

Vote for ...?

The proceedings that ended up in the Supreme Court's ruling also point to one sorry fact, that many of our political leaders do not want either the electoral process to be free of the influence of money and muscle or the electorate to be in possession of certain crucial information about the parliamentary candidates so that they can make the right decision in electing their representatives and are not taken in by lies, lies, and more lies.

KAZI SM KHARUL ALAM QUDDUSI

THE Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed for three months a High Court order that had made it mandatory for people aspiring to contest parliamentary polls to declare their educational status, criminal records, if any, statement of assets, and sources of income while filing nomination papers.

After hearing an appeal filed by one Abu Safa, Chamber Judge of the Appellate Division Justice

Joyrul Abedin also directed the Election Commission to accept the nomination papers of the candidates without the details.

It is to be mentioned here that the High Court on May 25, 2005, in a significant verdict, issued the order following a writ filed by three lawyers asking the Election Commission to seek eight particulars from aspiring candidates for parliamentary elections and make them public in their respective constituencies. It had also asked the Election Commission to hold

joint projection meetings and to compel all the candidates to stand on a platform to answer to the queries of the people in their constituencies.

The High Court said in the direction that the candidates should also inform the Election Commission whether they had been members of Parliament before and the role they played individually and collectively in fulfilling the commitment to the people.

The direction also said that the

candidates should also report to the EC about the amount of loans taken from banks and financial institutions (personally, jointly or by dependent of a candidate) or loans taken from bank by the company where a candidate holds the post of chairman or director.

The Supreme Court's ruling essentially means that the voters will be denied their democratic right to form informed opinion about the contestants before casting their votes. Obviously, the High Court order threatened the interest of many politicians who have unlikable facts to conceal and whose electoral strength stems from undisclosed and unlimited sources of money and links with the world of crime.

Admittedly, as there is no provision for disclosure of these particulars of a candidate, the people remain in the dark about the quali-

fications of the candidates, and very often the less qualified people and law-breakers are elected to the legislature to shape national policies and to enact laws, also observed the High Court bench.

After passage of the order, Advocate KM Zahir, one of the original writ petitioners, told newsmen that following the order passed by the chamber judge of the Appellate Division, the corrupt people will get opportunity to contest the parliamentary election and Parliament will not be effective. He added that there will be no transparency in the details of the candidates and the corrupts, owners of black money, bank defaulters and musclemen will get the opportunity to go to Parliament.

Meanwhile, the accuracy of the voter roll still remains questionable even after the latest 10-day

drive of the Election Commission (EC) for its correction. According to print and electronic media, thousands of people, who are eligible to be voters, have been left out, as the commission officials failed to cover most households in the capital city and elsewhere in the country. There were also instances of eligible voters not getting enrolled despite filling in prescribed forms more than once.

Such detachment on the part of EC is symptomatic of the way the commission has gone about the task of revising and updating the voter list right from the start. It has never shown the level of seriousness required to produce a reasonably accurate electoral roll. Instead, it has given rise to one controversy after another. Consequently, even if all the parties agree today to participate in the election as per the election

schedule the commission has changed time and again, it would be far from either meaningful or credible with such a dubious voter list.

Anyway, the proceedings that ended up in the Supreme Court's ruling also point to one sorry fact, that many of our political leaders do not want either the electoral process to be free of the influence of money and muscle or the electorate to be in possession of certain crucial information about the parliamentary candidates so that they can make the right decision in electing their representatives and are not taken in by lies, lies, and more lies.

Regrettably, the interest of the unscrupulous few has increasingly prevailed over the interest of the multitude. Interestingly enough, media reports have it that a section of leaders on either side

of the political divide were behind the move to have the High Court order stayed. It is another painful reminder of the blatant fact that criminalization of politics has reached newer heights in our country.

The bottom line is that it is still pretty unclear whether people will be required to vote in the next general elections, as an inclusive election seems not in sight and existence in the voters roll is also unknown to many. It has, however, been made mandatory that the people will not be allowed to know about the candidates' personal information even if they are allowed to vote. The implication is that people will have to vote, but, of course, without asking any valid question regarding the candidates.

Kazi SM Kharul Alam Quddusi is Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Chittagong.

Our foreign friends

Our foreign friends asking for this from the president/CA is in no way an intrusion to our internal affairs. To expect this is legitimate. The nation does not want the world should sit on both hands and watch an unprecedented election engineering taking place in this land.

DR MOAZZEM HOSSAIN

THE piece by defence and strategic affairs editor of this daily published on December 21 entitled: "We are under threat of sorts" has stirred the old debate on the role of our foreign friends in helping strengthening our democracy.

The piece mainly addressed the recent comments by Her Excellency, the US ambassador, in Bangladesh and the letter sent to the president by the EU Parliament about the recent deployment of army by President/CA Iajuddin Ahmed. By all means, the arguments raised by Mr SA Khan to this end deserve further examination for the sake of a clear understanding of the subject.

In my opinion, the editor has displayed a very strong view about the role of foreign friends in our internal matters which is understandable since he is one of the leaders of this well read daily of our nation. Having said that, the arguments offered in the piece, certainly, are ill timed to say the

least. The author concludes by saying that:

"Yes, there is everything wrong with our politics, and, yes, we have been not well served by our politicians, and, yes, we all understand that the army must not be used to reap political benefits for any particular political party. But we don't need a foreign envoy sermonizing in public how he or she thinks the people should go about sorting out problems that are ours exclusively and for us to solve. However, it is for the political parties and our leadership to see that their actions do not provide the slightest excuse for our foreign friends to meddle in our internal affairs."

In fact, this conclusion led me to write this piece and I would like to raise some issues which with respect, the editor, have missed in his strongly worded commentary. I must make myself abundantly clear in the beginning that I have no problem with the spirit of the conclusion, but my problem is, it sounded misplaced under the present political environment of our nation. Why?

It is not a secret any more that our politicians and leaders failed to live with democratic principles and public confidence over the last fifteen years. But we must not forget that the nation has been under a supposedly neutral care taker government headed by the president who is occupying both the positions of the head of state and head of government since almost the last two months.

It is needless to repeat the unexpected and alleged partisan performance of the CTG including its head over this period. I must, however, mention that all the advisors of past and present CTGs are well-respected citizens of this nation.

The present outcome has been predicted long ago by many commentators that a physically unwell person like Professor Iajuddin has taken too a great burden on his shoulders and is unlikely to finish the job with even a minimum satisfaction.

Is it not clear that the root cause of all the crises is the CA himself than the political leaders? Yes, we know that politicians are

soundrels, but, I am afraid, the nation expected something better from an educationist-cum-president.

My point is, at this sorry stage of the nation to say "our foreign friends meddling in our internal affairs" is certainly misplaced. This reminds me a popular Bengali old saying: "Shak di-e mass dhaka." What does it mean? It means we do not want to admit the truth and knowingly or unknowingly would like to divert the course of action and put the blame to someone else's shoulder. In other words, we refuse to call a spade a spade.

There is, of course, Article 41a of the Vienna Convention. I am sure the honourable Ms Butenis and the EU Parliament know this very well. At the end of the day, the question is, are they really meddling in our internal affairs? I do not think so.

They said repeatedly in the past that the development partners want from the president/CA to create an environment for the 2007 election where every political party gets equal treatment and every voter is included in the electoral rolls.

Our foreign friends asking for this from the president/CA is in no way an intrusion to our internal affairs. To expect this is legitimate. The nation does not want the world should sit on both hands

and watch an unprecedented election engineering taking place in this land.

I must say, certainly, we are not under threat of any sort from outside. However, we are under a great threat from within. The way things are unfolding, the presi-

dent/CA unlikely to avoid a calamity for the nation and the history is unlikely to treat him kindly, to say the least.

The author is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.



Remembering Kazi Golam Mahboob

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

FOR some time since the beginning of this year, members of the Bhasha Andolon Museum have been advocating the need to accord official recognition to the role played by Bhasha Sainik Kazi Golam Mahboob during the Language Movement. The attention of the Mayor of Dhaka was drawn to this through several articles and workshops held in different parts of the country. These efforts underlined that it was necessary to protect the memory of the Language Movement by honouring some of the principal participants who had given leadership during the critical period between 1948 and 1952.

Such a move was indeed a welcome step. It was also relevant given the direct impact that the Language Movement had on the future course of events that resulted in the emergence of a sovereign Bangladesh.

Consequently, it was most heartening to see that some action was taken in this regard.

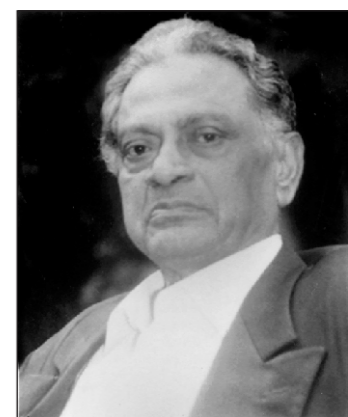
On December 10, the Mayor of Dhaka unveiled a plaque on the entry point of old Road No 10 of Dhanmondi Residential Area, Dhaka and renamed that street after language movement veteran Kazi Golam Mahboob. This particular street was chosen because it contained the residence of the Bhasha Sainik.

December 23 marked the 79th birth anniversary of this late language activist. He was born in Kosba village of Bakergonj district in a well-known and respected Muslim family. His father, Kazi Abdul Majed is still remembered in his area not only for his pro-active role during the 1921 movement carried out in Barisal for achieving a more equitable arrangement for farmers but also for his prominent association in the election efforts of Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq during the elections of 1937.

I met the late Advocate Kazi Golam Mahboob for the first time after my father shifted his residence to Dhanmondi RA in 1965. I was struck with his deep love for Bengali literature and his humour. One particular afternoon, after the elaboration of the Six-Points by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (also a resident of the Dhanmondi RA), he took time to explain to some of us about the importance of the 1952 movement and its special place in the ethnic history of this country. There was passion and sincerity in his elucidation. It enabled us to understand what was happening around us -- a little better.

Bhasha Sainik Advocate Kazi Golam Mahboob passed his Matriculation Examination in 1942 and then proceeded to Kolkata to study in the Islamia College located in that city. One of his fellow students at that educational institution was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was natural that both of them were friends as both students had come to Kolkata from adjacent areas in the eastern part of Bengal. Subsequently, after studying Political Science, Mahboob obtained his Bachelor's degree in Law from Dhaka University.

One might say that Kazi Golam Mahboob's association with the Language Movement started in September 1947 with his participation in the activities of "Tamaddun Majlis." Like a few others, he believed that Bangla as a language reflected the ethos of the Bangalee people -- their literature and culture. He became involved in organising resistance to the idea that Urdu should be the sole official language of the then Pakistan.



A group was formed consisting of a few intellectuals. They all shared the view that it was important to create public opinion and generate pressure on the then political government so that this government would desist from taking any step that would affect the status of Bangla within Pakistan.

Some others associated within this group were Dr Nurul Huq Bhuyian, Mr Shahed Ali, Mr Sanaullah Nuri, Syed Nazrul Islam, Mr Abdul Matin Khan Chowdhury, Engineer Nurul Huda, Dr Mirza Mazharul Islam, Mr Abdul Rahman Chowdhury, Mr Abdul Mannan, Mr Khaleque Nawaz, Mr Aziz Ahmed, Mr Showkat Ali, Mr Md Toha, Mr Oli Ahad, Dr Ashkar ibne Shaikh, Dewan Md Ashraf and Professor Abdul Gafur.

On March 11, 1948, young activist Kazi Golam Mahboob organized a hartal in Dhaka in support of making Bangla one of the official languages of Pakistan. This was a wake-up call for the local Provincial Administration. Activists were termed as agitators and many were interned. Later, following agitation by students, they were released from jail. The Language Movement had started.

Kazi Golam Mahboob's activism within the framework of the Language Movement continued between 1949 and 1952. It gained momentum and came to a boil after Khawaja Nazimuddin, as Prime Minister, declared on January 26, 1952 that Urdu alone would be the official language of Pakistan.

He had already become a practicing lawyer by then. However, representatives of different political parties met to discuss this latest provocation and decided that he should be the Convener of the Combined All Party "Rashtrobhasha Sangram Parishad." It was also agreed that this Parishad would work unitedly to oppose efforts to demote the status of Bangla in the national context.

The first measure undertaken by this Committee was to call a strike in all the educational institutions on February 11, 1952. He was very closely involved in all the steps that led to February 21, 1952. Although no longer a student, he joined them in their demonstrations in the streets, always in the forefront to ensure that the impetus was not lost.

Later on in life, he took interest in politics but did not take any active part on behalf of any designated political party. He was associated with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party from 1978 but fell out with them during his tenure as President of the Supreme Court Bar Association in 1994. His views on the independence of the judiciary were not acceptable to the then BNP administration. This persuaded him to sever all links with political parties.

Many of us who knew him well, will remember him for his wit, patriotism and dedication to the cause of furtherance of Bangla as a language.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

The children of politics

The dynastic legacies of our country are stagnating under the dark shadow of the tragedies that brought the two ladies Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia into politics and into power. It would be fair to say that none of them ever sought to enter into the maelstrom of our politics. For a daughter of the house and a housewife their performances speak well of their effort.

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

THE British Raj left behind a legacy of parliamentary democracy in the region. Dynastic succession was however not to die. Rather it became a dominant feature of politics. Thus we came to know the children and the spouses of politics.

The first lady on the scene was Srimavo Bandarnaike. Srimavo was a befitting successor to her assassinated prime minister husband, Solomon Bandarnaike. Her brilliant husband Solomon through out his three-year term from 1956 to 1959 was in the thick of trouble over the official status of Sinhala language.

His wife Srimavo, initially known as the "weeping widow," served longer, fared better, and attained a worldwide stature. She was the first woman prime minister of the world. Her singular success was hosting the 5th Non-Aligned Summit held at Colombo in August 1976. Chandrika Kumaratunga, the daughter, paled before her mother. It would be fair to say that dynastic succession did not overshadow the personal merit of the three of them.

India has four in all, if one counts Sonia Gandhi as the lady behind the prime minister. Jawaharlal, Indira, Rajiv, and Sonia. The patriarch Jawaharlal Nehru is the ultimate standard for all his personal attributes and worldwide stature. He had the most gifted of minds and was a consummate politician of the British model. A Fabian socialist, he

believed in gradualist approach.

His daughter Indira developed under his wings. Although, in sharp contrast to his style and substance. She was endowed with an unforgiving resolve, a combative temperament and a condescending stand. Her beliefs strongly mattered to her and the means did not bother her. It was to say the least radically different from the approach of her father. Jawaharlal left behind many followers and friends and virtually no enemies to swear vengeance.

Indira started the rift in the Congress. She started by snubbing Morarji in supporting VV Giri's candidature for the presidency behind the back in place of the official candidate Sanjiva Reddy. As she rose she relied on personal allegiance and relentlessly pursued what she believed in. It led even the juggernaut of a party Congress to be routed in the polls for the first time by the Janata Party in 1977. The score was leveled Morarji became the prime minister and Sanjiva the president. The rest is history, a tragic one for that. Even the most benign of persons Rajiv was assassinated. Fortunately, Sonia has learnt to cash on the dynastic legacy by trusting others with the job.

Parliamentary democracy, judging by the British model was born out of a need that power is not to be owned but to be served. Power is best served in trusting and trusted hands. It should therefore be a mater of broadest possible

choice. The concept prospered over the years and produced two enduring institutions, the parliament and the monarchy. It was the politicians and their leaders that were in the centre of it and contributed the most. The political offices were never a matter of succession. There were one or two instances of grooming the offspring but I do not know of any succession to the office of the prime minister.

It is certain that the region did not inherit the dynastic legacy from the British Raj. This is something that has grown out of the heritage of the region. The Bhutto political

dynasty of Pakistan turned out to be self-destructing. Both the father and daughter Zulfikar and Benazir received the best of education and distinguished themselves for their intellect and enlightenment. A highly conceited man and gifted one at that Zulfikar was witty, flamboyant and unscrupulous. He would not stop at anything for getting his goal. He was struck down by his destiny. The daughter Benazir is rather unlucky at that. Even though she is not reckless and scornful like her father Benazir was overwhelmed by her circumstances.

The dynastic legacies of our country are stagnating under the dark shadow of the tragedies that brought the two ladies Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia into politics and into power. It would be fair to say that none of them ever sought to enter into the maelstrom of our politics. For a daughter of

the house and a housewife their performances speak well of their effort.

Sheikh Hasina has a populist approach like her father. Her easy informality is much useful in galvanizing her party workers for combative political programs. Awami League has therefore continued to remain the most vigorous of our political parties. She has done well to wait and see how the other lady is doing in grooming her son.

Khaleda Zia on the other hand has proved to be more successful than her husband in expanding the party that BNP is today. She is a greatly determined lady and an indefatigable campaigner. This has benefited her party in electoral prospects. There is however a personality cult about her that makes her party dependent on her. Besides, her decision of inducting her son into the hierarchy of the party proved to be against the

interest of building party structure. The elders felt marginalized and that led to a rebellion. And now BNP has a challenger in LDP.

In parliamentary democracy the party is the engine. Discipline in party structure is therefore of great importance. Lateral inductions disrupt this discipline. The clanish nature of the societies of this region encourages dynastic succession. Naturally political stability and growth suffers. The root cause behind it is the culture of personality cult with its two banal attendants, mistrust and favouritism. Political tragedies therefore continue to visit the countries of the region. The ills occur when the leaders submit to the indiscretion of owning democracy. In the end what we see is dynastic democracy.

The author is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

