

### Don't waste time anymore Go for door-to-door enumeration immediately

**T**HE Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and his office never cease to surprise us by its twiddle de twiddle dum positioning on the voter list. Immediately on heels of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court dismissing CEC's appeal to go forward with a fresh voter list and ruling that he update the existing voter list instead, he opted for revising the voter list based on information gathered from the controversial list he had prepared de novo. His office gave the newsmen to understand that the method of door-to-door collection of data will be dispensed with. Senior jurists and former election commissioners refuted the EC's argument saying if information on household-to-household were not collected to delete the deceased since 2001 and add the 18-year and above generation eligible to vote to the list, the action will be tantamount to committing an unlawful and illegal act.

We now see the EC taking a 'close look' at the Supreme Court verdict along with the observations made and direction given thereunder and deciding that they will update the 2001 electoral roll alright, but stuck to their other decision of not visiting door-to-door for the same.

We are relieved by the CEC's shifting of position to updating the list, but thoroughly disappointed to know that the voters will have to trek to upazila or district level election offices of their own initiative for registering their names, instead of enumerators visiting their homes for the purpose. But mind you, preparation of an authentic voter list is the constitutionally mandated job of none other than the election commission itself. It is not for the individual to do it.

If the enumerators don't visit door-to-door how can the fraudulent voters and the deceased be kept out of the voter list and the newly eligible ones added to it?

In a related matter, the EC's position apparently is that the dead will be deleted on receipt of information or 'a complaint'. Supposing, this is not brought to the notice of the EC, then what? Obviously, the deceased will be on the list, and in that event, can there be any guarantee against his/her ballots being stuffed by somebody else.

This by itself is good reason why house-to-house enumeration is a compelling necessity and that there is still time for the exercise to be undertaken, given our fairly good transportation network. It all depends upon will; is there one?

### Vigil over garments sector Move needs to be sustained

**N**O industry worth its name can survive if its workforce remains in a continuous state of agitation over their very basic rights. With the formalisation of understanding among factory owners, BGMEA and the government through an MoU, we sincerely hope that matters will now be resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned and that the entire industry can resume normal operations in a better and more congenial atmosphere.

In this context, the formation of 15 teams by the government to oversee implementation of the agreed upon provisions of the MoU is a move in the right direction. It is indeed of vital importance that the MoU is executed expeditiously and without any further ado. We have to remember that even now some companies are witnessing labour unrest. Without going into the causes of turmoil which have been covered extensively by the media, the fact remains that RMG workers have had a raw deal for more than a decade. Their mistrust of factory owners and managements will not taper off unless some confidence building measures precede actual implementation of the MoU.

Now that an agreement has been reached and the teams for supervising the progress of implementation are in place, the process must not be allowed to be bogged down in bureaucratic red tape as we have seen in the case of many a team formed to oversee different other operations of the government and ending in a fiasco.

Already the recent turmoil has caused considerable loss to the regular flow of foreign exchange earnings from this sector. We wish the government, BGMEA and workers' leaders all success.

## Back to the future



ZAFAR SOBHAN

**I**t never seems the right time to focus on the long-term future for Bangladesh. As a nation, we have a hard enough time just keeping our heads above water (often literally), and the proximate crises and catastrophes are of such an extent that it seems unrealistic at best or frivolous at worst to focus on anything beyond the immediate present.

Now seems to be no exception to the general rule. We have the most important election in a generation coming up in the next six months, but there is zero consensus and zero apparent likelihood of consensus as to the necessary reform of the election laws, and we appear to be stuck with an election commissioner who, it seems safe to say, is so thoroughly compromised that he cannot possibly oversee credible elections.

**STRAIGHT TALK**  
Indeed, one of the problems we have faced as a country since our inception is lack of really serious long-term planning. The development of Dhaka city is a prime example of this. A city of less than a million people in 1971, it has grown into one of the world's mega-cities, with a population certainly in excess of 12 million and in all likelihood closer to 15 million. At no time in the past or present has any government ever really comprehended the nature and extent of this exponential growth and planned accordingly.

The country seems to be descending into total chaos and confusion, with pitched street battles with law enforcement the order of the day, not only on the part of the opposition, but also on the part of garment workers, and before that common citizens who wanted nothing more than a steady power and water supply.

Nevertheless, the sad truth is that there is never a good time to ignore the long-term future, and that, however bad things might appear and however little it seems we can afford the luxury of long-term planning, there is no alternative.

Indeed, one of the problems we have faced as a country since our inception is lack of really serious long-term planning that takes into account all the relevant variables (the good intentions of various five-year plans notwithstanding).

Part of the leadership deficit we have faced since independence (and before) is the evident lack of imagination on the part of our leaders, such that even when ostensibly planning for the future, they have made grotesque errors and miscalculations.

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Part of the problem was that we have never encouraged the growth of urban centres outside of Dhaka to which rural populations can migrate and find work. It is true

that, with the population in the last 35 years mushrooming from 80 million to 140 million, figuring out a way to deal with the growth and the industrialisation and urbanisation that accompanied it was never going to be easy, but a little bit of prescient planning might have been a good idea.

It is in this context that I would like to raise an issue that we never really focus on in Bangladesh, and that is the environment. The environment is a huge issue that does not get enough play in this country. Thus, the questions of pollution of our water bodies and flooding and the balance to be drawn between economic development and preserving the environment are generally not as large a part of the policy debate as they should be.

We at The Daily Star are perhaps as guilty as anyone else on this issue. Star reporter Pinaki Roy,

among others, has done some excellent reporting on the subject, and we do have a weekly environment page, and do occasionally print other pieces on the issue, but it is not enough.

Parentetically, in more than 100 columns, this is the first time that I am addressing the issue in print.

The simple if unpalatable fact that we need to focus on is that if we don't get a handle on our environmental woes, then all of our other gains in other areas will be moot, and we risk losing everything.

The fact of the matter is that there is plenty we can do, but it requires appreciating the gravity of the situation and planning accordingly. We have an advantage in that right now we are not too industrialised so our energy needs and carbon emissions are not as high as elsewhere. Also, being

where we are, we are in a good position to learn from others and get a head start in implementing best practices.

As we industrialise and develop, we need to think about how to do it with the least environmental cost. We need to be innovative. Two of the best initiatives of the current government have been environmental: the poly-bag ban and the introduction of CNG as a fuel. Credit where credit is due. But we need many more such initiatives and ideas.

Other areas we need to focus on before it is too late are protecting our water supply from industrial effluents and other wastes and air quality. The pollution generated by coal and gas-fired generators should be taken into consideration, for instance, when thinking about how best to employ our natural resources and whether or not it might be a good idea to trade them for hydro-power in return.

Next week I will try to address the issue of global warming in the context of the cataclysmic potential effects for Bangladesh, and what we need to be doing about it.

Unless something else catastrophic occurs in the immediate present that causes me to once again ignore the long-term future for the crisis du jour, that is.

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## Good governance for corruption free society

PROF. MD ALI ASHRAF

**G**OOD governance is governance for the people and for welfare of the people. Again in that the government is accountable to the people for its activities.

Transparency is very important term used in good governance. What is transparency? How does transparency take root in society? To create awareness among the public about the activities of the government is the basic element of transparency.

Transparency is essentially "comprehensive and sincere openness". A society that is transparent is one that has created the conditions necessary for its members to participate effectively in its public administration. Transparency may be applied to all aspects of politics, economics, business, and social and cultural life. Transparency may arise only in a just society which respects human rights, honours democratic principles, justice and morality. The absence of transparency results in widespread detriments to society, such as inequitable resource allocation, injustice, and an ineffective rule of law that leads to corrupt practices and oppression of the community. Transparency and responsibility are the core of good governance. Without them, the door is open to widespread corruption and embezzlement of public funds.

**What should be done to promote transparency?**

An important factor for transparency in a society is the dissemination and receipt of accurate information. For the effective provision of information, leaders should promote publication and distribution of all draft budgets with projected taxes, income, revenue and public expenses, and publicise the mandates, rules and procedures of all executive institutions. Officials at all levels should permit the people receive this information unconditionally.

"Transparency is built on the free flow of information, i.e. enough information to determine responsibility for failure, incompetence, and deceit." In

The development of Bangladesh will remain a far cry if there is failure to combat corruption. It is estimated that our per capita income would be doubled if corruption could be eradicated. Political will is essential for the success of this initiative. Political reforms should include measures to strengthen the rule of law, the role of civil society, the capacity of parliament and to establish a transparent and comprehensive electoral process. We need to do these now to sustain as a nation.

addition, national leaders and government officials at all levels must open up and encourage independent inspection agencies to audit and control their finances. If not, the society cannot be considered to be "clean", the economic benefits will not reach the people, and there will be more corruption. "When a few top officials have access to un-audited funds, the risk of corruption or the perception of corruption arises, even if these funds are used only for genuine security...".

Transparency may only exist in a society that provides the people with complete freedom of expression and of the press. The voices of the people and the media are of prime importance for transparency in society since they are factors that can push state and public institutions to accept responsibility for their functioning. For a free people, the media can be a very efficient watchdog on the affairs of the state.

These are the conditions for the promotion of transparency that the nation's leaders must follow. According to research, two approaches have been proposed: 1) the creation of training programmes that help people to understand the concept of the legitimacy of government; to understand the nature of public affairs; and to understand the responsibility of the government to the public; and 2) that the government should honestly strive to understand in detail the needs and concerns of the people and should hasten to solve and problems justly and equitably.

The government must also ensure that the law protects the right to exercise freedom of expression, and that criticism or expression of unpopular opinions are not punished.

**Good governance and accountability**  
What I have described about good governance and transparency is perhaps easy to grasp and understand in theory, but it is obviously complicated to put into practice due to culture, and political and economic and social factors.

Accountability is another component of good governance. It is the mechanism by which public power is checked and directed towards the achievement of broadly defined national goals with "the greatest degree of efficiency, effectiveness, integrity, and prudence". In a parliamentary democracy like Bangladesh. It is the role of parliament and to a lesser extent the member organisations of the civil society, to call the leaders and the rulers to account for their actions. An inherent strength of the parliamentary system is that it locates responsibility in a small, readily identifiable group—the Cabinet—which is held directly accountable by parliament.

Accountability aims to inform the public about the reasons why government action is done, and to explain how it must be done, so that the public can understand the actions, ponder about them, and provide useful input and feedback. Because corruption thrives in secrecy, open and accountable government is essential to check it. Government must then be open to the scrutiny and questions of the people and/or their elected representatives in parliament. All members of the legislative branch are expected to be vigilant and ensure that the government satisfactorily implements programmes duly adopted by parliament.

**Good governance and civil society**

Throughout the world there is a growing recognition of the contribution that an active and participating civil society makes to the development of a country. Civil society embraces a broad range of human activities outside of the market and the state. Civil society includes non-governmental organisations, people's organisations, trade unions, political action committees, human rights groups, women's associations, the media, community-based coalitions, religious groups, and academic and research institutions, among others.

Civil society organisations are generally recognised for their knowledge about issues, their ability to mobilise communities and to come up with solutions to complex problems. They constitute the impetus for democratic change and represent a vital source of experience, expertise, and information. They bring new insights and approaches to people-centered and participatory development. They provide mutual support and services particularly for people who cannot afford them and for whom either the government or the market do not reach.

In many parts of the world, civil society organisations have defended the vulnerable supported the oppressed, the marginalised, and the excluded. They have created economic opportunities as well as promoted human rights and improved justice system. They have facilitated policy changes in the state that have reflected people's circumstances and needs. Above all, they have helped to generate the social capital that makes democracy work and that lies at the heart of healthy economies. This social capital includes both formal and informal networks

of trust, openness, communication and cooperation as well as shared norms, goals, beliefs, and decision-making institutions.

Civil society organisations therefore play a critical, catalytic role in society. They carry out policy research, advocate for the rights of major groups that may not find their voice heard, and in this way have become actors in relation to governments, local authorities, employers and systems that impact on people's lives. They fight for various causes whether political, social, economic or cultural, that stimulate people to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. In short, civil society organisations foster transparency and accountability and have become essential to the development of coherent programmes and projects that build upon reality and people's needs. A vibrant civil society is therefore a critical precondition for a more equitable, democratic, pluralistic and human society.

In Bangladesh NGOs and civil society organisations have played an active role in the development of the country. The early 1990s have seen the emergence of large numbers of self-help groups in urban and rural areas, fostering greater social cohesion and community organisation in the country. These groups bring communities together around specific issues and concerns, like water, credit and savings schemes, and small-scale infrastructure. They assist communities not only to improve their living conditions and livelihoods but also to encourage participatory processes that lead to greater openness, trust, confidence and self-reliance among communities.

The NGOs and civil society play an important and active role by promoting political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in govern-

ment; 2) reducing poverty at the grassroots level to ensure that rural people have fair access to the country's resources.

### Conclusion

The ultimate goal of the state is to ensure the well-being of the people and create a just and tolerant society. This is after all the purpose of democracy. While we spend a great deal of time discussing the importance of such things as 'separation of powers' and 'independent judiciary', these are but means to the end, which is to provide for the basic needs of the people -- food, shelter, health care, etc. This will only occur when the state fully embraces the concept of good governance and implements the rule of law without fear or favour.

We are already rated as number one corrupt nation. Very recently even the Chief Justice of Supreme Court of Bangladesh has expressed his concern. Very recently country assessment strategy team with the Vice President of World Bank hadly blamed government for corruption and also asked head of the government to stop corruption. The chairman of Anti Corruption Commission has blamed political authority for this disgrace.

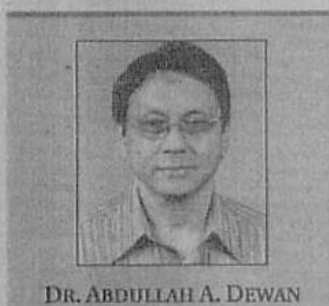
However, the people of Bangladesh have the right to ask about the function of Anti Corruption Commission. We as a nation must stand against those corrupt elements of the society to save the present and future generations from their grip. The country should not be hostage to a section of wealthy and corrupt people. They must be taken to task without any delay.

The development of Bangladesh will remain a far cry if there is failure to combat corruption. It is estimated that our per capita income would be doubled if corruption could be eradicated.

Political will is essential for the success of this initiative. Political reforms should include measures to strengthen the rule of law, the role of civil society, the capacity of parliament and to establish a transparent and comprehensive electoral process. We need to do these now to sustain as a nation.

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## Persecution of journalists in a democracy



DR. ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

**O**N December 14, 2003, New York Times published an editorial titled, "Risk of journalism in Bangladesh" in which Bangladesh was portrayed among the world's most dangerous countries for journalists. If I were to rewrite that editorial today, I will epitomise Bangladesh as the world's only democracy where journalists are harassed, intimidated and physically beaten by ruling party activists and state controlled police force. Repression against journalists has become a patented response by government officials and the members and activists of the ruling alliance whenever any unfavourable news and views are published against ruling party politicians.

appear in the Internet edition of The Daily Star. I always alert my students when articles on economic issues are published. On May 30, two of the students who read my article entitled, "Price spiral and possible remedies" asked me about the story on disruption of the journalist convention in Kushtia and the merciless beating by the hooligans of a local lawmaker Shahidul Islam. I felt enraged, which made me speechless for a few seconds in front of the students.

No, I was not in shame; I never felt shame in my life to face the truth however bitter it may be. No, I was not enraged with the students who asked me the questions; I became speechless because all these years I have been promoting my country of birth as democratic and freedom of press loving nation and in some respects ahead of the US in terms of electing Women Prime Ministers for almost a decade and a half.

I learned that tension between the journalists and three Kushtia lawmakers was brewing for some time following the publication of reports about their declining popularity along with the various mischievous and notorious activities of one of them Shahidul Islam. As reprisal, Shahidul and his fol-

### NO NONSENSE

No government or political party ever failed anywhere because of transparency, the upholding of the rule of law, and the freedom of media. Francois-Marie de Voltaire once said, "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it. But that does not mean I waive the right to argue with you! That is as much my constitutional right as it is yours." What a mind shattering statement?

lowers started harassing and intimidating the four journalists and filed fabricated charges of extortion against them.

The journalists' convention in Kushtia, on May 29, was organised to protest against such harassment and intimidation by ruling BNP lawmaker Shahidul Islam and his two parliament colleagues. Unfortunately, the convention instead of becoming a venue of protest turned into a theatre for the whipping of the journalists by those against whom the peaceful convention was organised. The rampage and running amok of Shahidul continued with the ransacking of the newspaper office, Dainik Andolaner Bazar, forcing the suspension of its publication on May 31.

If these lawmakers had proper education and some semblance of intelligence they would have used the press report about their

declining popularity as a wake up call and worked towards improving their image. Now, after this heinous crime they will probably get a pat on their backs from the party hierarchy. This should not be treated as an isolated incident; it is symptomatic of the serial nature of smear campaigns the ruling alliance has often been waging against the media since it was installed in power in 2001.

It was not so long ago that state police and security forces had beaten up journalists, prior to a cricket match against the visiting Australian team, without any provocation. This time BNP's own political party activists and elected MPs from Kushtia are directly involved. The expatriates and the international community of journalists are outraged and are waiting to see what punitive measures BNP Chairperson is taking against her own party

hoodlums. Speaking as guest of honour at the monthly luncheon meeting of American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel on June 1, US Ambassador Patricia A Butenis observed, "I was shocked and saddened by the attacks earlier this week on the journalists convention in Kushtia, even more so by reports that the assailants were associated with local officials of an important political party."

What journalists are subjected to in their line of work in Bangladesh was aptly expressed by the former US Ambassador Harry Thomas, who said: "It is not an easy place for journalists. I salute the journalists of this country for the way they are working under duress." Recalling the killing of journalists in Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, and Jessore, he said: "We want to see the killers of journalists brought to justice."

Journalists in the capital and various parts of the country condemned the incidents and demanded punitive measures against the culprits. Amnesty International on June 2, called upon the government to investigate all allegations of intimidation and violent attacks on journalists in Kushtia. State minister Babar also condemned this premeditated and disgraceful act of BNP activists.

Such protests and condemnations have gone unheeded in the past and don't penetrate the thick skin of the alliance government. Past assurances by the government to bring the murderers of veteran journalists Shamsur Rahman, Manik Shah and Humayun Kabir Balu to justice are yet to be realised.

Journalists are the last beacon of hope against tyranny, autocracy and all forms of social, political and economic tomfoolery of a

government. Historically, corrupt and power famished rulers who have everything to hide have resorted to anti media activities. The citizens and the international community must take a firm stand against the offenders and perpetrators. At the minimum the national media may inform the government about the following measures:

- That a moratorium be imposed on the publishing of political news and activities of the ruling alliance for a prolonged period of time unless the authority takes stern measures against those implicated;
- Journalists are not bound by national borders. The local journalists, independently, and with support from the Amnesty International may appeal to all democratic governments to impose travel restrictions on politicians and government officials involved in the crime against journalists and free media.
- With the beginning of the campaign for the 2007 national elections, the alliance rulers must guarantee that their party workers will eschew all activities that harassment contravene people's right to freedom of expression and views without fear of pestering and retribu-

- tion;
- There was not enough police protection at the Kushtia convention premises. In future, sufficient security protection must be provided if sought for by the convention organisers.
- Journalists, on their part, must report news and incidents objectively, as they happen, without being opinionated. They may, however, exercise their right to freedom of opinion by writing newspaper "Op-Ed" articles, as this writer often does.

No government or political party ever failed anywhere because of transparency, the upholding of the rule of law, and the freedom of media. Francois-Marie de Voltaire once said, "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it. But that does not mean I waive the right to argue with you! That is as much my constitutional right as it is yours." What a mind shattering statement?

Voltaire did not have to die to preserve the freedom of press. Many thousands met deaths and persecutions and many more will sacrifice life for the right to read, write and speak their mind fearlessly.

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