

Election, Political Instability and Fragile Democracy in Bangladesh: Is Proportional Representation the Remedy?*

Dr. S. M. Abdul Quddus**

Abstract

Being one of the most populous countries in the world, Bangladesh has been facing numerous challenges such as poverty, rampant corruption, decay in living conditions, slow economic growth, bad governance, insecurity and of course political conflicts and instability, which are supposed to be met in a democratic polity. After the fall of Ershad's military regime in 1990, democracy has been reinstated in the country. But the "winner-takes-all" political culture and mentality of the political elites has resulted in the boycott of parliament by the opposition parties followed by street agitations and general strikes on a regular basis. Thus many scholars argue that democracy in Bangladesh is not working as per the hope and aspiration of the people of Bangladesh. This paper examines the question of whether the Proportional Representation (PR) system can help in institutionalising and strengthening democratic practice in order to achieve political stability and sustained economic growth in Bangladesh. Our findings reveal that there is a need for political reforms, and particularly change from the existing "Winner-Takes-All (WTA)" political system to the PR system in Bangladesh. This is because PR system paves the way for greater participation i.e. seats in the parliament are allocated among parties in proportion to votes they receive. Our data also shows that the PR system will not only grant legitimacy to the party with majority seats in the parliament to rule, but also build stakes for opposition parties to meaningfully participate in parliament by means of committee assignments in proportion to their representation i.e. the percentages of electoral votes and parliamentary seats. This paper further highlights that the PR political system, which some scholars name it as a system with 'justice as fairness principle', will also help to build a national consensus to resolve the issues of long-standing political contentious in Bangladesh such as appropriate electoral system, institutional framework of the electoral process, political neutrality of the Election Commission (EC), organise open, free and fair election, etc. These are some major political issues which are unresolved in the country for a long time and the PR system may bring a positive change in this respect by transforming traditional behavior of political elites thus making a difference in the quality of life of the citizenry in Bangladesh. The findings of this study also suggest that in order to adopt the PR system in a new democracy like Bangladesh there are also numerous challenges such as: commodification of election, commercialisation of nomination, the issue of geographical representation, instability of the government, etc.

Keywords: Proportional Representation, National Consensus, Loyalty Effect, Democratisation & Winner-takes-all

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** Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). E-mail: abdulquddus@iium.edu.my

Introduction

In the past, the heroic people of Bangladesh dedicated themselves in the war of independence to establish a country free from poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and maladministration. Bangladesh attained its independence through a historic war in 1971 after being liberated first from the British colonial administration 24 years back in 1947. All the struggles were brought about to give the people due rights to exercise the democratic process. The Constitution of Bangladesh in its preamble declares democracy as its one of the fundamental principles and pledges that "...it shall be a fundamental aim of the state to realise through the democratic process a socialist society, free from exploitation – a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens;" (The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh). But after 43 years of independence, the pledge remains a dream of the patriotic people; while the constitutional declaration, according to analysts (e.g. Khan, 2011), seems to be mere rhetoric. Politics in Bangladesh is a duopolistic business of the major two political camps i.e. Awami League and its allies on one side and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its allies on the other. People who struggled for the independence and democracy have become disillusioned. It is against this backdrop that people are looking forward to seeing a meaningful change to establish democratisation process as a true means of rapid national development, ensuring people's right and good governance in the country. Many states all over the globe, particularly in the sustainable democracies like Scandinavian ones, follow the rules of Proportional Representation (PR) for long time. This paper examines the question of whether a shift from the current majority rule system to the PR system can help the fragile democracy in Bangladesh achieve political stability or otherwise. In other words, to see the possibility of PR system as an alternative to the plurality or 'winner-takes-all' electoral system in a major structural electoral reform for the sake of Bangladesh's better democracy and political stability. This paper deals with the following questions specifically: (a) what are the nature and characteristics of electoral system hence democracy in Bangladesh? (b) why is there persistent political unrest and instability in Bangladesh? (c) how can PR help to stop the politics of confrontation and instead ensure stability for a sustainable democratic practice? and (d) what are the potential challenges and threats to the introduction of PR system in Bangladesh? The data of this paper is based on empirical evidences collected mainly from published secondary sources such as journal articles, books and study reports; personal observation of the 10th national election; information from the Election Commission's (EC) website as well as print and electronic media reports on election and democracy in Bangladesh.

The Colonial Legacy and the Nature of 'Democracy' in Bangladesh

Bangladesh runs a fragile parliamentary system of government and it inherited the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) or "Winner-Takes-All" voting system since it was a British colony prior to 1947. However, the FPTP system has been criticized worldwide because of its inherent drawbacks. For example, under this system, voters turn out considered to be low and political experts identify it as failed mechanism to reflect the views of the public in a precise manner.

On the contrary, the Proportional Representation (PR) system has been globally accepted as an effective mechanism to reflect the views of the citizens in an accurate manner because this system yields election outcomes which give some people authority to rule but at the same time include the left out in the governance process. Under PR, a legislature reflects the voting potency of various political parties and the difference between the treasury and the opposition is eventually reduced.

'Democratic' process was impeded at the very beginning just after 3 years of independence in Bangladesh. An elected parliamentary system of government started working with its brutal majority in the legislature. The so called 'majority' misinterpreted the sense democracy and the most 'popular government' couldn't understand the sense of demand of the people and failed to translate expectations of the people into realities. Subsequently, military intervention in politics was brought up as the legacy of the Pakistani misrule after 1947; and the people of the country have been disfranchised for long time. It is noteworthy that a long battle did occur between democratic forces and the undemocratic elements in the vast canvas of the political history of Bangladesh. After a huge sacrifice presented by her brave people, Bangladesh rediscovered the track of democracy at the beginning of the 1990s.

Unfortunately, the resurrection of democracy cannot find its elevator; rather its ways are blockaded time and again. The major political parties here do not foster the sense of purpose for democracy; rather, they are interested with their own party dominance. This leads to political institutions not being developed. Party in power exercises all the do's and don'ts and they have a 'who cares?' attitude and mindset. The elected parliament member of the opposition sometimes cannot even visit his/her own constituency due to the unwritten embargo set by the ruling party. Major pillars of the state such as administration, police, and judiciary have been purposively politicised and tamed to feed the greed of the leaders of party in power. Most often parliament is paralysed due to the rigorous boycott of the opposition parties. Even the party in power does not hesitate to go for walkover win when all major political parties boycott the Parliamentary election (e.g. the 10th Parliamentary election held on January 5, 2014). Parliamentary standing committees are also becoming ornamental; often the ministry concerned does not bother its standing committee.

On the other hand, almost 50% of the populations in the country are women but they do not have their due representation at any level of the elected bodies particularly in the Parliament. Historically, women of Bangladesh could not have proper education which has resulted with a vacuum of women leadership in the socio-political arena. Additionally, the on-going plurality electoral system is very much unwelcoming to women to be elected. The scarcity of women elected by plurality rule has dire consequences. For example, parliament with fewer women are apt to give less attention and funding to women-related policies such as family planning, maternity health, reproductive health, child care, nutrition, welfare of working women (RMG sector), prevention of women and child oppression, prevention of child marriage, prevention of child abuse and other social services. Without empowering women properly Bangladesh cannot win the race to functional democracy.

Over the last few decades, politics in Bangladesh has become the safe investment sector for particular interest groups. Businessmen who turn into politicians, for example, are the key

players in this regard. This eventually leads to some career, experienced, and professional politicians being sidelined in some cases. Hence the people who fought for independence and democracy are again disillusioned. As a matter of fact, money mongers and power mongers join hands together extracting the blood of the people. The two major parties launch an unholy competition just before the election to bag the business tycoons to their respective slates. Businessmen with black money are in the race to purchase the candidature for the national election, therefore, in the past as well as in present legislature remarkable numbers of the parliament members are from the business community. According to some analysts, signs of bankruptcy exist in the politics of Bangladesh.

Since the party in power secures and holds all reins of the administration in its hands, the opposition has been driven away from the scene, creating anarchy in law and order situation. Following this, the opposition starts boycotting the house and, finally at the end of the tenure of the government, they resort to street agitation to unseat the elected government – which sometimes results in a huge loss of life and wealth. Then, election comes along and the opposition wins and it takes all. Here, power rolls in between the hands of these two major parties. They make the chair an apple of discord, and unfortunately the people of Bangladesh are the ultimate losers. Such instability is the fate of the Bangladesh democracy.

Thus, mistrust and power mongering among the major two parties and their leaderships lead to the sky rocketing corruption that paves the way for undemocratic elements to power. From 1991 to 2014, Bangladesh experienced five “democratically elected” regimes; some of which came to power with the interventions of the Non-Party Caretaker Governments (NCG) system. The NCG system has been incorporated in the Constitution for the sake of neutrality in conducting election. In the reality of politics of Bangladesh, democracy suffers from the misrules and misdeeds of political masters dominated by two major political camps i.e. the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Notably, in Bangladesh politics means fortune making. This is especially so because the party in power would leave its pro-people political programmes and instead deviate its activities to grab money by corrupt means such as manipulating development works. ‘Party men’ become part of the administration from grass root level to apex level. A classical example of the “winner-takes-all strategy” indeed! On the other hand, opposition parties do not go to parliament. They confine or sometimes compel to confine (due to aggressive attitude of ruling party) themselves in their party offices releasing political programmes using media or street agitations, etc. Both the regime and opposition aggravate their political programmes just before the scheduled election. They declare their manifestos, circulate them and try to explain them through the media. After election both of them forget the manifestos and pledges that they promised. Thus, in Bangladesh, politics means election, and democracy is synonymous to the right to vote only. And, therefore, to ensure a sound environment of healthy competition, politics and a true democracy, the reform in voting system is a crying need.

The Nature and Characteristics of Electoral System in Bangladesh

It has been recognised by experts that election and democracy are intertwined and main pillars of modern democratic polity. According to experts like MacIver (quoted in Hakim, 1993)

elections confer legitimacy and means for routinised succession for ruling elites. It is not only considered as the main mechanism that ensures governing elites to remain accountable to their electorate but also to accentuated legitimacy crisis for many regimes. Bangladesh could be portrayed as a typical case where regimes suffered credibility and legitimacy due to rigged elections, used violence and force to win election, lack of elections at periodic intervals, etc. Thus, people have apparently lost their interests in elections and especially during the rule of military regime (1982-90) and recently under civilian government (e.g. 10th general election) whereby elections revealed all dysfunctional consequences (Ahmed, 2004; Quddus, 2014). However, Bangladesh stepped back onto the road to free and fair election and democracy resulted from an election in 1991 under a unique system, namely the non-party caretaker government (NCG). This caretaker system of government took a better shape through constitutional modifications in 1996 and, that, too, following mass movement (Ahmed, 2004). Although three general elections held under the NCGs led by Justice Shahabuddin, Justice Habibur Rahman, and Justice Latifur Rahman were accorded overwhelming appreciation home and abroad; as usual, the main opposition party complained of anomalies. Most importantly, to the then main opposition party and allies, the caretaker government headed by Iajuddin Ahmed as last option of the caretaker government was seen as, to all intents and purposes, an extension of the four-party alliance rule. Whether he was forced or compelled, President Iajuddin Ahmed's—despite being a party nominated president—taking up the role of chief of “Caretaker Government” dealt a controversy to the non-party character of the caretaker system (Alim & Mozumder, 2008). And, that led to a face-off scenario between the immediate past ruling party block and the past opposition party alliance. Interesting indeed, because a sort of crusade ensued between the two alliances - one alliance committed to hold the 2007 elections at any cost for the sake of safeguarding the Constitution while the other being determined tooth and nail to resist the same for safeguarding the voting rights of the people (Quddusi, 2010; Quddusi, 2011). However, the gloomy side of the development is that this very innovative system of government has been removed from the constitution by the current regime. This has not only ensured electoral corruption but it was also an issue of controversies.

On the other hand, Kochanek claimed that “Bangladeshi businessmen have been very successful in securing direct elite representation in government ... have been well represented in elected assemblies and have been served as cabinet ministers” (2000, p. 155). He has also argued that the proportion of businessmen elected to parliament (MPs) in Bangladesh has been quite high, significantly higher than elsewhere in South Asia. Rahman also noted that the percentage of MPs elected from the business community has increased over the years; for example, it rose from 24 percent in 1973, to 26 percent in 1979, and to 45 per cent in 1991, remained stable at 44 percent until 1996 (1996; also quoted in Kochanek, 2000) and reached the highest level¹ to 83 percent in 2001 (Daily Janakantha, Dhaka, June, 27, 2005). It should be mentioned that the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

¹ Of the elected MPs in 2001 national election, 83 percent mentioned ‘business’ as their occupation in their nomination paper submitted to the Election Commission (Source: Daily Janakantha, Dhaka 27.06.2005).

gained the mandate and formed the government several times in the country. The dominant position of the business elites in these main two political parties and in the parliament demonstrates that they have gained increasing influence over state power and policy. In contrast, the representation of vocational groups such as lawyers in the government, or in the parliament specifically, has declined over this period. For example, in the 1970 national election, 47 percent of the Awami League nominees were lawyers and only 19 percent were businessmen; in contrast, in the 1996 election, 44 percent were businessmen.

The Causes and Consequences of the Electoral Engineering, Persistent Political Unrest and Instability in Bangladesh

Bangladesh appeared on the world map as an independent and sovereign state on December 16, 1971 after a nine-month-long war of liberation against Pakistan. The party that formed the first post-liberation government was the Awami League, headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib). In August 1975, a bloody military coup overthrew the Awami League government and in November of the same year, a popular uprising brought General Ziaur Rahman to power (Siddique, 1996). His rule ended with his assassination by a group of military officers in 1981, and in another military coup in early 1982, Ershad, the commander-in-chief of the army, ousted the elected Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government headed by Justice Abdus Satter and seized power. Ironically, General Ershad's military coup was supported and welcomed by the then main opposition party i.e. Awami League. Later Ershad formed the Jatiya Party, which won the majority of the seats in parliament; however, the credibility of the national elections held during the Ershad regime had been questioned. One of the important features of the Ershad regime was extensive participation of the military in civil administration. Finally, the Ershad government was toppled by a mass uprising in 1990. The election held under the "Non-partisan Caretaker Government" brought the BNP back to the power again, with Khaleda Zia, the arch rival of Sheikh Hasina, as the Prime Minister. The Khaleda regime also came to a premature end when many top level bureaucrats deserted BNP for the *Janatar Manch* (people's platform), in order to support the long struggle of the opposition political parties; this quickened the "bureaucratic coup" and fall of the government (Quddus, 2008). Some of these senior bureaucrats, known as "secretaries", later gained prestigious administrative and political posts; for example, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir was rewarded by the Awami League with a ministerial position for his participation in the *Janatar Manch* although he violated bureaucratic norms and involved himself in political acts, which is prohibited by the Constitution and secretarial instructions of the country. In 1996, Awami League regained power after 21 years; but during its tenure there were endless agitation, street demonstration, general strikes, etc as protests against government undemocratic practices and oppression to opposition leaders. But the election held in 2001 brought a landslide victory for the BNP and its four party allies again, and Begum Khaleda Zia became Prime Minister for a second term. In the election held in 2007, Awami League and its allies returned to power again with two-third majority although Begum Khaleda Zia and her four parties' allies brought allegations about manipulation of the election to bring Hasina's party Awami League to power by the military regime under which election was held at that time. The 10th general

election held on January 5, 2014 under the current regime witnessed some remarkable incidents such as major political opposition parties did not take part in the polls. Hence, more than 50% candidates of which were mostly from the ruling party were elected MPs uncontested; voters turnout was very low - about 22-26% (www.amadershomoy.com) - and due to a lack of contesting candidates in some constituencies there was no vote at all!; election ending with chaos; local media, international communities and donor agencies expressed their dissatisfaction about the credibility of the election outcomes and the way election was conducted; and others. However, the ruling Awami League called the election a free and fair one and expressed its satisfaction about the election outcomes. The above outline indicates that, in the post-liberation Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Awami League have been the two main political camps that have ruled the country; but they are considered each other's arch rivals in the political scenario in Bangladesh. These two major political camps never recognise one another to even dialogue with each other when there is desperate need of the nation to have dialogue between these two parties in order to settle national issues such as system of election or government.

Jahan (2000) has argued that there are intermediate classes dominating the electoral politics of Bangladesh, irrespective of differences in their ideological positions and social backgrounds. It must be borne in mind that the leadership of all political parties in Bangladesh belong to these intermediate classes and most of them come from wealthy farmer family backgrounds and are themselves by occupation lawyers, businessmen or civil/ military bureaucrats (Jahan, 2000). Khan characterises the Bangladeshi political system as follows:

Successive regimes in Bangladesh have changed the political system to suit their narrow, individual, sectarian and partisan interests. Mujib, Zia and Ershad have all manipulated the political system in a bid to hold on to power....Individuals became much more important than institutions, resulting the lack of faith in such political institutions as political parties, the legislature, and the judiciary. The political system becomes the shadow of one man as long as he is in power. The executive organ of the government keeps on playing the most dominant role compared with other organs, i.e. the legislative and the judiciary (1991, p. 27).

Another important feature of the political system in Bangladesh was the increasing militarisation of civil administration, particularly in the 1980s. This phenomenon began to emerge when General Zia took over power in November 1975. At that time, regime implemented the policy of militarization of civil service by appointing either serving or retired military officers to some key posts in the civil service, which got momentum during the era of General Ershad (1982-1990). Similarly, Alavi (1973, p. 47) concluded that post-colonial society Bangladesh was a "military-bureaucratic oligarchy". According to his thesis, which was mentioned earlier, there was a symbiotic relationship between the state bureaucracy in post-independent Bangladesh, and three other elite groups including the political elites, the business community and the landed aristocrats. His analysis is highly apt from the perspectives of the regimes of General Zia and Ershad, since both tried to liberalise the economic policy in line with market economic theory, while their predecessors had opted for a strict state control of the economy.

In fact, even after restoration of democracy in 1991, democracy has been provided with little room for expected development by uncouth electoral politics. Though an interim arrangement, called Caretaker System, was introduced for transition from dictatorship into democracy in 1991, the system had to be continued due to distrust of elections under party governments. There were, however, widespread allegations that the two major political camps i.e. BNP and AL and their alliances were so absorbed in the delusion of state power that they failed to reach even a modicum of consensus and compromise, which are inarguably the cornerstones of democracy. Painfully enough, the ethos of consensus and compromise which are basic notions of democratic completion and dissent are absent in political culture in Bangladesh and political parties have miserably failed to establish such ethos despite their repeated promises to the nation (Jahan, 2000). Islam (2011) also argued that there exists a firm institutional framework of the electoral process in Bangladesh characterised by electoral fraud and hostility, which usually claims lives. The 10th general election held on 5 January 2014 which is internationally known as “walkover win” for the Hasina regime, for example, took at least 26 lives of opposition supporters on the day of election only (The Daily Star, 8 January 2014, Kuala Lumpur). Moreover, doubtful results, harassment of political opponents and no engagement of meaningful political dialogues between the two major political rival parties are some common features of electoral culture in Bangladesh.

The Possibilities of Proportional Representation System to Stop the Politics of Confrontation and Facilitate Stable Democratic Practice

Political scientists (For example, Amy, 2000, 2002; Barber, 2000; Colmer, 2003, 2004; Cox, 1997; Hill, 2003; Linton and Southcott, 1998; Loenen, 1997, etc) studying the proportional representation (PR) system have identified that in PR countries there are high voter turnout rates couple with fair representation opportunities for different ethnic, political and other minorities groups. Their study also revealed that countries using proportional representation are enjoying comparatively stable political system with a culture of stable coalition of parties. The Scandinavian countries are classical examples of such long sustaining multi-party coalition based political system. Thus there may be a chance to break down the duopoly in Bangladesh politics and bid farewell to the politics of confrontation and instability that causes the country's lagging behind in terms of economic and political development.

The PR system facilitates full representation and suggests a special electoral formula in which there is a match between the percentage of votes and the percentage of seats obtain by different groups in election but grouped of candidates depends on certain measures. Under PR rules, no significant groups are denied representation. In PR systems such as Scandinavian region usually voters turnout is high (80%–90%) compared to in most plurality system (50%-60%) and nearly everyone's vote counts under this system. It also ensures that parliaments reflect the voting strength of various groups in its real sense. For example, if a party receives 40% of the votes in the election, it will be entitled to get only 40% seats in the parliament according to PR system, not 20 per cent or 60 per cent as can happen under the WTA system that Bangladesh has now. In Bangladesh there are 40-50 political parties; but under the present WTA system of voting many candidates from minor political parties never get the

chance to be elected in the parliament because the current electoral system requires candidates to receive a majority of the vote and minor party candidates can rarely manage to get the highest support. Consequently, the supporters of small parties are usually forced to choose a candidate considered to be 'the lesser of two evils' among the major party candidates or refrain themselves from going to polling station or waste their vote on a candidate who has no chance to win. Adopting PR electoral system may also help to create an atmosphere of free and fair competition and election in Bangladesh. And that is why the Election Commission (EC) has to incorporate a provision of NO vote system. In relation to Bangladesh, the former President Ershad and his Jatia Party (JP) demanded to introduce the PR system so that in addition to two major political parties AL and BNP, other political parties also get equal chance to win in the national elections and send their representative to the parliament (The Daily Samokal, May 11, 2011).

The unfairness of the current electoral system and considering the contentious political culture and dominance of two major political parties and their allies the PR system is a necessity in Bangladesh. People are increasingly frustrated with the activities of the two major parties and their leaders who do not feel hesitate to be in the power even with a "walkover win" like the 10th general election. In 2007, the army-backed "Caretaker Government" was popularly hailed by the civil society, business community and common people. And that unconstitutional government ran the country for two years without any interruption being brought about by political parties. Unprecedentedly, most of the stalwarts along with two heads of the two major parties were arrested at that time and "Caretaker government" was overwhelmingly applauded by the mass, which is the sign of mistrust of the people to the two major parties. But the experiences of the army-backed "Caretaker Government" were also no good as there were allegation of biasness to one political party and alleged involvements of army personnel in corruption scandals. With all such experiences, people in Bangladesh are now showing increasing interest in alternative electoral systems and they would really like to see a third player to emerge and challenge the two major political camps i.e. the Bangladesh Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Under the current WTA electoral system in Bangladesh, party candidature can be purchased at any time before the election and that is why businessmen with black money rush to grab the party brand by exploiting the greed of leadership. This occurs because in the election voters don't know the candidates; rather they cast their votes for party on the particular symbol! But in the multi-member PR districts system, it is a compulsory for a party to declare the list of its party candidates which is cross-examined by the voters. So, it creates some sort of pressure on the political parties to choose their candidates wisely; they have to go for the persons who have clean image with a commendable and tested political career. Thus politics will get rid of the money mongers and it will get back to the safe custody of the real, honest and popular politicians.

Another important issue in relation to introduction of the PR system is women empowerment and its effect on women's participation and election in Bangladesh. Women usually win more seats when there is PR system in operation and Scandinavian countries are unique example in this regard. The U.S. and England, for example, use the ancient plurality rule and only 10%

of their representatives in the Parliament or Congress are women. In contrast, the PR rules are adopted by the oldest democracies in Europe in the last century and, interestingly, 30% of their representatives are women. Nations that use the PR system elect more women compared to those that use the plurality system. This is because most parties under the PR system nominate more women in each district to attract particular voters. A party that offers an all-male slate of nominees looks corruptly sexist. If the PR system comes to effect in Bangladesh, the provision of reserved seats for women can be omitted and women will be bestowed with real empowerment.

Potential Threats to Introduce the Proportional Representation System

As discussed in the previous section, there are a number of advantages to introduce electoral process based on the PR system such as preventing large and perverse fluctuations in electoral outcomes, reducing subjective incentives for manipulation and abuse of the voting process, promoting better quality of candidates for the parliamentary election, making election more effective and participative, creating better conditions for functioning of local bodies, being more inclusive of different social groups like women and small political parties and most importantly, create more just and more peaceful political and social environment, etc. Still, the PR system has some shortcomings, especially considering the socio-economic and political conditions in Bangladesh. These include: a. compared to WTA system, PR system fails to ensure geographical representation; b. a switch from WTA system to PR system requires broad agreement and consensus among political parties and consent of the people, which can be really difficult to achieve as political parties and the people of Bangladesh are clearly divided based on political ideology, religious identity, etc; c. another contention that is often made against the PR system is that it may lead to unstable governments and there may be a possibility that large parties will become hostage to small parties to form and sustain a government; d. As we all know, “nomination trade” or “buying nomination” (especially by wealthy businessmen) is a common political phenomena in Bangladesh; thus the PR system may encourage potential candidates to ‘buy’ their candidature in the party lists.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned discussion reveals that there is a need for change from the existing WTA political system to the PR system in Bangladesh. It is because the PR system paves the way for greater participation i.e. seats in the parliament are allocated among parties in proportion to the votes that they receive. In addition, the PR system will not only grant legitimacy to the party with majority seats in the parliament to rule, but may also help for opposition parties to leave their ‘boycott culture’ of politics and contribute to establish a stable regime by means of their meaningful participation in the parliament and committee assignments in proportion to their representation.

Our point of departure is that the PR political system, which some scholars named a system with ‘justice as fairness principle’, will also help build a national consensus for resolving the issues of long-standing political contentions in Bangladesh such as free, fair and effective electoral system, institutional framework of the electoral process, political neutrality of the

EC, organise open and credible elections, etc. These are some major issues which are unresolved in the country for a long time and the PR system may bring a positive change in these respects by transforming the traditional behaviour of political elites thus making a difference in the quality of life of the citizenry in Bangladesh. However, in order to adopt the PR system in a new democracy like Bangladesh there are numerous challenges such as commodification of election, reluctant attitudes of major political parties about the PR system, commercialization of nomination, the issue of geographical representation, and instability of the regimes, etc.

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