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Democracy Deficit in Bangladesh

Erstwhile Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina fled from her country on August 5, 2024 and took shelter in India. She had to resign and flee from the country of her birth as she failed to manage the on-going student's protests on the street of Dhaka and elsewhere in the country. Number of events has taken place in the aftermath: refusal of visa by America; UK's refusal to host Hasina on its land; pros and cons of her continuing to be there in India; invitation to Mohd. Yunus, the nobel laureate to head the interim government of Bangladesh and his final assumption of power; sagging of economy that was quite on positive track; subsequent absolve of Yunus of all the charges and cases in which was implicated and was in legal net; release of Khalida Zia and many other political opponents; lifting of ban on Islamic parties, organizations and elements. Finally, the leadership of Bangladesh is taking all steps to block the return of Sheikh Hasina by implicating her in umpteen number of court cases or even if she returns she is taken behind bars.

Politics of confrontation has began once again, in spite of the fact that the country is still reeling under the long spate of violence, in-fighting and alleged atrocities on Hindus, probably to avenge India and its role in Bangladesh. Hasina left her country after formal resignation in a military plain for India; as she must have been tipped by intelligence that her life is in danger. The political instability that led to her resignation has been the consequence of her own misdoings, miscalculations and unmaking of the Bangladesh polity as evident on number of counts. Firstly, Hasina hardly ever thought Linkon was not wrong to have admitted that democracy though is by the people; it must always exist for the people. It is above all of the people. But the power inebriated Hasina tried to manage politics in a manner that led to gross mismanagement. It thus gradually created a crisis of legitimacy for her power.

Secondly, rather than consolidating democracy Sheikh Hasina continuously worked for her own consolidation. She hardly ever thought of orchestrating a viable opposition. She rather contributed towards unmaking of opposition by captivating them or crushing them with iron hand. She could not work to strengthen the institutions of the state to strengthen the democracy in Bangladesh. Thirdly, she believed more in permutations and combinations of forces within democracy to maintain herself in power. Creating reservation for generations of freedom fighters of Bangladesh was very much a part of it. This was indeed bad politics on part of Hasina and her party. This also sent a strong signal that judiciary in Bangladesh has capitulated to political leadership.

Fourthly, Sheikh Hasina suffered from anti incumbency factor as she continued in power for three terms in a row that counts almost fifteen years. This is fairly a long period. Leaders can survive for long only when they continue to perform through delivering development in all walks of social, political, cultural and economic sectors of their country. During her fourth stint she could not rise-up to expectations of the people, consequently partisan politics proved disasters against bipartisan politics. Fifthly, the great influx of Rohingya from Myanmar may have contributed towards unmaking of the social infrastructure in Bangladesh which Awami League and other members of the government failed to read. Their role in the entire episode would be deciphered later; once the identity of those involved on the streets of Dhaka are revealed. This may also be taken as intelligence failure on part of Hasina's government.

Sixthly, in politics one never calls spade a spade. She could have been diplomatic enough to call students anything else than 'Rajakars' and 'terrorists' as they are not only derogatory but also demeaning. She should have gauged the mood of the students and people; could have collected enough intelligence to address with the state machinery at her disposal. She too got emotive with the issue and caused herself untold damages. Seventhly, she blamed it on St. Martin Island episode which she should have taken as a warning bell and calculated the risk of refusing US to oblige. She could have brought India and China on board regarding US interests in the maritime zone. It was her failure to pick lessons from erstwhile diplomatic history of the world. Last and the most important, the great fiasco of her China visit provided an opportunity to opponents within to sense that an important neighbour is not in favour of happenings within Bangladesh and is unhappy about it. They understood it quite well that India is an idealist nation-state and would not make interference within the internal affairs of the country. Hence, they counted it as an opportune moment to scale-up the crisis to its logical conclusion.

— BK