

Election 2007: A Complex Algorithm

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Nazim Kamran Chowdhuri's empirical survey along with statistic based investigation (published in the Daily Star and Prothom Alo, October 06, 2006) on election 2007 has forecasted the inevitable debacle of BNP led alliance in the forthcoming election. His study, no doubt, has supported the common belief that BNP will not be able to succeed in the next election in anyway. However, the outcome of his study really amazing where he has predicted that AL led alliance will get 220 –plus seat considering the present context and the political psychology of the mass people. His survey has revealed that about 52% of voters yet are undecided favour any particular party. These swinging voters are, in fact, will be the major deciding factor of the outcome of the election.

Even, in the developed country, the swinging voters are the crucial factor for the major participants of the electoral race. For instance, in 1992 election of the UK, most of the pre-poll surveys had suggested that the Labour Party (with the leadership of Neil Kinnock) would definitely win the election. However, contradicting the pre-election survey, the conservative party led by John Major won the race. Many of the media concerns and polling organisations were surprised at the outcome of the actual election and they carried out investigations in this context. The wikipedia (a free encyclopedia) has commented on this election as follows:

“On the morning of polling day, [The Sun](#) newspaper had published a controversial front page with the headline "If Kinnock wins today, will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights." They also featured an overweight woman on [Page 3](#), headlined, "Here's How Page 3 Will Look Under Kinnock!" Many commentators believed that this caused a late swing to the Conservatives sufficient to overcome Labour's poll lead.”

The swinging voters, though are deciding factors, are too much fragile. In case of the UK, it was evident that in 1992 election, the tabloid Sun newspaper succeeded to bias the swinging voters in favour of conservative party. In Election 2001 in Bangladesh, similar influence of media (e.g. *Sabash Bangladesh* program on ATN Bangla, directed by Dr. B. Choudhury, the role of Shafique Rehman's *Jai Jai Din*) on the very psychology of the swinging voters to cast vote for BNP-led alliance was evident.

However, in Bangladesh, at present context, the situation is very different. Unlike in other countries, high percentage of swinging voters (52%) ahead of the next election implies that the majority of the eligible voters in our country have no confidence in any major parties. This lack of confidence, in turn, has further revealed that in true sense, no pro-people political party does exist in our country. No doubt, this scenario is a major

barrier to democracy norm of any country. If there is no political institute on which the people can trust whole heartedly then how does democracy will get its momentum? This is high time the political parties found out their flaws which have alienated themselves from the mass people and took appropriate measures to overcome this unwanted situation.

In Kamran's study, it is evident that there is an erosion of popularity of BNP and the core vote of BNP has dropped to 16% (It was above 40% in 2001 election). This dislodge of popularity of BNP is obvious as throughout its tenure, BNP led alliance government has submerged in pervasive corruption and has failed to provide minimum level of services to the citizen of the country. Besides, price spiralling of the essentials, electricity and water crisis also have contributed much in repelling the voters away from BNP politics.

However, the failure of BNP does not imply the success of AL. Instead, the survey has also revealed the erosion of popularity of AL and the core vote for AL has dropped to 23% (it was slightly above 40% in 2001 election). This is because of AL's failure to fight for the people in the contemporary contexts. As for example, during the current government's period, AL could successfully organise the people to fulfil their popular demands (Electricity crisis, water crisis, price hikes, *monga*). AL has missed the trains again and again to sustain and accelerate its popularity. On contrary, from the beginning of the formation of this government, the only agenda that has been adopted by Hasina's AL is just to topple the government by any means. The common people do not like this attitude of AL.

Kamran's observation, '*...the BNP no longer seems to be a political party. It is rather an association of interest groups aligned by their sole desire for financial gain at national and local levels*' is, in fact, BNP's core philosophy now. The birth of BNP was not based on any ideological discourse. Its founder, military turned politician late president Ziaur Rahman formed this party while he was in power centre and the only objective to form this platform was to legalise his tenure and hence to stay in power. In fact, it was Zia, who divided the nation into pro-liberation and anti-liberation groups by legalising communal politics in Bangladesh for his own political interest. He shrewdly translated his infamous utterance "*I will make politics difficult for the politicians*" into reality by dividing the nation into pro and anti liberation groups. However, Zia's personal charisma, strong leadership capability as well as his position as head of the government helped him in organising BNP as one of the major parties in Bangladesh. Zia, with his strong personality could attract some of sincere, dedicated and seasoned politicians (e.g. Shah Aziz, Kazi Zafor, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan) and other dignified gentlemen of the society (e.g. Prof. B. Chowdhury, Saifur Rahman) from both right and left platforms who helped him much in making BNP a strong political platform. However, after the death of Zia, his successor President Sattar did not get enough time to show his credibility in politics as within a short time he was ousted from the power through army coup led by president Ershad. Subsequently, BNP's leadership went to Khaleda Zia. Khaleda's bold

participation in the anti-autocracy movement against Ershad and her uncompromising attitude had turned her into another charismatic leader in spite of all her limitations.

With the span of time, however, there is a popular belief that BNP's leadership is no more in the hand of Khaleda Zia. Especially, at the advent of the 2001 election, the shifting of leadership from the older generation of BNP towards younger generation has been marked. Especially, after the Election 2001, the young group (also known as Young Turk) of the BNP led by Khaleda's son Tarique Zia based in *Howa Bhaban* virtually is leading the party in all aspects. Unfortunately, it has been alleged that the members of this young group has no political ideology other than their own vested interest to loot the public money using the state influence in all ways. So, Mr. Kamran has rightly ascribed present BNP as an association of interest groups seeking for financial gains. In this context, I would like to point out that at the advent of the Election 2001, the veteran journalist Mr. Shafique Rehman urged the young generation through his weekly magazine *Jai Jai Din* to vote for BNP appreciating its young leadership led by Tarique Zia. I am not sure what is the present stance of Mr. Rehman on the all round corrupt Young Turk of the Howa Bhaban.

Kamran's statistical analysis has predicted that in the next election, AL led alliance will get 220 seats and rest 80 seats will go to BNP led alliance considering the inclination of the swinging voters. To me, for the AL led alliance, this is an overambitious prediction. However, there is no doubt that in the next election AL led alliance will lead the election result with more than the required number of seats to form the government but it may not come out as a brute majority as BNP did in the last election.

It has been ascertained that as swinging voters do not belong to any political party, in actual election, many of them will consider the personal qualities of the individual candidate rather than his/her (candidate's) party affiliation. The voters are now more educated and informed about the prospective candidates. Due to revolution of both electronic and print media and their objective journalistic approach, the common people are now more aware of their individual rights. Again, the movement of civil society and some responsible news media centring the next election will have a significant extent of influence on the outcome of the election. Though many of the nominated candidates of the next election will try to use their black money to buy the voters, this will not be as effective as the previous elections. Now the common people are now very eager to see honest and efficient persons in the parliament. So, in nominating the candidates, if the major parties be not sincere and give nomination to the corrupt candidates then the outcome of the election may contradict the prediction of Mr. Kamran.

Mr. Kamran has predicted that in the coming election there is minimum or no chance of winning for the independent candidates. But I would like to differ in this point. Kamran has already suggested that most of the swinging voters have lost their confidence in political parties. If this is the case, then if any independent efficient and honest candidate stands against inefficient and corrupt candidates of the major parties then many of the

swinging voters will favour for the independent candidate. Even some of the independent candidates may get the votes of the partisan voters. Observation suggests that the major parties will fail to nominate honest and efficient candidates in all of the constituencies due to internal pressure within the parties. In those constituencies there is a fair chance of winning of independent candidates. My personal estimation is that in the next election about 10 to 15 seats will go to independent candidates. Besides, if other minor alliance or parties nominate efficient and honest candidates then they will also get some seats.

I have already mentioned that the swinging voters are more fragile and the media has a tremendous influence on them. So, far, the major media concerns (including electronic media as well as the printing media) have blessings for AL led alliance. In this context, AL should be more prudent to keep the media in support of them during their election campaign if they want easy victory in the race.

Election 2007 seems to be a complex algorithm. In our present polluted complex political setup, for the prediction of the election outcome, we need to consider many other factors (e.g. roles of US /EU, poll boycott by any major party, political biasness of the CTG, role of law enforcing agencies including army). However, the premise of the above forecast of the election 2007 is that the election will be held under neutral CTG and Election Commission. This issue is yet to be resolved. The dialogue between the Secretary General of BNP and the General Secretary of AL is going on. We hope the outcome will be a positive one for the greater interest of the country. However, the failure of this dialogue, presumably, will lead the country to a devastating situation. In that case there is a chance of grabbing state power by any unconstitutional evil force. In the past we had bitter experience in this regard. Any unconstitutional evil force in the state power can be compared with the devil of *Sindbad*. So, the political parties as well as conscious citizens of the country should work as vanguard so that such evil force refrains from taking any initiative like that.

