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No Clear Win Sighted in Indian Polls

Reazuddin Ahmed writes from Calcutta

India goes to polls on May 20, 23 and 26 to elect 510 members of the 543-member Lok Sabha (Lower House). The elections to 14 seats in Assam and 13 seats in Punjab will be held in June. Elections to six Kashmir Lok Sabha seats have been postponed. No party is yet poised for winning an absolute majority and political analysts rule out a viable coalition either.

INDIA is seemingly heading for a political stability as the opinion polls predict a hung parliament again. No party is yet poised for winning an absolute majority in the parliamentary polls beginning from May 20.

Political analysts rule out a viable coalition either, among the parties — as they differ ideologically. Despite the disappointment with two coalition governments in last 15 months, the Indian voters are still undecided about giving Rajiv Gandhi another chance to form a stable government with Congress winning absolute majority. West Bengal Chief Minister Mr Jyoti Basu said here that gone are the days for single party rule in India and the new generation politics must look for viable coalition.

The Congress (I) led by Rajiv Gandhi, Janata Dal-Left combine coalition headed by V P Singh, and Bharatiya Janata Party led by Lal Krishna Advani are jostling for power in India. Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar's Janata Dal (Socialist) looks for a chance to enter into coalition with any acceptable partner in case none gets absolute majority.

All the three contenders for power have offered the nation elusive alternatives with Congress giving the slogan for a stable government. Janata-Left combine for politics of social justice and anticasteism and BJP for a Ram Raj. BJP's emergence in Indian politics as a major party has surprised many although political pundits predict that Ramjanambhumi-Babri Mosque issue will finish BJP.

India goes to polls on May 20, 23 and 26 to elect 510 members of the 543-member Lok Sabha (Lower House). The elections to 14 seats in Assam and 13 seats in Punjab will be held in June. Elections to six Kashmir Lok Sabha seats have been postponed. Congress has put up candidates in all the 510 seats. Janata Dal has put up candidates in all the seats

with adjustments in some seats with the regional parties. BJP is contesting for the first time in 472 seats. BJP has given 14 seats to Shiv Sena in Maharashtra.

A high pitched Ayodhya inspired campaign by BJP is likely to increase the votes for the party all over India. The party continued to mix politics with mythology. The BJP candidate Miss Deepika Chakhalta who portrayed Sita in television serial Ramayana is drawing large crowds in Gujarat. She is using a Maruti Gypsy jeep as her 'Rath' which moves one mile an hour with devotees showering flower on her while many even frantically fall on her feet to get the blessings!

BJP has also pointed its finger towards Bangladesh to catch votes in India elections.

The party vowed to expel what it termed as 60 lakh illegal Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants from West Bengal. The Indians did not find any basis to this claim saying that the BJP was fanning up communalism. In West Bengal the election posters of Left Front and Congress have highlighted on secularism to counter the fundamentalist BJP.

Janata Dal-Left combine coalition is banking on Muslim and lower caste votes. Imam Bukhari of Delhi Jama Masjid has called upon the Indian Muslims to vote Janata Dal. The Indian newspapers reported that Bukhari's call has been challenged by other Muslim leaders who asked the Muslims to vote for secular parties which include Congress.

52 per cent of the Indian population. V P Singh's attempt to implement Mandal Commission report sparked off a violent reaction among the caste Hindus. The Mandal Commission report gave the backward class a better deal in Indian job quota and political observers see the possibility of VP Singh getting the dividend from the lower caste. But Janata Dal (Socialist) leader in UP, Mulayam Singh Yadav, has a good hold among the Muslims and lower caste Hindus and is likely to take a chunk from there.

The noted Indian columnist S Nihal Singh wrote that "despite the bitter disappointment with the opposition parties and their quarrels, there is perhaps a still somewhat undefined feeling that the Congress has outlived its

useful life. The problem is what after the Congress? Although the BJP is trying to appropriate the stability platform to an extent, its claim lacks credibility."

There is a feeling that Rajiv Gandhi's Congress may increase the tally in this election from 194 up to 230. But he will need 256 members to form the government. Rajiv Gandhi's critics say 'Rajiv had performed the last rites of his 'nana', mother and brother. He will perform this time the last rite for Congress.'

Even after all these allocations it is by and large held that only Congress can give a stable government in the centre which is needed at this critical juncture when the national unity is threatened. Economy is in shambles, foreign exchange reserve is all-time low. But today's Congress is led by people who could not create the impression that they can lead the nation to prosperity and dignity.

The problem is where India is facing a political uncertainty.

Reazuddin Ahmed is the Deputy Editor of this paper, now on a visit to India and Sri Lanka.

Saving the CEPZ

We heartily welcome the directive just issued by the Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed for the immediate reconstruction of the embankment along the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ), which had been badly damaged by the recent cyclone and the tidal wave.

The Acting President has acted on a request from the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority to take up the matter on a high priority basis in view of the importance that CEPZ occupies in our national economy. That the request should have been made directly to Justice Shahabuddin is perfectly understandable. As Acting President of the country, he serves as the Chairman of the Authority.

For this newspaper, it is particularly gratifying that the presidential directive coincided with the publication of a special report by the Star's Economic Editor Moazzem Hossain on the destruction of the embankment as well as on the damage caused to the whole area by the recent cyclone and the tidal wave. His on-the-spot report which incorporated comments by a number of foreign entrepreneurs painted an extremely grim picture and focussed on the danger that unless something was quickly done to repair the damage, the country would face difficult times ahead in attracting foreign investors.

The timing of the disaster was particularly tragic for CEPZ. Until the country was hit by the devastating cyclone, there had been most encouraging interest from foreign investors in the industrial opportunities available in the zone. According to sources, interviewed by Mr Hossain, there had been four to five delegations from abroad visiting the CEPZ every month to study possibilities of their participation in this all-important economic project. For all intents and purposes, the CEPZ had indeed got off the ground.

While we may take a grim view of the situation, we should not throw up our hands in despair or assume that the fate of the zone is sealed. Our hope is that the work on the repairs of the embankment will be completed soon and that special care will be taken to make it stronger than before. Once this is done, some activities can be resumed in some of the plants. All this is likely to be tough and hard. But we have no other option but to go ahead and handle the job as best as we can. The CEPZ must be restored to full health.

The success in the revival of the CEPZ — in fact, in all other business and industrial activities in the country — greatly depends on the speed in which we can restore our satellite communication links with all parts of the world. Here, the task before the country is to make the Betunia Earth Station fully operational again. This, in turn, requires urgent repairs in the microwave towers which form part of the whole system. We are relieved that the satellite dish remains undamaged, but it is disconcerting to know that it will take months and involve considerable cost to make the 87-metre high tower, with 19 antennas, fully operational. Meanwhile, some temporary repairs, now undertaken by a group of Japanese technicians, may make the tower partly functional. We are grateful to the Japanese Government for taking interest in this matter. It is in the best interest of all concerned — ourselves as well as our friends abroad — that, in terms of communication, Bangladesh rejoins the world again.

Social Forestry a Compulsion

The Philippines is all islands. But they have highlands too. And, according to an article published in The Daily Star on Saturday, it is the uplanders who form the poorest section of the Philippine population. The reason is those people in the hills have no way but to go for, what we call in Bangladesh, a kind of 'jhum' cultivation which doesn't yield a big harvest and on the contrary degenerates the soil.

The Manila government has very successfully brought a sizeable section of the 17 million uplanders under a programme called the Integrated Social Forestry and more than 355 thousand hectares of land have been distributed to 128 thousand acceptor families. The land is being distributed with a view to, first, settling this nomadic population down and then make them to go for small-scale agro-forestry, based on reforestation of the lands they burn, which in a very short time transforms them self-reliant farmer-foresters.

The same programme have been pursued in Sri Lanka and Thailand. Nepal and India with local adjustments and a varying level of success. In neighbouring India there has been a shift in emphasis. Not so much highlanders as pure plains-people of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh have turned in a massive way to social forestry — taking this mean growing big and valued trees as a business proposition in the private plots of each family. Millions of families there have already grown crores and crores of tall timber yielding trees without requiring government to spend a farthing on this account. The countryside peopled by the 'social forestry' families stands reforested to a deep and unending green — as never would have been the case had government, and not people, alone had taken up the programme.

Jhum is a nuisance in Bangladesh also. But the harm is not big and jhumiyas are not a nomadic people. As such, it is in the Indian sense that social forestry will be more meaningful in Bangladesh. In fact, our own dear forest department has been after it for over a couple of years. The results are unknown. Even if these are some in papers, visibly there is not a sign that can be heart-warming.

Decades back attempts were taken to enthrone people living by the side of railway tracks to grow fruit and timber trees on the two sides of that. That attempt brought in such unspectacular results that there was never after that any talk of repeating the effort.

We feel that with a little more circumspection — and a lot more application — government can indeed get people to respond to the social forestry idea in a big way. There is no way out for but to make a massive afforestation click so that from the present less than nine per cent the nation can travel to a 20 per cent coverage of the land mass by plants — in a matter of 50 years. Without a super-successful social forestry programme it cannot be achieved.

Compensation Due for Maori Tribe

Derek Round writes from Wellington

THE New Zealand government has been urged to give substantial compensation to a native Maori tribe left "largely landless and impoverished" as a result of European settlement last century.

The landmark decision has been made by the Waitangi Tribunal set up in 1975 to hear grievances by the Maori people over their rights under the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's "founding document."

Under the treaty, signed in 1840, Maori chiefs ceded sovereignty over New Zealand to Britain's Queen Victoria and it became a crown colony.

There was a population of an estimated 115,000 Maori at the time and about 2,000 European settlers.

In return for handing over sovereignty to the British the Maori people were guaranteed possession of their lands, forests and fisheries. The chiefs agreed to sell land to Queen Victoria's agents.

The treaty was recognised and observed as a binding contract for more than a decade after its signing.

But continuing immigration created increased demands for land and pressures between settlers and the Maori people culminated in the land wars of the 1860s which saw British troops fighting on New Zealand soil.

Recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi declined and New Zealand courts continued to hold until 1975 that it had no legal status in domestic law.

In 1975 Parliament passed the Treaty of Waitangi Act to investigate Maori claims from 1975. The law was later amended to allow the tribunal to examine claims dating back to the signing of the treaty in 1840.

The Ngai Tahu tribe, which once owned more than half New Zealand's land, brought its grievances to the tribunal, claiming it had been deprived of land and that there had been serious breaches of the treaty.

The tribe's grievances arose from land sales between 1844 and 1866 when about 14 million hectares of land—slightly less than half New Zealand—passed from its ownership to the government for 14,750

pounds. The tribe was left with only about 15,000 hectares.

Its claim to the tribunal was not primarily about the low price paid for the land, although that was part of it, but about the government's failure to provide the tribe with adequate land for its needs, to exclude from the sale certain lands the tribe wanted to retain, and to provide food, reserves and health, educational

and land endowments.

Upholding its claim, the Waitangi Tribunal said successive governments had failed to honour the principles of the 1840 treaty.

It declared: "By 1864, as a result of the omission to provide them with adequate land, the Ngai Tahu were in a pitiable condition: an impoverished, people largely confined on uneconomic patches of land, almost entirely isolated

from mainstream European development, neglected by government at both central and provincial level, marginalised and struggling to survive both individually and as a people."

Tribal disintegration followed and "impoverishment of a proud and loyal tribe."

There was no evidence that at any time during the 20 years of land purchases the govern-

ment ever had regard to its obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi, the tribunal said.

But it rejected the tribe's claim that 3.2 million hectares in the central South Island of New Zealand had not been meant to be included in an 1864 land purchase. The land contains large lakes, hydro-electric works, mountains and high country pastoral lands.

The tribunal also rejected Ngai Tahu's claim that 1.1 mil-

lion acres of Southern Flordland was not sold to the government.

But it recommended that the tribe and the government should have joint ownership of management of Lake Ellesmere near the city of Christchurch in the South Island. The Ngai Tahu said the lake had spiritual significance and was an important source of food such as eels and flounders.

The Waitangi tribunal has made few detailed recommendations because the Ngai Tahu and the government asked it to give its findings on the principal issues and leave them to negotiate a settlement.

But the tribunal recommended the government should pay the tribe NZ\$1.4 million (US\$924,000) to cover its costs for presenting its submissions and for future negotiations.

The Waitangi Tribunal's decision came after more than three years of hearings during which it received 900 submissions and heard from 262 witnesses, collecting an eight-metre-high pile of evidence.

Ngai Tahu leader Tipene O'Regan, who is of Maori and Irish descent, said the tri-

bunal's overall findings were "a vindication of the generations of Ngai Tahu who have struggled to have the tribe's grievances carefully heard and judicially assessed."

Prime Minister Jim Bolger and Maori Affairs Minister Winston Peters have promised the government's commitment to a "fair, just and affordable" resolution of the substantive issues in the Ngai Tahu claim.

Mr. Peters, himself part-Maori, said the Ngai Tahu would have to present a total economic plan to the government as part of the settlement of the land claims.

The Ngai Tahu are likely to be given part-ownership and control of some national parks in the South Island. But Mr. Peters has made it clear no privately-owned land will be taken from its present owners and handed back to the tribe.

Ngai Tahu's O'Regan says some of any cash compensation received may be used to provide members of the tribe with health and retirement benefits.

The Waitangi Tribunal, which currently has over 100 Maori claims before it, has still to rule on Ngai Tahu claims to fishing rights — *Depthnews Asia*

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

To help the victims

Sir, Your "Commentary", Mahfuz Anam's "The Third View" and the brilliantly written editorial column of Tuesday's issue of your esteemed paper all tried to evoke some element of spontaneity from Dhaka's populace, to provide help to the cyclone affected victims. Perhaps political parties will come out on the streets of Dhaka now. Perhaps a spate of cultural functions will succeed in jerking tears as well as cash. But whatever happens now, perhaps it will be too little, too late.

Chittagong's frightful rendezvous with nature is a case of history repeating itself. Remember 1970. And we all know the consequences of the apathy, the indifference and unconcern shown by Islamabad at that time. People who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

Perhaps the MPs from Chittagong would like to comment through your esteemed columns. Or would they?

T. Ahmed
Motijheel, Dhaka.

Ads on TV

Sir, Generally our Television programmes are quite boring, this is speaking about the ones locally produced and directed. Of course, there are some which are interesting, but they are few and rare. Besides, once an interesting serial is started there is little guarantee that it will continue. For almost every other good programme is discontinued at the first chance.

Talking about TV commercials, one better not think about them. First of all they are in most cases, extremely boring, lack imagination, and have no message for the viewers, whatsoever. It is often difficult to differentiate between one advertisement and the other. All are same drab, giving lectures, and moving slowly.

Please let us have some imagination and produce quality ads, in order to sell our merchandise. We television viewers are tired of the same boring trend advertisements, so much so that we do not even remember the product advertised!

Tariq Aziz
Gulshan, Dhaka.

Of magazines and videos

Sir, Mr. M. Zahidul Haque of Bangladesh Agricultural College seems most concerned about the existence of our film industry so he has not hastened to claim foreign books and movies as being 'obscene' and 'affecting the market of clean, decent country magazines and books.' (?) (Letter: 29-4-91). He mentions about Ms Subarana Mustafa's 'Ghorsanger', suspended because she faced marketing problems. On the other hand 'Sananda', an Indian magazine, found its way to reach the people's interest. Mr Haque does not say why an Indian periodical could capture interest — but very cleverly tries to prove it carries 'obscene' articles or stories or may be even pictures. I wonder how he got all

these data without going through most of the items. He is greatly mistaken about the video films either because he possesses strictly limited information, or is simply biased. About our film industry, Mr Haque should take note of the fact that now-a-days most of our Bangla movies are 'carbon copies' of super hit Indian movies — past and present.

Video shops supplying 'obscene films' (?) ... It is best left upto the viewers. After all, no one is total Holy nor an angel, but a human being. Those who enjoy good movies never go near the pornographic movies which the writer has completely avoided mentioning! To save an industry it is our duty to do something for the people instead of only trying to pocket money at the cost of the movie-goers' passion. This does more harm than good to a nation. What has Haque to say about the standard of our magazines and movies?

The past Government performed a 'novel act' by stopping the film 'Shiva' from being distributed and shown in the capital city though it had nothing to do with obscenity but the ills of an autocratic government or rule!

Nahtasha Kamal.
Dhaka.

ABCS

Sir, I would like to take advantage of this column to circulate that an 'Association of British Council Scholars (ABCS)' has been formed. The aim of ABCS, as per constitution, shall be perpetuation of the links between Britain and Bangladesh which may mutually beneficial to the British Council and the Scholars. Any person who has travelled overseas under the

auspices of the British Council is eligible to become a member of the association. The association has plans to undertake a number of socio-cultural and welfare oriented projects with the participation and cooperation of its members. Recognizing the importance of increasing participation of women in all aspects of life, the ABCS has created provision for a special 'Women's Subcommittee'. British Council Scholars interested to become members of the association may contact, ABCS, P.O. Box 3116, Dhaka.

M Zahidul Haque
A member of ABCS.

Overloaded buses

Sir, Recently there was a very serious accident at Dhamrai, where many valuable lives were lost. The accident occurred mainly due to overloading of passengers obviously to collect more money than the capacity permits. The bus owners are only interested in getting as much money as possible no matter what happens to those who board their vehicles. It is really inhuman of them, but that is the way they operate.

The saddest part is that even after such a big tragedy, we still observe that buses are plying on the road, with passengers clinging on and hanging from all sides.

Now, for heavens sake(!), this must stop. Please let us not kill people deliberately. As it is they are dying due to numerous reasons — diarrhoea, cyclone, etc. We do not need any more deaths.

The government must come up with really tough traffic regulation to combat carelessness on the part of the drivers as well as those who own these vehicles.

Rahman Talukdar
Kalabagan, Dhaka.

OPINION

Prize Bonds

There are certain other decisions which, it seems, authorities have very abruptly made with little object of improvement behind and despite public grievances ventilated from time to time in the national dailies. The authorities seem to have taken no care to consider the matter or turned their deaf ears to that and even did not think it necessary to let the people know the justification of such actions. I am inclined to mention one, amongst such things:

Prize Bond is one of the most important National Savings schemes. People buy and hold 10-Taka and 50-Taka Bonds with a fond hope to better their lot by winning prizes through periodical draws. The Government, for reasons best known to them, at first fixed limit of six years for claiming prizes against winning Bonds and later reduced the period to one year. Curiously enough although decisions were taken by appropriate authorities on no occasion the decision was given any publicity.

The authorities should know well that the persons purchasing and preserving Prize Bonds do not get any benefit whatsoever, until and unless they succeed in winning a prize. But yet they hold the Bonds in spite of the fact that they could get certain corresponding monetary benefit by investing the amount in savings accounts or in any other form.

If anyone succeeds to win a prize his entitlement to get the prize money should not be forfeited for any period. If the winner fails to put forth a claim within any reasonable time, his claim for the prize money must subsist for all the time. In fact when the system was introduced, no such time limit was prescribed, nor there seemed any necessity for such a time limit whatsoever. The decision to prescribe a time limit for claiming prize money does not sound well and it does not exist anywhere.

Most of the Bond holders do not find sufficient time to verify their Bond numbers with the prize winning list when published and defer the same for a period to find a comparatively leisure time to attend to

it. In such an event, by dint of the government decision, they are sure to forego their right to the prize money. For failure to put forth one's claim for prize money, it is the Bond holder who is to suffer for getting delayed payment, and in fact no one else loses anything — the prize money remains in the government exchequer until it is drawn.

Accordingly it is for the National Savings authorities to take suitable steps to do away with the system of time limit. They should also continue to prepare and circulate list of unclaimed Bonds as before for the benefit of Bond purchasers.

Further, purchase and sale of Prize Bonds as per government scheme is to be done at the Banks and Post Offices. But numerous grievances made by letter-writers in the national dailies show that most of the Bank branches do not perform this part of job and they simply express regret that Prize Bonds are not available there. They perhaps think that it is an extra and avoidable burden. The Bangladesh Bank and the Ministry of Finance who have positive role of superintendency over such institutions also do not appear to have taken any notice of such accusations.

As Prize Bond is an important system that plays dominant part in the growth of national capital, any decision which is bound to retard the efficacy of such a scheme is not desirable. Persons instrumental for originating matters for such retrograde step should be pointed and the matter deserves careful and sympathetic consideration of the authorities apart from other matters relating to Prize Bond drawing etc. that also come in national dailies from time to time.

It is for the appropriate authorities to study the statistics to examine whether the Prize Bond is gaining or losing popularity day by day due to imposition of time limit and it is easy for them to examine what were the numbers or amounts of Bonds in circulation before and after such decision.

S.M. Hussain
Motijheel C/A, Dhaka.