The Infighting of the Ruling Party: Rivalry in the Grassroots Level and Future Indications

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The country's 10th Union Parishad (UP) election started on 21 June 2021, being held under the party symbol for the second time. The salient fact about the election is the triumph of the independent candidates in all seven phases. In the first phase of the election, 24% of the winners in the Chairman position are independent candidates. The percentage stood at 40% in the second phase, while it rose to 45% in the third phase. The fourth and fifth phases of the UP election rose to even larger numbers, consecutively 49% and 50%. The independent chairman candidates grabbed 44% of the total win in the sixth phase. However, in the seventh phase, it rose to the biggest number. In the seventh phase, 64% of the winning Chairman are independent candidates, more than double from the ruling party Awami League's (AL) nominated candidates.

Though Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) officially boycotted the UP election, they did not restrict the independent participation of their members. According to a report by Prothom Alo, the win percentage of BNP independent candidates in the election is 9.39%, while it was only 8.94% in 2016. Nevertheless, this data shows that most of the independent winners were not from BNP; they were from the ruling party. Infighting inside a party is very common in our political culture; we have seen it happen in the past. However, the infighting in the recent local election grabbed the attention of everyone due to those unusual polls.

Three incidents of the election might give some insights regarding the issue-

In the third phase of the election, out of fifteen UP in the Faridpur-4 region (Vanga and Charbhadrasan), a stronghold of the ruling party, AL nominated candidates lost in fourteen Unions. Among the fourteen winners, nine are rebel candidates of the AL. They are the followers of the local AL Member of Parliament, Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury.

Faridpur-1 (Boalmari) used to be considered one of the strongest bases of AL as the symbol 'Boat' never lost any election there since 1991. However, nine lost the election under the party symbol out of ten nominated candidates in the fourth phase of the UP election. Among nine winning chairpersons, five are rebel candidates from the Ruling Party.

In the sixth phase of the election, seven out of the eight AL candidates lost the election in the Sadullapur Upazilla of Gaibandha. Among the seven other winning candidates, four are rebel candidates of AL.



Out of seven unions in Tahirpur, Sunamganj, no AL-nominated chairman candidate could win any seat in the seventh phase. Of the seven winning Chairman, four candidates are rebels from the ruling party.

While the national media tried to seek answers, the AL member of parliament of Faridpur-4 claimed that not giving the nomination to capable candidates was the reason behind this defeat. In an interview with the Daily Prothom Alo, Faridpur Upazilla chairman and advisory member of the district AL Shamsul Haque also indicated the nomination of ineligible persons as the reason. Nationwide, the underlying factors seem to be very similar in all cases. The local leaders feel that capable and deserving people did not get the nomination. Some rebel candidates also got support from influential

local leaders. Some of them felt unvalued by the party for not nominating them, but they decided to participate due to their popularity.

One thing is visible from the cases stated above, in the local election, the image of the individual matters more than the party symbol. Union Parishad usually consists of some of the villages of the same locality. UP politics are different from national politics as it concerns only the wellbeing and development of that rural area. The support and adherence depend on the local leader's activities, personality, and family status. Hence the nominated candidate may not be better than the other nomination expectant of the same party. So, arranging elections under the party symbol might be an option to rethink for the AL government.

This result brings another question to the table- 'will there be any impact of the result in the future?' In the national dailies, many local leaders and rebel candidates claimed that the grassroot level recommendations were not considered. According to Dhaka Tribune, the joint general secretary of the AL, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, acknowledged that there were some imperfections in the selection process. Some party leaders identified the nomination process, local leaders' influence, and local conflicts as the main factors as the election result. However, they think that the UP poll will not impact the national election.

Whether the party leaders think or not, this local election shows some implications for the future, which the party must seriously consider. There is an existence of clashes and a lack of harmony at the root level of the ruling party. If these issues are not sorted out, they will flare up in the coming days. If dedicated and capable leaders of the grassroots level feel undervalued, their voices must be heard, and party policies must be formed accordingly.

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Upcoming Events

Bay of Bengal Conversation
Governance • Security • Development

23-25 July 2022

The Centre for Governance Studies will organize the first edition of the yearly international flagship conference BAY OF BENGAL CONVERSATION between 23-25 July 2022 in the Intercontinental, Dhaka. The Bay of Bengal has been an interconnected and interdependent region for centuries. Trade and migrations across borders have made the littoral ports and cities culturally diverse and mutually supportive. In recent years, the geostrategic shift from Euro-Atlantic to Indo-Pacific has provided the Bay of Bengal region with renewed geopolitical prominence. This unique platform will convene over 150 delegates from over 65 countries to join the brightest minds in Bangladesh to discuss, ideate, and debate the most pressing regional and global challenges. The dialogue will bring together diverse voices across sectors and geographies as it seeks to discover new ideas and propose new solutions that serve an emerging human-centric world order out of the Bay of Bengal.

Global Directions Conclave

16-25 October 2022

The Global Directions Conclave (GDC) is an annual intensive ten-day policy workshop scheduled to be held from 16-25 October 2022 in Dhaka and Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Each year, the Conclave will bring together 50 outstanding young leaders, between 25 and 35 years of age, from diverse backgrounds, geographies, and sectors. The young leaders will be nominated by heads of governments, private sector leaders, and global experts. The Conclave aims to foster leadership qualities among the selected fellows, engage them in discussions on issues that are trending worldwide, and serve as a networking platform. Through cross-border dialogue, deliberations, and debates with prominent figures from the world of politics, business, and academia, fellows of the Conclave will get opportunities to assess as well as confront conventional interpretations of the global challenges.