

## **DEMOCRACY IN BANGLADESH: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **Introduction**

With the collapse of the erstwhile USSR and dissolution of communism, the golden era of democracy started. The political science writers in many ways explained the new era and its implications for the coming days. Some considered it as the demise of the struggle between two competing ideologies, namely, communism and liberal capitalism and the scholars in this line talked about “the end of history”.<sup>1</sup> Democracy, as a megatrend is now sweeping across the world where communism is no longer an archrival to democracy.

Bangladesh stands on the track of this megatrend. Our long struggle for democracy has put Bangladesh into Huntington’s “Third Wave” of current world – wide democratization since 1991.<sup>2</sup> The ongoing process of democratization has rekindled the hopes and aspirations of the common people of Bangladesh. Following the formation of the parliamentary form of government in 1991, Bangladesh anchored the journey to democracy and now people are prone to see democracy flourishing everywhere in the state organs and institutions. However, the path of democracy seems to follow a zigzag direction of development that proceed amidst both challenges and opportunities that lead some observers to view that the experiment of democracy and democratization in Bangladesh clearly suffers contradictory realities. Despite the fact that a number of factors seem to positively work for the slow and steady growth of democracy bearing brilliant prospects for democratic consolidation in our country, there are strong negative elements that also pose threats to achieving sustainable democracy.

Against this backdrop, it is worthwhile to critically examine the constraints of and opportunities for the birth and life of nascent

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<sup>1</sup> Fukuyama, F., *The End of History and The Last Man*, New York and Toronto: Free Press, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Huntington, S.P., *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

democracy in Bangladesh and to understand the dynamics of changes in future political scenario in the country. With this end in view, the current paper has been designed. The researcher concedes that the present work, which is conducted under the supervision of a non-Bangladeshi Professor with strong academic and professional background in both the west and Asian country, might provide an in-depth and neutral analysis of democratic trend in Bangladesh.

The principal objective of this paper is to identify the problems and prospects of democracy in Bangladesh and to that end, it presupposes to respond to a number of questions. What is the meaning and impact of democracy? Is democracy an ideal and universally accepted process of social development and political cohesiveness? Under what circumstances, democracy flourishes in a smooth manner? What are the patterns and process of the emerging democratic trend in Bangladesh? Is democracy a welcome sign for Bangladesh? Is there any development alternative beyond that? What are the characteristics and features of democratic practice here? Is democracy merely a slogan and politically used ideology of regime legitimization and party-politics survival? Can democracy be without hindrances here in Bangladesh? If it is not without hurdles, what is the root of the problems of democratization towards sustainable democracy? In what ways, the discrepancy between the political use of the term and its actual implementation is minimized?

### **Methodology and Analytical Framework**

The present paper is based on mainly secondary materials. The books and research articles will be studied to gather necessary information and knowledge. The scholars and experts on the topic and some political leaders will also be interviewed.

Structurally and chapter wise, the paper has been divided into seven sections. The methodology and theoretical construct have been discussed in the second section. The third section is dedicated to the conceptual analysis of democracy. In the fourth section, the emergence of democratic trends in Bangladesh is explained. Section five is designed to focus on the critical evaluation of democratization in our country where the constraints of democracy and its opportunities are examined. Some recommendations and directions needed for furthering democratization process of Bangladesh and strengthening the country's nascent democracy are listed in section six. Finally the write-up ends with some concluding remarks.

## **Democracy: Conceptual Analysis**

### ***i) Democracy: Concept and Notion***

The term democracy is derived from two Greek words- ‘demos’ and ‘cratia,’ the former means people while the latter implies power. Thus the central meaning of democracy lies in the power of the people. In more precise words, democracy implies the system and procedure of such government structure where the choices and priorities of the general people must prevail.

Generally speaking and in the dictionary definition, democracy is a government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. According to the Greek philosophers and which Abraham Lincoln also quoted, democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people.<sup>3</sup> Gattell gave a comprehensive definition of democracy. According to him, democracy is that form of government in which the mass of the population possesses the right to share in the exercise of sovereign power.<sup>4</sup> Seeley has marked that democracy is a government in which everybody has a share.<sup>5</sup> Thus the notion of democracy indicates the participation of general people in decision making of the whole mechanism of the government. A pragmatic definition was provided by Lord Bryce: “A government in which the will of the majority of the qualified citizens rules ... say, at least three fourths, so that the physical force of the citizens coincides with their voting power.”<sup>6</sup>

Broadly speaking, all democracies are systems in which citizens freely make political decisions by the majority rule. But the majority rule is not necessarily democratic. In a democratic society, majority rule must be coupled with guarantees of individual human rights that, in turn, serve to protect the rights of the minority—whether ethnic, religious, or political, or simply the losers in the debate over a piece of controversial legislation. The rights of the minority do not depend upon the goodwill of the majority and cannot be eliminated by majority vote. The minority rights

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<sup>3</sup> Ahmad, E., *Rashtrabiggner Katha*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Corporation; pp. 250-268, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> ibid.

<sup>6</sup> ibid, p. 257.