

FROM THE EDITOR

It is becoming ever more clear that for Bangladesh to flourish economically, culturally, intellectually, and morally, the country's politicians must first clean up their act. The bitter fruits of 30 years of political strife has taken its toll and produced a nation that languishes somewhere near the bottom of the community of nations. It is also not clear whether the politicians understand how we got there, or remained there, despite the rhetoric. Now that Bangladesh is in another era of political leadership, the question remains whether anything will change and, if so, will things become any better. While there was initial euphoria that the newly elected won the people's favor, that perception was premature, misguided, and far from the truth. There is circumstantial evidence that the newly elected did not win because of a sudden surge of good feelings for them; they won because the voters voted to punish the party in power for its inability to deliver the goods.

The decisiveness shown by the voter has an inherently powerful message. To the victors it says: Deliver, or you will be punished in the same way...again. To the vanquished the message is: Manage your negativism if you want us to bring you back in the next election. This is a positive development that must be followed and even nurtured by the intellectual community. Political leaders must also be quick to realize that the large majority of the people did not vote for perpetuation of the status quo; what they voted for is "results." They want to see tangible and measurable improvements in their conditions. If the newly elected are able to hear this message (and one is profoundly intrigued by the deafness of "all" parties on this count as 30 years have shown), they must demonstrate a new brand of leadership.

Unfortunately, recent developments suggest that the people are likely to experience more of the same: insecurity, mean-spiritedness, hypocrisy, bitter rivalry, violence and bloodshed, corruption, nepotism, mismanagement, party-over-country, fanaticism, and so on. The air is already thick with vengeance, violence and bloodshed continue unabated, sympathizers of opposing parties including minority groups are being targeted and harassed, positions are being filled with party cadres (witness the installation of 27 ministers and 32 state and deputy ministers), insecurity perceptions are high, and there is a sense that religious intolerance will rise steadily.

If good sense dawns on the political leaders of all relevant parties, the nation ought to witness a paradigm shift in political leadership that would alter the battle from conflict and competition for control over resources, to winning the hearts and minds of the people by understanding their needs and meeting those needs. This requires leadership that is people-centered and not opposition-centered; a leadership that is willing to share the not-so-plentiful resources that the country generates with the people rather than party cadres. To win hearts and minds, it is important for both the ruling party and the opposition to adopt and abide by two main principles: wisdom and justice.

Wisdom must be demonstrated in the choices they will be making in leading the nation down a certain path (i.e., security, privatization, gender roles, health care, education, religiosity, national defense, external relations, gas and water policy, etc.). Wisdom must embody sincerity reflected in saying what they will do and by doing what they say. Wisdom must be operationalized in transparency, accountability, honesty, and commitment. Wisdom must be reflected in selection of the right person for the right job and in producing the promised results. Wisdom must be demonstrated in party leaders who choose to engage in constructive dialogue by discarding the politics of hartal, violence, and retribution. There is a clear need for more "positive engagement."

Justice must be demonstrated in the enactment of fair laws and their implementation in accordance with the spirit of the law. Unfair treatment of anyone, including those opposing the views and actions of the elected, can be a major stumbling block to being re-elected. No one should be above the law and the rule of law must be vigorously established and pursued, even if it means going after party stalwarts and their relatives and henchmen. The spirit of justice must demonstrate that everyone will be dealt with in a fair manner. Let us remember Aristotle who said, "No government can stand that is not founded on justice."

It is this new leadership that will determine to a large extent where they will take the country in the coming decades. There is increasing recognition today that creating a vision of the future and successfully conveying that vision to others are essential to charting out a desirable path for a nation state. It is with this vision--a genuine dream--that leaders must energize Bangladesh. The vision or mental image of a desirable future for the country and its people is a

powerful first step to emancipation because it is usually an ideal state that reflects positive values to which most sane citizens ought to subscribe. In addition, if the vision is also unique in some way that communicates hope, inspires pride, and energizes citizens to action, it can introduce a certain dynamic to shake Bangladesh out of its stupor.

Great visions come from great visionaries whose vision and imagination extend beyond the ordinary while tapping into the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of their people. Their greatest ability is to convey the vision in a language that inspires, motivates, and moves a nation. Great visions are also context dependent. The great American leader Martin Luther King Jr., conveyed such a vision during the Civil Rights Movement. He said, "We are simply seeking to bring into full realization the American dream—a dream yet unfulfilled. A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men no longer argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character; the dream of a land where every man will respect the dignity and worth of human personality—this is the dream. When it is realized, the jangling discords of our nation will be transformed into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood, and men everywhere will know that America is truly the land of the free and home of the brave." Nelson Mandela's vision led a South African to write, "For the first time in our history, our common experience as South Africans became more important than the rifts and divisions in our society, as we discovered that an ordinary, everyday life was indeed possible in a community that had never known the meaning of normality." And Abraham Lincoln's vision against slavery and for liberty led to his saying: "In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorably alike in what we give and what we preserve." Visions and visionaries go hand in hand: Great visionaries create great visions that, in turn, create great nations.

The vision for and of Bangladesh, unfortunately, has not been clearly articulated yet. The simplest test for this contention is to ask various members of the country's past and present leadership to articulate their vision and determine whether the people understand it and can state it themselves and, if so, whether they accept it. The extent of discrepancy within and between the two groups should prove the point and indicate that the people of the land are stuck in a state of utter chaos for lack of a clearly articulated vision. It should be obvious to any leader that the people want emancipation from this state of

chaos which breeds, generally, a vile and malicious environment in which the conniving and greedy continue to strip the nation of its bounties, and where the powerful and their cronies and cohorts conduct themselves with reckless abandon and without fear of consequences.

It is high time to revitalize a simmering and seething nation that has seen little but continuing negativism in its 30-year sojourn through the kaleidoscope of time and events. The quality of leadership in Bangladesh will determine the quality of the vision and its adequacy to the task of nation building and emancipating the masses. Those who have occupied leadership positions in Bangladesh in recent times and at various levels fall clearly into three categories: those who see the desired future, those who see when they are shown, and those who simply do not see. Those in the first category are the real leaders, those in the second are followers, and those in the third are blind. Bangladesh, today, desperately needs the first category...to bring a sense of hope, to bring unity, to infuse positive values, to inspire achievement, to let people breathe freedom, and to strengthen the nation so it can stand tall in dignity and respect among other nations.

It is also important to reflect that political leadership represents only one side of the coin; the people of the land are also responsible for their leaders. By exercising their choice, they incur the brand of political leadership they must live with and endure. Unfortunately, history will corroborate that they have neither chosen the wise nor the just. Not surprisingly, they have always complained of being under the yoke of insincere, corrupt, and despotic regimes. But they must share in the blame because as Samuel Adams said, "I believe that no people ever yet groaned under the heavy yoke of slavery but when they deserved it."

The essence of good governance lies in a partnership between those who govern and those who are governed as reflected in the first public speech by Abu Bakr (RA) when he was appointed caliph. He said, "I have been appointed as your ruler, and I am not the best of you. If you find me following the right way, support me. If not, correct me." That's how true leaders win hearts and minds, that's how they attain the legitimacy to govern.

The Journal of Bangladesh Studies remains committed to intellectual leadership and solicits views that provide new ideas to shape politicians, policy makers, academics, and others at the helm of affairs in the country. In this issue, we present four articles

that ought to provoke intellectual discussion about the possibilities for Bangladesh. Ahrar Ahmad examines the opportunities and advantages that Bangladesh was endowed with at the time of its emergence and in later years. Yet, as he points out, these opportunities were never fully taken advantage of; rather they were frittered away while the politicians engaged in their brand of leadership by being embroiled in what one of our previous authors termed *mutually assured destruction* or MAD. Ahmad poignantly concludes how “the country consistently manages to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.”

Syedur Rahman examines major trends in Bangladesh worthy of note. His article provides hope in his view that power may be shifting from the politicians to the people whose consent will play a more important role in future selection of the country’s leaders. He also indicates that the NGOs and other self-governing groups at all levels of the society are imbibing greater accountability, responsibility, shared decision-making, and organizational and managerial skills, thus suggesting that democratic institution-building processes may have begun to take root in the country. Ways must be found to expedite these processes if the country is to emerge from the morass.

Hasna Khan, Asma Huque, and I examine the prospects of harnessing a renewable source of energy—solar energy—to transform the rural population by bringing greater opportunities to them, as more hours are made available when darkness descends over the countryside. This technology—the solar home system— is particularly suitable and convenient for the widely dispersed households whose combined load needs are too small to justify grid-based systems. In particular, it has the potential of adding more hours to education, providing greater

earning opportunities, and exposing the rural masses to events in the country via TV and other communication processes that is highly likely to expedite the process of democratization, spur economic growth, inspire social advancement, and heighten intellectual growth.

Finally, M. Abdul Wadud assesses the technical efficiency and performance of rural households in Bangladesh to propose ways of enhancing their productivity. His analysis suggests that ways must be found to improve the irrigation infrastructure and reduce environmental degradation to enhance their efficiency.

In closing, I would like to encourage submission of more thought-provoking articles for our future issues to address the challenges of development in Bangladesh. The ‘note to contributors’ on the inside front cover furnishes details about submitting manuscripts. The authors are reminded that while technical merit of their article is important, it is more important that they are able to communicate lucidly with a wide variety of readers who are interested in the country’s development. For enabling this issue, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the editorial board, the anonymous reviewers, and Sue Pennington for her editorial assistance.

Syed Saad Andaleeb, Ph.D.
Editor, Journal of Bangladesh Studies
Professor of Marketing
School of Business
The Pennsylvania State University, Erie
Station Road
Erie, PA 16563
Phone: 814-898-6431
Email: ssa4@psu.edu

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Call for Papers

Journal of Bangladesh studies is inviting academics and experts in various fields to send scholarly papers for publication in its next issue in June 2002. The tentative deadline for receiving papers is March 30, 2002; papers received after the deadline will be scheduled for subsequent issues.