

# Fake Election Victory of Hasina & Death of Democracy in Bangladesh

## The calamity of immorality

Those who are power-addict, morality stands as the most unwanted burden on their shoulder. Hence, they drop it in the dustbin on the first day of their political career. They are focussed only to grab more power. As a result, the moral deprivation cum immorality becomes the most distinctive feature in their political career. Because of such moral deprivation, Shaikh Mujib –the former leader of Bangladesh could easily go against his own high-sounding promise. He could quickly bury the multi-party democracy and impose one-party brutal dictatorship in the early seventies. Shaikh Hasina –the current Prime Minister and the daughter of Mujib, showed the same immoral persuasion vis-à-vis the parliamentary election under a caretaker government. When she was out of power, she fought for it. But when in power, he abolished it. In both the situations, addiction to power was the guiding force; not any morality.

In Bangladesh, holding parliamentary election under a caretaker government was adopted as a consensus formula of all political parties in 1991. It has its own historical background. Since the party-based government repeatedly failed to hold a free and fair election, election under a caretaker government was preferred as the only alternative option by all parties including Awami League. Such governments under the retired Chief Justices of Bangladesh showed some spectacular successes; fair and free elections were successfully held in 1991, 1996 and 2000. There was no post-election chaos on the acceptability of those election. Such successful experiment of caretaker government indeed encouraged many other countries

like Pakistan to replicate it.

Moreover, the constitutional legality of such a caretaker government was never challenged by any political leader, nor by any legal expert. Even Shaikh Hasina couldn't openly raise any objection against it. But she has other reason to abolish the system. She wanted victory only for her; and an electoral defeat was totally unacceptable. Since a neutral caretaker government can't ensure such an all-time victory, she wanted its quick abolition. She conveniently forgot her own argument in its favour. She even took a deceitful secretive route by using the country's Supreme Court Chief Justice Mr Abul Khair for its abolition. Mr Abul Khair declared it unconstitutional. It is significant to note that even three previous Supreme Court Chief Justices didn't consider it illegal to head the caretaker government. Chief Justice Abul Khair unsettled the settled issue and opened the door of serious political instability in the country. He was so desperate to serve his presumed beneficiary that he did the job on his own; nobody needed to ask him openly to deliver a judgment on it. In an unrelated non-constitutional litigation, he jumped on the issue of caretaker government and abolished it by making a casual remark on its constitutional legality. He didn't allow any legal experts to make any argument on the issue. Whatever he had in his mind was announced as a final Supreme Court verdict. Thus, Shaikh Hasina was given a green signal to go ahead with her agenda. Later on, it came to the press that the same Abul Khair took one million Taka from Prime Minister's Relief Fund to meet his domestic need.

### **Manufacturing election victory**

There exists little doubt about the real beneficiary of the judgment of former Chief Justice Abul Khair. It gave the needed legality to the incumbent Prime Minister Shaikh Hasina to manufacture election victory for herself -as she did in

2014 and now in December, 2018. She became the player as well as the umpire in the electoral game. As a result, the whole election process is used only to rubber stamp an extension of her rule. So, it clearly proves how the judiciary can be complicit in promoting the evil agenda of a power-addict autocrat. In such a forged election, Hasina doesn't need to launch any tiresome election campaign. In 2014 election, she need not open polling booth in 153 parliamentary seats in a total of 300 seats; her party nominees were elected uncontested. She could easily manufacture a victory for her party only by appointing a compliant Election Commission and using the servile administrative machinery. She could manufacture similar victory in 2018 election, too. It is alleged that the opposition polling agents were arrested either beforehand or restricted to enter into the polling stations on the Election Day. So, the ruling party thugs enjoyed the full liberty to put ballot papers in the ballot boxes even before the polling booths were opened for the voters. In such forged elections, the victory is so guaranteed for the ruling party that the party stalwarts could openly claim that Shaikh Hasina will stay in power as the life-long Prime Minister before the Election Day.

### **Democracy is dead**

When the ruler is a power-addict autocrat, the democratic institutions possess no option but to die. Then, sovereignty rests only in the hand of the ruling autocrat. The people are made mere powerless viewers, sycophants and obedient taxpayers. Thus in Bangladesh, the democratic rights of the people stands blatantly robbed. The country is brutally ruled by an immoral ruler. In the name of election, only a political slavery has been imposed. The election process has become a selection process to elect only the dictator and her cronies. The recent election in Bangladesh is indeed a huge proof of such an autocratic selection process.

In the past, Shaikh Hasina and her party Awami League could be easily defeated with huge margin on multiple occasions. It was only possible because of her inability to manipulate the election. But now, since she is the Prime Minister, no one can defeat her. The candidate who stood against her in Gopalganj constituency was not allowed to take even a few hundred votes. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) –the party which won election several times in the past, was restricted to have only 7 seats in the parliament of 300. In the past, the rigging power of the ruling party proved to be so huge that no one could defeat even the most unpopular dictator like General (rtd) Ershad in any election while he was in power. It is not difficult to understand the massive rigging power of the partisan state institutions; hence power-addict Hasina is deadly against any election under a neutral caretaker government. She knows, such a neutral election will ensure only her defeat. Her toxic tribal ideology, her cruelty against the common people, her slavery of inimical India and her politics of extrajudicial murder and enforced disappearance could flood the county only with the enemies. Hence, election phobia runs very high in the psyche of Shaikh Hasina and her cronies. Election defeat appeared to her as a death sentence. Criminals know their crimes; they know the punishment, too. Hence, many top party leaders of the ruling party even told in public that their election defeat will bring deaths of thousands of their party leaders and members. So, Hasina thought it life-saving event to elect herself and her cronies.

A hijacker needs weapons to do the hijacking; the power-addict too, needs weapons to hijack people's democratic rights. Rigged election provides as such an effective weapon to grab the state power. And for successful rigging, it is indispensable for the power-addict to manipulate the whole election process. Then, grabbing even 98% percent votes is not a problem. The dictators like Syria's Bashar al-Assad, Abul Fatah al-Sisi of Egypt and the ruler of North Korean display

such fraudulent electoral success. Shaikh Hasina had taken the same route. Without free and fair election, democracy finds its place only in the graveyard. This has proven to be exactly true in the case of Bangladesh.

### **Back to the square one**

Bangladesh is back to the square one. The election on 30<sup>th</sup> December, 2018 couldn't solve the ongoing political crisis; rather has complicated it. The culture of electoral rigging by the ruling party has successfully killed democracy in Bangladesh. As a result, the country is on a disastrous course. No amount of economic growth can solve this political crisis. The political crisis must be solved politically. Without a functioning heart, how can a body survive? Likewise, how can democracy survive without a fair and free election? Since free and fair election may lead to the defeat of the ruling party, it isn't acceptable to them. They need the guarantee for 100 percent success. For ensuring such a success in 2014, the election was held by keeping the main challenger Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) out of the race. Such an exclusive election earned huge condemnation for Hasina. Hence, this time she tried to make it more inclusive. Since the intention was fake, such inclusion didn't work either. Hence the crisis continues. How election can work while the ruling party is not ready to admit a free and fair expression of the people's verdict. Such fake election –even if held ten times, never helps democracy. It can only promote brutal autocracy.

Although the participation of the opposition parties in election on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2018 couldn't put an end to the autocratic rule of Hasina, it has helped immensely in other way. She is more naked than before; it has fully exposed her evil intention and the toxic immorality. Millions of lectures couldn't expose her with such clarity. Equally, it has proven

how indispensable is the need of the caretaker government. The forged election and the confrontational politics between the illegitimate government and the democratic opposition has now revived the most crucial political issue of Bangladesh. It is the restoration of caretaker government to conduct the next election as soon as possible.

Like drug-addiction, power-addiction too, kills the common sense. Hasina reveals the death of her common sense, too. Hence, like a drug-addict, she displays ugly shamelessness publicly. So vote rigging crosses all limits. She has failed to understand the simplest fact that fake election can't solve any problem. It can only aggravate the crisis. Such election only causes a huge wastage of money, energy and time. But, such wastage or poor participation of the people is not an issue for Shaikh Hasina. Her only interest was to fulfil a constitutional formality for another five year term. Sadly, what else one can expect out of a rigged election engineered by an established power-addict?

### **The only option**

The foreign governments as well as other stakeholders of Bangladesh have only two options: either to stand for autocratic Shaikh Hasina or support the democratic rights of the people. Support for a dictator can only damage the fate of democracy in Bangladesh. It can only promote political savagery that would make the country unfit for civilised living. Such a savagery of an autocrat only brings civil wars, deaths, destruction and mass migration. Syria gives a good lesson on that. In such a critical juncture, the foreign countries need to make visible their own choice. The political crisis in Bangladesh and the political culture of the ruling Awami League is not unknown to anyone. So, no one needs lecturing on that. Those who love democratic values and basic human rights should do everything for an immediate fair and

free election under a caretaker government. Holding such an election is indeed the most important single political issue in Bangladesh.

For the majority, a free and fair election is indeed the only ray of hope to get out of the current impasse. Otherwise, it will only trigger the explosive despair of the people. In such tense context, election needs to be visibly transparent, impartial and acceptable to all parties. The election which is acceptable to Shaikh Hasina and her ruling Awami League may not be acceptable to others. Election for the sake of election can only exacerbate the toxic political divide. It needs to understand that the people of Bangladesh now stand at the edge of the breaking point. The situation is ripe only for a war pathway. A fake election can only aggravate that. Then, no one will stand safe. Even India will feel the heat. Only the ruling party and its internal and external cronies will bear the whole responsibility for such a disastrous calamity.

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