

New voter list preparation

Unilateral approach by CEC was Entirely avoidable

LET us start with a simple question: How important is it to have a voter list that is both accurate and above controversy? We feel that few would argue with the contention that a full and complete voter list is the foundation, one might go so far as to say the sine qua non, for a free and fair election.

This being the case, we are at a loss to understand why the CEC seems determined to go ahead unilaterally with the framing of a new voter list for the upcoming general elections when the current process has become so riddled with confusion and controversy.

The year has begun with workers going door to door to gather information to compile the new voter list, and the CEC has given every indication that he intends to go ahead with the process, whether his fellow members of the EC, or anyone else, like it or not. This one-man show grandstanding in preference to working as a commission is the height of folly and the potential adverse consequence for the nation is immense.

Making matters worse, the CEC has not even deigned to offer any reason as to why he has chosen to act unilaterally, summarily overruling the two other members of the EC, and moving ahead with the process in the teeth of public opinion.

This is surely nothing that good old-fashioned negotiation, discussion, and compromise cannot solve. It seems to us that the path of confrontation and unilateralism chosen by the CEC was one that could have been avoided quite easily, thus averting the potential damaging consequences of his decision.

This is not the first time a voter roll is being drawn up, but never before has the process been subject to so much controversy from the very beginning. The political reality in the country is that relations between the government and the opposition are at their lowest ebb, and that at this time we need to be thinking of ways to find common ground not to create more tension. The CEC's decision will only add fuel to the fire, and make free, fair, and authentic elections that much harder to achieve.

Given all that is at stake here, we find the CEC's obstinacy and intransigence utterly mystifying. The voter roll preparation needs not only to be above question, it must also be seen by the people to be above reproach. By proceeding in the way he is, the CEC risks placing the entire election into jeopardy.

Hajj camp mismanagement

Put an end to the ordeal of pilgrims

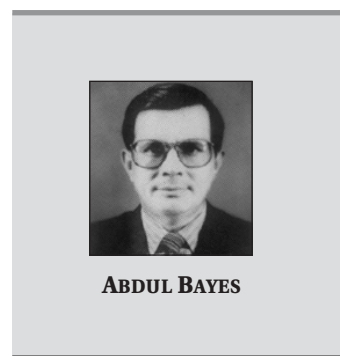
PEOPLE intending to perform Hajj have had more than their due share of hassle and uncertainty this year. A few hundred non-ballotee pilgrims are now more or less stranded at the hajj camp, not knowing whether they can have their wish for pilgrimage fulfilled. The flight schedules have gone awry beyond imagination.

And there are other problems too, some of them quite serious in nature. There is chaos at the camp. Many an elderly man or woman has not been allegedly provided with the amenities they need to stay at the place reasonably comfortably. The mosquitoes are droning and the inmates lack adequate toilet facilities. The condition at the camp is extremely unhygienic. The waiting pilgrims, who didn't know that they would have to stay at the camp for such a long time, are also running short of money. The camp managers are obliged to be looking after these people with great care. What is particularly regrettable is the fact that these men and women have been invited to stay at the camp, yet the treatment that they are receiving is not of the kind that a guest on a holy mission would expect.

Hajj is an annual event of great religious significance, and that makes the mismanagement at the camp very hard to explain. Those hajis and their relatives have every reason to feel hard done by. Many of them are using the savings of their lifetime to make the pilgrimage. They must now be taken good care of and all the impediments to their onward journey should be quickly removed, with only a few days to go before the Hajj.

The civil aviation ministry and all others concerned are urged to look into the matter urgently and bring an end to the agonising plight of the pilgrims.

A turbulent and tearful year!



ABDUL BAYES

some good and some bad episodes. But to us the year 2005, that has just passed, would go down in history as a year of turbulence and tears, events unseen and unheard earlier but probably unlikely to unearthen in the years to come. All that happened during the tenure of a government that promised, among other things, peace and progress for the people of Bangladesh. While the space is too short to delineate the developments, allow me to

Bangladesh a free access to the US and EU for export of air buses! Whereas, as revealed from the deliberations, the 3 percent 'negative list' contains its major export items e.g. garments. Allegedly, the present government failed to develop an economic diplomacy to foil the façade. It is true that Bangladesh progressed well over the years as far as export earnings are concerned. But to meet the growing challenges of global trade

year, the fertilizer crisis crippled the farmers. Imported fertiliser was stockpiled by importers on the heels of heightening demand at farm level on the pretext of non-payment of the so-called subsidy from the government side. Both parties have their own view points but at the end of the day, farmers suffered heavily.

The year 2005 was one of the worst years as far as the national image is concerned. Militants'

expectation was that during the tenure of the government, the growth rate would hit 6 per cent plus. Nearly 6 per cent growth rate was achieved even during the Awami League regime when the growth rate jumped from an average of 4.5 per cent to an average of 5.6 per cent. In the year 2005, the foreign exchange market remained volatile and taka lost much of its value. Costs of imports went up with perceptible impact on infla-

hadu repeatedly reminded of the evil impacts of corruption on economic growth. The Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) constituted under the pressure of the donors engulfed itself in legal battles and thus keeping it quiet for sometime. Even the legality of the appointments of the commission members are now in courts for a challenge. It means, supposedly, the commission was created to keep it quiet. Meantime, corruption crept and Bangladesh was dubbed as the most corrupt country in the world.

We welcome the year 2006. In fact it is the year when the preparation for the next general election would be completed. The nation is eagerly waiting for a change in the system of governance that would ensure people's overall freedom. Fundamentalist forces tend to forfeit the freedom of the people. The growth of the fundamentalist forces over the years and, especially, their "zihad" for religious state points to the perilous situation in the country. For a change to occur people must be allowed to cast their verdict freely under a caretaker government and an Election Commission duly reformed to deal with the situation. Let the year 2005 be only one such bad year in our national life. Let us for the moment forget the turbulent and tearful year that we just passed and prepare ourselves for a shining morning. We have a history of overcoming crisis, although many miles to go before we sleep, in peace.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

For a change to occur people must be allowed to cast their verdict freely under a caretaker government and an Election Commission duly reformed to deal with the situation. Let the year 2005 be only one such bad year in our national life. Let us for the moment forget the turbulent and tearful year that we just passed and prepare ourselves for a shining morning. We have a history of overcoming crisis, although many miles to go before we sleep, in peace.

highlight few of them.

There is a saying that the morning shows the day. We cannot now recollect the morning we started with in 2005 but possibly deduce it by seeing the day. The year ended with two sad news. First, in the recently concluded WTO Hong Kong ministerial, Bangladesh's economic hopes were dashed to the ground with no commitment received for duty free access of its major exports to developed countries. The 97 percent "duty free access" dictum that our honourable Commerce Minister had been harping on, applies to commodities in which Bangladesh barely bears a comparative advantage. This is almost like giving

diplomacy, Bangladesh did very little in terms of upgrading the skills for tackling trade dispositions nor the country could come up with institutional arrangements to deal with the crisis. A government machinery that banks on contractual bureaucracy is unlikely to harvest a good crop as the bureaucracy spends most of the time in pleasing the government rather than pursuing policies for national interest. The experts on board Hong Kong hardly had the ability to grasp the calculus of WTO negotiations. The year thus ended with hopes for garments and other commodities than the hopes it was supposed to generate.

At home, just at the end of the

activities and suicidal bomb attacks pierced through the heart of the nation. Judges and innocent people were killed. A reign of panic swept over the country with adverse impact on trade, commerce and civic life. But had the government acted on time, so runs the argument, much of the woes could be waned. There are serious allegations that a part of the government is directly or indirectly involved in manning the militants. But like a camel covering the head with sands, the government used counter productive arguments to face the devils that led to the worsening of the situation.

The economic growth rate ran at nearly 6 per cent. However, the

tionary situation. The inflation rate is estimated to be around 9 per cent, government borrowing from banks increased and investments did not pick up. The massive "election budget" impinged upon the nation's pockets of unproductive projects.

In 2005, Bangladesh continued to rank top in corruption. Talking to businessmen these days reveal that the costs of business reached an all time high due to massive corruption. From the farm to the fork, you cannot run your business if you do not pay extra money. The Transparency International continues to speak of the rampant corruption in every sphere of the government organs. The donors

Today's terrorism: Where's the provenance?

PROF MAHBOOB KHAN

ALARMING outbreak of terrorism dictates that its root causes are brought to focus and ramifications fully analysed and understood. However, the question 'where's its provenance' is seldom asked and rarely answered these days.

The end of World War II was a great blessing for mankind, but not for many Muslims despite the fact that they sided with the victors in the war. The Jews' convoluted design hatched in collusion with the British for creation of a Zionist state in the hub of Muslim world was up then for the final touch after half a century of intrigue and scheming (S. Alam DS 25/11). Soon after the war, the US, British and Soviet heads met at Yalta and endorsed the Jewish design. The West also manipulated the UN to legitimise it. By an impugned UN Partition Plan, the Jews were awarded 55 percent of the Palestinian land of which they owned barely 7 percent. The dispossessed Palestinians would not give in and resisted the unjust plan -- but they were crushed and dragged, more land from them was captured by the Jews. Close to a million Palestinians were forced to leave their hearths and homes and flee to hostile territories and inhospitable terrains. The history following these events is one of remorseless violence, miseries and human tragedy.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, there was ethos of great optimism. The major players in the war, the US and the British, being democratic held out credible prospect for a better future, that of peace, justice and fairness around the world.

But then what occurred to these leaders of the free world? Why they chose to rob Peter and pay Paul? Why on earth they preferred a

trouble spot to be created after so much devastations and tribulations of half a century? Was there no other place on earth to accommodate or rehabilitate those few millions of persecuted Jews? To encapsulate 'what lay in their cryptic design'?

The answer is still hard to find, but one thing became quite clear. The US and the British took hard look and a long view. They felt the need of an outpost in the bosom of the Muslim world. They foresaw the resurgence of Islamic nationalism and emergence of potent rivals on the playground of world poli-

twenty years, Palestinians and their helpers were utterly vanquished and humiliated grievously. They lost more land and every elite possession. Israel now had occupied 100 percent of Palestine (S. Alam).

In the years that followed, Israel adamantly rejected peace overtures refusing to cede the booties. Several resolutions were tabled in the Security Council -- but US veto thwarted every move. Many other countries worked hard to finesse through it but the mighty brother went budge.

In attempts to cover up, Islam is painted by some quarters as belligerent, even violent. Well informed people know Islam teaches peace. But dignity is also emphasised. The humanistic values and doctrines inherent in it helped to propagate the faith from the Atlantic east coast to the western rim of the Pacific, a vast chunk of the planet inhabited by a billion souls of high ethics. Who can deny this prodigious entity? Civilisation spread from parts of Islamic world. And it revolves in cycle. In the current hiatus Muslims are in disadvantage -- but no one should harbour

enemy, many disgruntled Muslims have directed attention against their home governments who have been dancing to the tune of the West and keeping mum against injustice. Muslim monocratic rulers lean on them for protective coverage, while others for morsels of doles. Ordinary Muslims think that such attitude have helped to trample the Islamic values or a sell-out of national dignity. Some cases in point are evident -- Abu Gharib and Guantanamo where even the Holy Quran was desecrated besides the many incarcerated and tortured victims. Hypocrisy in

jettison misgivings about the heavenly prospect. Recruitment to terrorist outfit, therefore, poses little problem. If this goes on endlessly, it is hard to imagine how anyone will rein in a multitude of doctrinaire freaks.

There is no immediate solution in sight and no time to waste too. The canker has high potential to get out of hand leading to anarchy. The best the patriotic leaders can do at this juncture is to forget politics and partisan squabbles, and join hands to save the nation preferably seeking help from the prominent and accredited religious leaders. Unity must be forged among all citizens including the detractors and strayers. They should be convinced that their course is not Islamic nor productive in the present world, and that they are cutting off their nose to spite their face.

Before closing, a few words for the heavy weights. The humanity at large desires to live in peace. We are interdependent and must have interactions. Each of us should be tolerant, prudent and respectful to others' views. The powerful nations should shed the delusions of grandeur. The high and mighty is more honourable and respected through the virtue of magnanimity and humility -- not gunboat policy which only alienates and infuriates. Even a little child can destroy a big house just by striking a matchstick. There is no credit or gain in the power of destruction and killing.

Revise your age-old policies, and make amends for the past mistakes. Treat every life as dear and valuable as your own. Probably then the human creatures can co-exist peacefully in a shared blissful environment.

Mahboob Khan is a retired Professor, Nizampur College, Chittagong.

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tics. The Jews could provide necessary implements and muscle to deter such developments. They also expected the Jews to heel the west's policies as obeisant creatures. So the opportunity was worth grabbing without delay.

The uprooted Palestinians would not accept this cruel fate, nor their neighbours, nor anyone with a good conscience. They lived there for generations in relative calm and peaceful co-existence with minority Jews alongside. As a natural corollary, they now took up arms and triggered the cycle of violence. Situation there soon turned messy, explosive and heart rending. Every assault was met with harsher and inexorable reprisal. The US in particular, continued bolstering the Israelis with money, arms and political muscle. They pumped into Israel a minimum of two billion dollars a year in economic aid and shipped all kinds of sophisticated killing machines. In a war that precipitated after about

Did the US monolithic stance serve peace? It did not but it did serve something else. It helped the Muslims to identify the real enemy, drive them to desperation and learn to die. The sequels that include 9/11 are climactic examples. Later events like Iraq war have added fuel to the unquenchable fire. In Iraq, according to British PM Galloway, more than hundred thousand ailing children and old people died due to war deprivation, besides another thirty thousand by direct confrontation.

So what one can expect from these suffering multitudes and their Muslim fraternities? This is how terrorism spawned and spread. The pundits here and everywhere tend to skirt around the core issue. Ben Haden and his cohorts are just trailblazers. Millions of Muslims there and everywhere have been chomping at the bit. So spread of terrorism like wildfire is not beyond any one's grasp.

the design to stop their march again. This ego is probably the compelling factor for Muslims to rise against unfairness and injustice. Moreover, how a handful millions (of people) have been out weighed against a billion of the same species?

However, Muslims are taught to respect others' views and faiths. For centuries, the Jews and Christians lived peacefully in many places with the majority Muslims side by side. "There is no compulsion in religion" is an unambiguous verse in the Holy Quran. No Muslim can transgress a Quranic precept. Moreover the Prophets of Jews (Moses) and of Christianity (Jesus) are some of the greatest Prophets hallowed by Muslims and in the Quran as genuine messengers of God. Denying them means excommunication from Islam. So nobody is enemy to nobody, except the die-hard fools.

Now the ramifications. Besides acting against the big fool, the arch

Islam is absolutely repugnant and forbidden. The West is voluble about human rights. As abusers they have now topped the list. The naive westerners who ask, 'why they hate us?' hopefully got the answer by now.

So indoctrination into terrorism has become a facile task. In Bangladesh 90 percent of 135 million people are Muslims. Presumably a half, quarter or so of them are counting days for entering the threshold of zannah (paradise), perhaps with all dubious or murky backgrounds. Many find the course of terrorism alluring -- a road paved well to reach the eternal destination. The Muslim clerics will not make any bones to assure them of this dream fulfilled if they embrace martyrdom. The criteria to qualify as martyr (shahid) are abstruse as expounded in the Holy Quran or Hadith. So the learned mullahs can take liberty to interpret with a slant. The gullible faithfuls are thus empowered enough to

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Root cause of militancy

The enemy is getting more and more barbaric. They blasted deadly bombs in all corners of the country. They are very successful in spreading fear among the people. But they forget that no extremism has ever succeeded; the most remarkable example is the Naxal movement in India. The Naxalites created terror in West Bengal but didn't achieve much.

It's the high time to go after the root cause of Islamic militancy.

Who are the masterminds behind the murderous attacks, who provide them money & who influence them? The simple answer is: elements who use religion as the ladder to climb the throne. Every year they issue sermons to the people in Waz Mahfils to overthrow the democratic government.

They pursue the guardians to send their children to madrassah.

Now the ball is in the government's court. They must launch a drive to wipe out militancy. And this will be possible only if they break their alliance with the fundamentalists in the coalition government.

Solaiman Palash
East Jurain, Dhaka

Drive against militants

The drive against the militants appears to have lost steam. Initially, there was a strong response from the government on the issue. But now it seems the government is not sure what to do to contain the threat.

Obviously, there is no alternative to the law and order approach here. The militants are committing

crimes in the name of religion. And innocent people are their target. So the law enforcers must go flat out to catch the killers.

It's much more than a question of nabbing some ordinary violators of the law.

Aziz Ahmed
Dhaka

New TV channels

It is good news that new TV channels are coming up. While the government is going to control the voice of freedom by making new autocratic provisions, the new channels tell quite another story -- the rise of media tycoons.

On the other hand, the government is very reluctant to give permission to any channel having the blessings of the opposition.

Matters should improve in this respect.
MAH NAZIM

Dept. of Political Science, DU

Proposal

I'm a resident student in the UK. There are thousands of students all over the world like me. They actually call Bangladesh regularly by using lots of phone cards, most of which are illegal. The services are very poor. We communicate with people in our country by using these cards. In this age of Internet based telecommunication (VOIP), it is cheaper than other services. Some dishonest businessmen are doing this business in Bangladesh illegally. I requested one mobile company to introduce this service. I asked them to participate in this VOIP business officially, so that they receive better service which will be cheaper as well. Bangladesh can also earn more foreign remittance by using this opportunity. The mobile company manager told me that Bangladesh is not issuing any

license for this business. The question is why? The owners of the illegal business are benefited by this, not my country.

I am writing this letter to draw the attention of the government to this matter. I would request the decision makers to consider it seriously.

Zahidur Rahman
London, UK

Curriculum of Private universities

From the very beginning private universities of our country opted only for the subjects having great demand. At first it was very common to set up a private varsity with only two subjects: BBA and Computer Science. After some time they moved to Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) with the change of trend. This entry to the arena of engineering

was almost sound, as the lab facilities for CSE is not that expensive or bulky. But over the last few years, those universities are launching subjects like Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE) and Electronic and Communication Engineering (ECE) following the recent boom in mobile and telecommunication industry. Subjects like EEE and ECE demand high-tech labs with bulky and expensive equipment, which most of the private universities cannot provide.

On the question of education quality, it is rarely satisfactory in a few varsities only. Most of the varsities never had their own teachers. Those hired teachers can't make quality engineers. So before allowing private universities to launch engineering subjects the authorities should ensure a sufficient number of teachers and proper lab facilities.

Istiaque Uddin Rifat
RUET

Our football

Our football is losing its charm day by day. The performance of the national team in the SAFF Games was lacklustre. They won against an insipid Pakistan in the semis and then were convincingly defeated by India.

Some of your readers seemed to have smelt something of an upset in our defeat. But I don't know why. True, there was a time in the mid eighties when we were a marginally better side than India, or the strength of the two sides might have been roughly equal. But since then our football has declined and so did its popularity. It's cricket and cricket everywhere. Somehow, we have pushed the most popular game into a position of less importance. So it is small wonder that we

are not doing well in the international arena.

Let's have a look at Indian football. It's not that well organised, but still club football is very popular in many parts of India. And they have a striker of Baichung Bhutia's class. Today we don't have any player whose services would be sought by a foreign club. Ours is a closed system where it's very difficult to move forward.

Football has also suffered some kind of injustice in the hands of our organisers. No concerted efforts were made to produce new players. The result is that we have very few good players.

So there is no point in expecting that the team will win against better sides when football is going through a crisis within the country.

Mansoor Raj
Dhaka