is a quality assurance analyst based in Canada.

SAYEEDA FATIMA

“I learnt that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear,” Nelson Mandela, a beacon of resilience and fortitude, once said. Every year on July 18, people around the world come together to commemorate Mandela Day and pay homage to the remarkable life and enduring legacy of Nelson Mandela. This celebration serves as a clarion call for us to reflect upon Mandela’s timeless values and principles, and to proactively make a positive impact within our own communities.

In November 2009, the United Nations officially designated this day as UN Mandela Day. The day’s central focus is honouring Madiba’s memory by engaging in community service and promoting sustainable projects that leave a lasting imprint. But Mandela Day transcends being merely a commemoration of Madiba’s life and legacy; it has evolved into a formidable global movement dedicated to honouring his life’s work and fostering positive change on a global scale.

In an era where inequality continues to proliferate in society, particularly in vulnerable communities, Mandela Day assumes even greater significance. The power lies in recognising the needs of those around us, taking action, and making a tangible difference in their lives.

Year after year, we celebrate this day to illuminate the impact of a man who indubitably transformed the course of the 20th century, leaving an indelible imprint on the 21st. This occasion provides an opportunity for all of us to rekindle our connection with the values that inspired Nelson Mandela: unyielding determination, an unwavering commitment to justice, the safeguarding of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and an unwavering belief in the equality and dignity of every

individual. Nelson Mandela’s enduring legacy endows him with the status of a great statesman and an unwavering advocate for equality – the architect of peace in South Africa.

During tumultuous times, Nelson Mandela exemplifies the power of resistance against oppression, the triumph of justice over inequality, the supremacy of dignity over humiliation, and the healing force of forgiveness over hatred. As our world forges ahead with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, striving to overcome new adversities, we must remember the invaluable lessons imparted by Mandela’s extraordinary life and the unwavering humanism that guided him. As he famously proclaimed, “To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

Nelson Mandela was born on July 18, 1918, in Transkei, South Africa. Hailing from the Thembu royal family in Mvezo, South Africa, he pursued a legal education at the University of Fort Hare and the University of Witwatersrand, eventually practising law in Johannesburg. It was there that he immersed himself in anti-colonial and African nationalist politics, emerging as one of the most prominent anti-Apartheid activists in South Africa. In 1963, he was imprisoned for his leadership role in the liberation movement against Apartheid and his unwavering commitment to the inherent right of individuals to live in freedom.

Assigned the prisoner number 466 in 1964, Nelson Mandela was confined to Robben Island, situated off the coast of Cape Town. Within the walls of Robben Island, prisoners were known not by their names, but by their numbers and the year of their imprisonment – thus, 46664 became Nelson Mandela’s defining identifier. His eventual release in 1990 became a turning point in South Africa’s political landscape, fuelling crucial debates and catalysing the country’s

transformation into a multi-racial democracy.

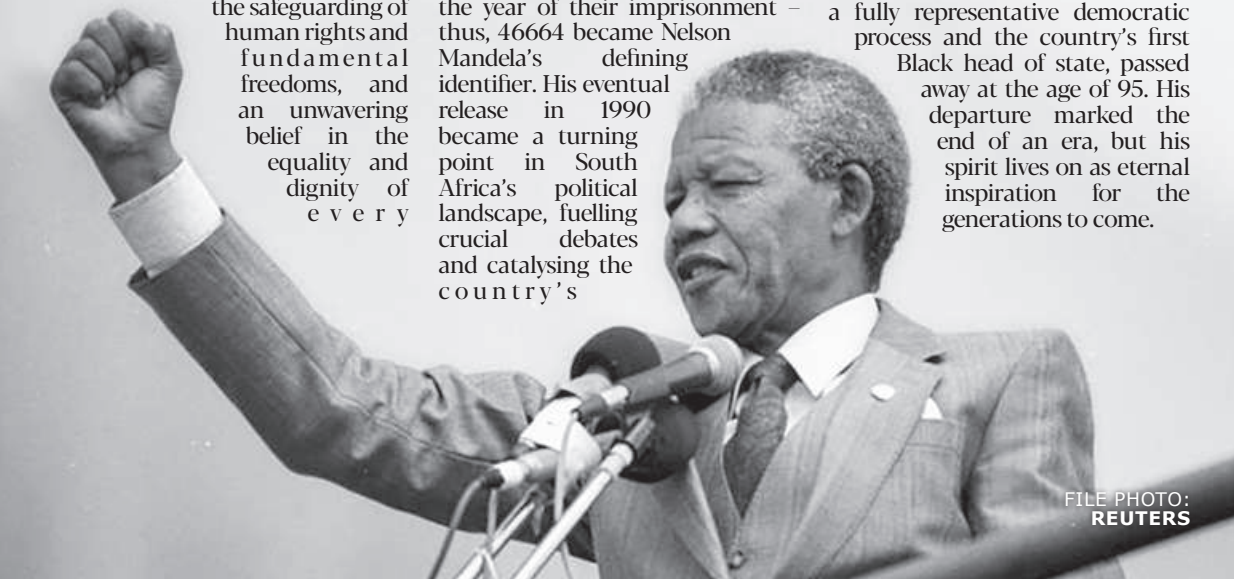
Following his release, Nelson Mandela continued to champion racial reconciliation in his country and supported initiatives aimed at healing a divided nation. In recognition of his tireless efforts, he was elected as South Africa’s president in 1994, serving until 1999. Furthermore, in 1993, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize alongside former South African president Frederik Willem de Klerk. Mandela’s post-presidency endeavours led to the formation of the Elders in 2007, an independent group comprising global leaders who leverage their wisdom and experience to advance peace, alleviate human suffering, and champion the shared interests of humanity.

Even before assuming the presidency, Mandela was deeply entrenched in anti-Apartheid activities. In 1962, he was arrested and imprisoned, and following the Rivonia Trial, he received a life sentence for his involvement in plotting the overthrow of the state. Over the course of his 27-year confinement, Mandela endured hardships in various prisons, including Robben Island, Pollsmoor Prison, and Victor Verster Prison. Despite such adversities, he remained unwavering in his commitment to the cause of freedom, spending many of those years alongside fellow freedom fighters.

Even in his official retirement, Nelson Mandela continued to lend his voice to pressing humanitarian issues and campaigned tirelessly for peace, children’s rights, and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Nelson Mandela was the recipient of more than 260 awards throughout his lifetime, and numerous statues and civic tributes have been erected in his honour, such as the one at Nelson Mandela Square in Johannesburg, South Africa. Over the years, postage stamps and various musical tributes have also been dedicated to Mandela, serving as enduring reminders of his immense contributions.

On December 5, 2013, Nelson Mandela, the first president of South Africa to be elected through a fully representative democratic process and the country’s first Black head of state, passed away at the age of 95. His departure marked the end of an era, but his spirit lives on as eternal inspiration for the generations to come.



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Government Peoples Republic of Bangladesh Office of the Director Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.

Ref: SOMCH/Diet/e-Gp/2023/1531

Date: 17/07/2023

Re e-Tender Notice

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/ Hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-tender, please register on e-GP system portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). For more details, please contract support desk contract numbers.

e-Tender are invited in e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Director sylhet M A G Osmani Medical college Hospital, Sylhet for the Procurement of;

Tender Id	Name of Goods	Tender/Proposal Last Selling Date & Time	Tender/Proposal Closing Date & Time	Tender/Proposal Opening Date & Time
853016	Procurement of Diet Group # 01 (Rice, Dal, Ect)	27 July 2023 11.00	27 July 2023 13.00	27 July 2023 13.00
853032	Procurement of Diet Group # 02 (Fruits and Vegetable etc.)	27 July 2023 11.00	27 July 2023 13.00	27 July 2023 13.00
853045	Procurement of Diet Group # 03 (Fish, Meat, Egg etc.)	31 July 2023 11.00	31 July 2023 13.00	31 July 2023 13.00
853054	Procurement of Diet Group # 04 (Bread & Biscuit etc.)	27 July 2023 11.00	27 July 2023 13.00	27 July 2023 13.00
853794	Procurement of Diet Group # 05 (Milk & others)	27 July 2023 11.00	27 July 2023 13.00	27 July 2023 13.00

e-Tender details can be downloaded on e-GP system portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for pursuer.

e-Tender will be accepted only as stated in above list accepted tenders will be opened online immediate as stated in above list.

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Memo No. DPEO/BOG/2023-2024/1769

Date: 16.07.2023

e-Tender Notice No. 01/2023-2024

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following scheme listed below:

Sl No	Package No & Tender ID	Name of work	Procurement Method	Tender Last selling (date & time)	Tender Opening (date & time)
1.	NBIDGPS-1/G1/-0155	Furniture Supply for 100 Nos Class Room and 07 Nos. Teachers Room of Selected 23 Nos of Govt. Primary School at different location of Bogura District.	OTM	02.08.2023 16:00	03.08.2023 13:00
2	NBIDGPS-1/G1/-0156	Furniture Supply for 85 Nos Class Room and 07 Nos. Teachers Room of Selected 20 Nos of Govt. Primary School at different location of Bogura District.	OTM	02.08.2023 16:00	03.08.2023 13:00

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP system portal have to be deposited online through any registered Banks branches up to as Mention in Table . Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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