

Rampaging garment workers

They need counselling and guidance

At times the workers seem to take out their anger on imaginary enemies, and the latest incident at Gazipur only proves the point. There can be no other explanation for some garment workers to have gone berserk on Dhaka-Mymensingh road on Sunday on hearing the rumour about deaths of some fellow workers in a road accident. It is a fact that there was an accident on the road in which three garment workers received injuries, who were later taken to a hospital in Tongi, but there was no confirmation of their deaths from any source. And yet, on the basis of unconfirmed news, the group of unruly workers went out on the road, blockaded the busy highway, damaged and torched a number of vehicles and clashed with the policemen. We are appalled to learn that the frenzied workers even damaged fire brigade engines for no reason whatsoever.

We remain puzzled as to why a section of garment factory workers keep looking for excuses to take law in their hands. They do so mostly in the name of avenging themselves on some grievances but in the process they resort to wholesale lawlessness and violence. This is a dangerous trend and this has to be stopped at any cost.

Such acts of violence have a demonstration effect inducing others to imitate. We feel it is time the factory owners gave a serious thought to using the services of psychological counsellors to get to the bottom of the minds of the workers. Such services are regular features in the factories in developed countries and we are sure, once introduced, these would bring desired results.

Notwithstanding their grievances, the workers cannot go on creating a situation of anarchy in the industrial belts and on the roads, thereby affecting the lives and property of others. They need to be told that by doing so they only help remove the focus from the main issue of punishing the real perpetrators of accident.

End of the football feast

A month to remember

The curtain on the World Cup Football Championships 2006, finally comes down with Italy defeating France. For Italy it was an event of unprecedented glory having won the championships after 24 long years.

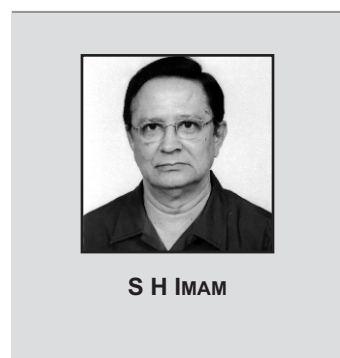
Despite the fact that there had been some controversies over conducting the games by referees, the game of football often called the "game of the century" was well organised on the whole without any security lapse. FIFA, the organiser and the host country Germany deserve our appreciation for a world-class treat.

Football happens to be one of the most popular sport events around the world, even in countries where apparently it is not played with any degree of seriousness. FIFA world cup championships, though held every four years, continues to play a natural role as binding force behind brotherhood between nations across the world, rich or poor, with all their diverse social and cultural legacies.

Here in Bangladesh, a country thousands of miles away, we have also witnessed unprecedented enthusiasm and groundswell of support for the game. The entire nation celebrated the game with different groups of fans supporting their respective favourite teams in a month long engagement that literally rewrote the rules of daily life.

Finally, as we await the next world cup football extravaganza, we do believe that Bangladesh has the potential to come good next time around and take its place on the world football map. Given proper support of the administration and good planning by the football authorities, there is no reason why we should not be able to make an impact at the regional level in the next couple of years before we graduate to other levels. If anything, over the years football has been treated as secondary to other games like cricket and hockey where we have already met with some success. Let us turn our natural enthusiasm for the game into a high professional commitment.

Non-sticking bed fellows and gleeful horse traders



S H IMAM

ERSHAD and his spouse's recent meeting with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, pulled off at the initiative of Young Turks in the BNP led by Tareq Zia, sounded like an opening gambit by both sides for a possible electoral alignment. It has produced speculation rather than any sign of commitment on either side. The best description of the outcome would be they have just tested the waters.

Immediately after Ershad's meeting with Begum Zia, the JP faction leader Anwar Hossain Monju also met with the PM. Monju dubbed Ershad as a major political player, suggesting necessity would dictate Ershad's stance on alignment.

There are pulls and counter-pulls within the mainstream JP for and against alignment with either of the two major political forces in the country. Ershad's younger brother GM Qader leads the pro-AL trend in the party while Rowshan Ershad represents the BNP-leaning tendencies. Ershad's recently divorced sec-

FROM MY WINDOW

Ershad's stakes lie in being on the winning side which would exonerate him from the corruption charges. Ershad will bide time until in his assessment the party to come out winner has been identified. The major political parties have a history of aligning themselves with parties having ideologies different from theirs. So, theoretically JP would be welcomed by both the alliances. Besides, JP's political plank is the other side of the BNP coin. For Ershad, the only principle he can work for is his full political rehabilitation.

ond wife Bidisha who was expelled from JP was known to be pro-AL. It is her such leaning that led Ershad to disown her before the BNP government.

Some reports have it that Ershad, feeling so much sought after, reportedly upped his bargaining chips as the price for alignment with BNP demanding 75 JS seats, president's post, one-third of the cabinet positions, withdrawal of 12 corruption cases lodged against him, and the proceedings to put Rowshan Ershad's house on auction. Exactly how much accommodative BNP would be to his demands is not known.

The proximate cause for the Khaleda-Ershad meeting lay in the fact that JP leader Kazi Zafar Ahmed, who is identified as a BNP-leaning leader, had had a meeting on "electoral understanding" with the Awami League.

Ironically, given the anti-incumbency downside in the ruling BNP's popularity, the party which commanded two-thirds majority in

parliament is now keen on coalescing with both the Jamaat and Jatiya Party. Tareq Zia has stated that Jamaat and BNP are in the same family in an apparently pointed reference to possible realignment with the party.

The respective strengths of Jamaat and Jatiya Party in 1991, 1996, and 2001 elections make an enlightening reading in terms of their stocks in trade as far as future electoral politics goes:

Jamaat in 1991 received voter share of 12.13% and 3 JS seats; in 1996 voter share of 8.61% and 17 JS seats; and in 2001 voter share of 4.29% and 17 JS seats.

JP in 1991 received voter share of 11.92% and 32 JS seats; in 1996 voter share of 16.40% and 14 JS seats; and in 2001 voter share of 7.26% and 14 JS seats.

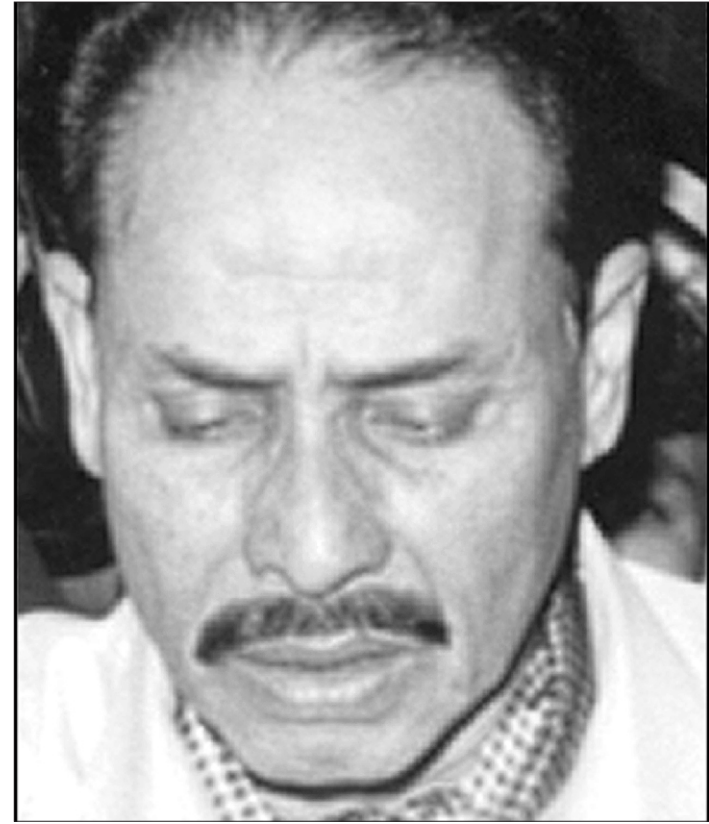
The five years since the last general election have been eventful and the state of politics may have transformed intrinsically without our realising it enough, something that will only become clear when the returns of the next

general election will have been posted.

Whether the Bidisha affair has undercut Ershad's popularity, one has to wait and watch for it. But more importantly, how in the light of sharper public consciousness of political extremism engendered by the bombing incidents, Ershad's role in making Islam the state religion of Bangladesh and pandering to Islamist lobby will be seen, is an open question.

Turning to Jamaat, which has had a declining support base in terms of vote bank from 1991 through 1996 to 2001, though not in the number of JS seats obtained as such, the point of determination would be whether the incidence of extremists bombings and Jamaat's purported links to JMB have alienated the religion based parties from the voters.

In 2001 Ershad quit the four-party alliance out of fear for corruption cases. Taking part in the election on its own, the JP bagged only 14 seats. Having been incarcerated he couldn't also stand for



the election. But the big difference is he can now participate in the election after having done the five-year waiting period since conviction.

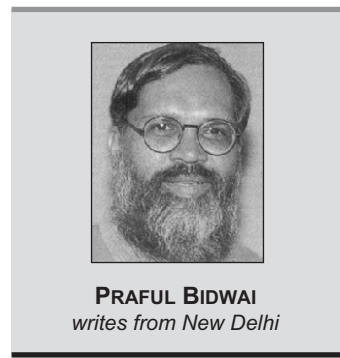
Now the 12 cases against him that are hanging fire are a lever in the hands of the government while Ershad's electoral clout is his bargaining chip. Ershad's stakes lie in being on the winning side which would exonerate him from the corruption charges. Ershad will bide time until in his

assessment the party to come out winner has been identified.

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SH Imam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star.

Nuclear myths and realities



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

DELIVERATIONS in the United States Congress over the India nuclear deal have polarised Indian opinion as never before. The agreement's supporters exult over resolutions passed in the House of Representatives and Senate foreign relations committees, which give the President the crucial authority to waive provisions of the US Atomic Energy Act, 1954, which would negate the deal.

They claim this is a "historic" achievement and fulfilment of India's "Second Tryst with Destiny."

The deal's critics range from the Left to the Far Right. Their grounds are that it compromises India's sovereignty, interferes with foreign policy options (e.g., on Iran), and shifts the goal posts of the Manmohan Singh-George Bush agreements of July and March.

Former Atomic Energy Commission chairmen Homi Sethna and PK Iyengar condemn the deal outright. They believe it will block India's "credible minimum" deterrent. Mr Sethna says

India's only gains will be legitimisation of its nuclear arsenal and access to civilian nuclear materials. But nuclear power, as this column has argued, is expensive, hazardous, and unsustainable. Even worse is the legitimisation of nuclear weapons. Once India is admitted into the unequal global nuclear order ("Atomic Apartheid"), it will be forced to abandon disarmament. India then will betray the National Common Minimum Programme's promise to fight for a nuclear weapons-free world. It'll become complicit in undermining the cause of world peace -- and its own security.

it'd be better to sign the much-hated Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It at least gives a signatory the exit option; the deal doesn't.

In the media, the deal's supporters greatly outnumber its opponents. Certain newspapers have conducted a crusade for it. Never before have we witnessed such a well-orchestrated media attempt to shape foreign and security policy.

The supporters are led by "pro-Washington pragmatists" who want India's nuclear weapons legitimised by America at any cost. At the other extreme are super-hawkish "nuclear ultranationalists," who oppose inspections and public accountability of India's nuclear programme.

Politically, the deal's opponents clearly outnumber its supporters. The Bharatiya Janata Party strongly rejects the deal and says it shouldn't bind future governments. The Left is moderately critical, especially of the foreign policy baggage involved. The Congress party is on the defensive.

Strangely, the RSS welcomes the deal because it presents India

a "new opportunity" to step into the global Big League.

What's the truth? Is the deal being radically altered in the US? Will it undermine India's national interest? What does it imply for global nuclear disarmament? Consider some myths, contrasted to realities.

Myth 1: The deal will cap India's nuclear weapons program. Reality: It won't! Under the agreed civilian-military separation, India will put only 14 out of its 22 power reactors under IAEA safeguards. The other eight, two fast-breeders and military-nuclear facilities can continue to produce fuel for bombs. India can also build many new military facilities.

The un-safeguarded reactors can annually yield enough plutonium for 25-plus bombs, adding to India's existing estimated stockpile of 100-plus. This surely fits any definition of "minimum" deterrent. Just a handful of nuclear weapons can kill millions.

Myth 2: The deal is tantamount to signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Reality: India has made no greater commitment than its unilateral testing morato-

rium of 1998. True, the House Bill says the Presidential waiver will "cease to be effective" if India tests. But amending Section 129 of the US Atomic Energy Act, which triggers such cessation, was never on the agenda.

It's absurd to equate India's voluntary moratorium with the CTBT, a multilateral agreement with universal application and verification. Besides, India doesn't need more tests to develop a deterrent.

Myth 3: The deal imposes symmetrical obligations on India and America. Reality: India isn't treated like the NPT-recognised Nuclear Weapons States (NWSs). These only safeguard a minuscule fraction of their civilian facilities (11 out of hundreds). They can take them in and out of safeguards. India's safeguards are perpetual.

India must adhere to Missile Technology Control Regime and Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) guidelines, although it isn't a member. India's testing moratorium was specifically noted -- but not America's. Yet, the US is far likelier to test than India.

India is a Johnny-come-lately in the Nuclear Club. It can't expect to be treated as a first-class member. India must make a show/preference of "responsibility" (a contradictory term for a nuclear power willing to kill millions of unarmed civilians).

Myth 4: India will be subjected to harsh IAEA inspections: "you can't move even a chair without their permission" (AEC chairman Srinivasan). Reality: India's experience at Tarapur and Rajasthan hasn't been one of intrusive IAEA inspections. Inspections for the 14 to-be-safeguarded reactors will probably be less strict, given the agency's budget constraints.

Myth 5: India's commitments under Congress resolutions and earlier bilateral agreements are identical. Reality: They aren't. Under the original plan, India would negotiate a safeguards agreement with the IAEA and get NSG approval after Congress ratification. Now, it must do so before ratification.

Myth 6: The deal has no larger foreign policy implications. The demand that India must help Washington isolate Iran and promote America's non-proliferation objectives is non-binding. Reality: Implicit in the deal, and motivating it centrally, is harmonisation of India's foreign policy with US objectives. India's two shameful IAEA votes against Iran prove this.

Normally, Indian diplomats would have objected to the reso-

lutions' language. They find it "intrusive and even offensive." But they have lumped it -- to seal a strategic alliance with Washington.

The March agreement binds India to even bigger policy shifts, including the Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture driven by US corporations, completing the WTO Doha Round in 2006, implementing the Asia-Pacific Climate Partnership, etc. India is likely to yield to other US pressures too -- including on the Non-Aligned Movement.

The US is recruiting India as a junior partner in its global alliance system. India will be asked to contain China and help America dominate the Eurasian landmass. Undermining India's policy independence is a huge achievement.

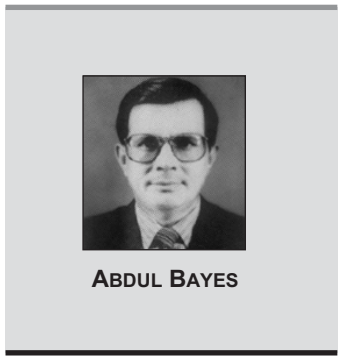
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India then will betray the National Common Minimum Programme's promise to fight for a nuclear weapons-free world. It'll become complicit in undermining the cause of world peace -- and its own security.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

CEC's uncommon common sense



ABDUL BAYES

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Under Justice MA Aziz and his team of commissioners, no free, fair, and credible election could be expected in this country. Mr. Aziz should have long before realized the ramifications of his stay in that constitutional post. Judges never ever preside over any deliberations when they feel that any party might be aggrieved by their presence as judges. They feel embarrassed and step aside by applying their common sense -- the most uncommon thing nowadays prevailing inside the EC.

tism. The EC, or for that matter the CEC, has never been beyond controversy in a country where losing election is generally added to the partisan role of the Commission and the commissioners. But a full-proof and perfect system of holding election is not, perhaps, the motto we have in mind, at least at the moment. We are fully aware of the determinants of or deterrents to a free and fair election: level of literacy of the population, the politics of guns and goons, the polluted politics, and above all, the grievous attempts of governments in power to influence the EC in whatever ways they have command over. Therefore, the

expectation of the nation always rolls round the provision of a relatively free and fair election -- credible at home and abroad -- where the EC is not instrumental in turning the popular tide for or against any particular party.

We are shocked to say that, of late, people's expectations have been dashed to the ground by the words and deeds of the present CEC and two other commissioners. Since his assumption of office as the CEC, the whole nation has been witnessing, as if, a circus, with the CEC playing the role of a joker. The performances of the jokers in circuses, of course, deliver some utility to those watching the circus. Our Justice-joker in the EC however

seems to impinge on us some "disutility" that is not what he is there for. The most serious complaint against the EC, that had long been looming large, is that it is bent upon arranging a general election for 2007 that could be riddled with election engineering and massive vote rigging.

Arguably, a first step towards that was the "invention" of the idea of a new voter list. While the whole nation stood against such a move, terming it as unconstitutional and unprecedented, the CEC alone went ahead with the proposition. In consequence, a total of Tk 600 million was spent in producing one of the most scandalous voter lists in country's history. It became soon crystal

clear that the means (new voter list) was targeted towards the "end" (favouring a particular group in the upcoming election). The cat came out of the bag! Quite obviously, in spirit, the movement by the opposition was heralded against the present bizarre activities of the EC under the alleged "partisan" leadership of the CEC Justice MA Aziz and his two mates on board with a malignant motive.

After the defeat in the legal battle, the CEC chose to nullify the making of a genuine voter list through conspicuous corridors. For example, he held up actions on the pretext of not receiving SC orders, although there was no bar on going with the process. It was about two weeks that the EC sat on files knowing fully well that time is the most precious element in the whole process of making a voter list. Then the order came at last but the CEC decided to ask people to come to specific places and enlist their names as voters.

Most of the constitutional experts and former CECs dubbed it as an attempt to foil a fair election. How can a dead person rise up from his grave to tell EC that he died long before and hence

should be excluded as a voter? How could a rickshaw puller, for example, spend Tk. 100 as transport cost to see that his name is on the voter list? All these are common sense questions asking answers from those in the EC -- for whom common sense appears to be the most uncommon phenomena.

The Justice turned CEC Mr. Aziz went on with his personal vendetta, rejecting all the claims from different corners, including the government side for going door to door as an attempt to update the voter list. Field level actions showed that a very insignificant portion of the willing voters so far appeared before the specific places with proper documents. Then the decision was relaxed and voters were asked to go to the nearest stations specified by the EC. Criticisms flooded in against such steps. And at long last, the CEC took cognizance of the matter and decided to go door to door and prepare the voter list. Meantime, a lot of money and time have been wasted. The future of an election was put to serious doubt.

In the FIFA World Cup foot ball

games, we find coaches resigning immediately after their teams lose in the games. Most of the time, they do it on their own by taking responsibility of the poor performance on their shoulders. This is a matter of common sense when the captain has to take the responsibility of the accidents. Our learned CEC already lost three games in his personal whims but still continues to cling to his power. He had been hated by people rank and file but seemingly shows no sign of moving out of the chair that he is occupying now. Pity on a Justice turned CEC who fails to understand the gravity of the situation arising out of his malignant motives; who cares little about public perceptions and, sordidly, who places personal and partisan interest above the national interest. We hear that after all his mechanisms failed to provide us with a fake voter list, he is now deploying the same old ruling party cadres to go door to door and list the voters. That means the updated version of the list will be heavily bias to the alliances in power at the cost of the opposition.

We are thus watching a circus

organized by the EC. The role of the joker in that circus -- meaning the CEC himself -- seems to produce a lot of pain rather than pleasure for the nation. We strongly feel that the circustic exercises of the EC should be stopped immediately and the "joker" should be removed right way. If the government declines to remove him on the pretext that he holds a constitutional post, then our suggestion would be to form Supreme Judicial Council to investigate into the wastages of public funds to meet personal whims.

Under Justice MA Aziz and his team of commissioners, no free, fair, and credible election could be expected in this country. Mr. Aziz should have long before realized the ramifications of his stay in that constitutional post. Judges never ever preside over any deliberations when they feel that any party might be aggrieved by their presence as judges. They feel embarrassed and step aside by applying their common sense -- the most uncommon thing nowadays prevailing inside the EC.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.