

India After the Polls

With the stage set for the return of the Congress (I) Party to power in India, there will be a sigh of relief throughout the vast country that the world's largest democracy seems to have been spared of yet another uncertainty, a hung parliament forcing the electorate to face fresh polls. Behind the sigh also lies the satisfaction that it is the Congress (I) and not the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or even the Janata Dal (National Front) which forms the next government. For Congress (I), it is indeed very much like coming home — from the cold.

Whether one should attribute this re-emergence of the 106-year old party to the sympathy wave that swept the country on the assassination of its leader Rajiv Gandhi, to the long-expected backlash against the communal politics of the BJP or to the confused and divided prospects faced by the National Front is no longer an academic issue. The answer, still subject of a careful study, would throw some light on the voting trends in the polls, on the level of maturity reached by the electorate and, above all, on the nature and dimension of the influence still exerted on the masses by BJP which, by the latest count, has won 95 seats in the House of 545, — by no means, a mean achievement.

While Congress (I) is all set to take power, it has won only half the battle in giving India a stable and effective government. Among many formidable post-election challenges it faces now, the task of turning its single party majority into one that gives it a reasonably commanding position in the parliament is undoubtedly at the top of the list. All indications suggest that, in order to keep out the BJP, most secular parties, from the leftist Communists to centrist Janata, would support the Congress government. Whether they will do so by entering into coalition or by merely giving it the issue-based support, exactly what the Congress under the late Rajiv Gandhi had done to the ill-fated Chandr a Sekhar government remains unclear. As long as Congress is unable to gain a clear majority, which seems to be the case today, the alignment of parties remains a vital issue. Among political analysts, the consensus is that ideally the new Congress (I) administration should set up a coalition with like-minded parties and share with them the responsibility of running the government. The alternative could well be the repetition of the situation when the Congress (I) had turned its back on the minority Sekhar administration and brought it down.

How this challenge, the challenge of giving India a stable government is met depends largely on the leadership that emerges through current uncertainties. Without Rajiv Gandhi, Congress (I) is very much a party of the equals, a though some may be more equal than others. The situation is, in some ways, similar to the one faced by the organisation after the death of Pandit Nehru, before the arrival on the scene of the late Lal Bahadur Shastri. The danger is that whether or not the party eventually finds a new Shastri, it may just now settle for either a covert "Committee rule" at the leadership level or a compromise Prime Minister, a move, dictated by expediency, can only produce a weak and an ineffective government.

The Indian electorate has shown its good sense in voting Congress (I) back to power. It is now for the party to demonstrate the necessary understanding and wisdom in tackling the challenges facing the country. A political crisis in India can produce all kinds of repercussions throughout the South Asian region. Hence the concern felt in this country over what lies ahead of India is based as much on its friendship with a neighbour as on its own enlightened self-interest.

Our Delicious Fruits

The mangoes are here — and not too soon either. The seasonal wait for this mouth-watering delight is well worth every second of it. For a few months each year every one of us — children and adults alike — go into a mango eating frenzy which no other fruit habit can match. But the tragedy is that the future of this annual feast is increasingly becoming uncertain. Mango buff and experts are both complaining that the mango growing season is becoming shorter — the fruits come late, and disappear early. There are many reasons for it, of which the most important one is that hardly any scientific research is going into improving its growing process.

This brings us to the broader issue of fruit cultivation in general and what we can do to improve their quality and availability. If the example of Thailand is anything to go by, increased fruit cultivation can not only provide additional nutrition into our daily diet, but also become an important contribution in expanding the national economy.

The truth is that we have not yet taken our fruits very seriously. They are there and we just enjoy their bounty. They are cultivated in the age old method. Given the richness of our soil and the numerous varieties of fruits that are traditionally grown here, a look into the possibilities of introducing scientific methods of growing them deserves a serious attention from the authorities concerned.

At some stage we will have to think of mechanising our fruit growing process and canning our fruits and exporting them for the foreign markets. This will necessitate setting up a standard fruit canning and preserving industry. Recently some developing countries have achieved remarkable success in perfecting this rather not too high-tech industry, example which we think we can emulate rather easily.

Some sort of a task force, with expertise from the relevant ministries, research bodies and members of the private sector already in this business, could perhaps be constituted to take a fresh look into what we can do to grow our fruits more and turn them into major foreign exchange earners.

FOR a country to be classified as least developed, one or more of the following three criteria should be fulfilled: (i) less than 10 per cent share of manufacturing sector in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP); (ii) only up to one-fifth of the adult population literate; and, (iii) per capita GDP below 450 US dollars. In Bangladesh today, share of manufacturing exceeds 10 per cent, one-third of the adult population is literate but per capita income is way below at 177 US dollars (1988 estimates) only.

The primary target for the transition from LDC to NIC should include a double digit growth rate sustained for at least the next two decades so that the middle-income status is achieved by the early part of the next century. The crucial question is do we have the resource potential for such rapid expansion of the economy?

Yes we have. Prospects for growth are many and plentiful in Bangladesh today.

The net cultivated area of 21 million acres (likely to be available by the year 2010) can result in 50 million acres of total cropped area through

Resource Base for Growth

promotion of intensive irrigated agriculture. Average yield of rice (excluding broadcast aman) can be doubled since it has remained at half the East Asian yield levels. Self-sufficiency in cereal production, the illusive dream of successive governments in Bangladesh, can then be achieved with less than 50 per cent of the total cropped area.

Land would thus be released for cultivation of high value crops for export in particular. Varieties of agro-processing would then inevitably follow. As for example, the world export of cut flowers and potted plants is estimated at around ten billion US dollars and it is growing at the rate of five per cent per annum. As little as two and a half per cent share of that market by the year 2000 would amount to a foreign exchange earning of 283 million US dollars, more than what was earned from raw jute exports in 1989-90.

The extensive water resources within national boundaries and the territorial and economic zones in the Bay of Bengal could be the basis for emergence of Bangladesh as an important fishing nation of the world. At present, 95 per cent of the marine landings are obtained from artisanal fishery. The real deep-sea fishing has so far remained only marginal. Fish is very rapidly becoming

of pulp wood combined with other agro products like jute cuttings can result in a vast expansion of the pulp and paper industries.

Bangladesh is fortunate in possession over 13 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves. Substantial coal deposits at exploitable depths have recently been discovered.

The government forest land of 5.38 million hectare equals to one-fourth of the net cultivated land of Bangladesh. Yet one-third of that forest land is virtually barren. Intensive forest plantations and agro-forestry can substantially increase income and employment. Quick growing species

Prospects of finding new hydro-carbon reserves are indeed very bright. In addition, electricity can be imported from Nepal as well as Assam state of India. The peat deposits in the south-west is awaiting exploitation for the last two decades. It could be a valuable source of domestic fuel as well as electricity.

Above all, the large pool of relatively cheap labour should play a significant role in the competitive advantage of nation's firms as the rapid

growth of manufacturing sector in low wage economies such as Hongkong, Taiwan and more recently Thailand attests. With the rise in the wage levels and infrastructural constraints in south-east and east Asia, there is no reason why a manufacturing growth rate of above 10 per cent during the next 20 years is not feasible in Bangladesh.

Other conditions necessary for rapid manufacturing growth, such as a well-developed banking sector, adequate port facilities, inland waterways offering the cheapest form of transport, modern telecommunications are also fulfilled by Bangladesh. Also it is not only unskilled labour, graduate engineers and other technical workers lack adequate opportunities within the country and therefore seek employment abroad.

No doubt entrepreneurial skill was lacking in the country during early 1970s. But within

the last two decades, an entrepreneurial class has emerged and given adequate training and incentives, they can play a leading role in the development of the manufacturing sector. A case in point is the growth of garment industry: from a zero base in the early 1970s, the total value of garment exports now amount to half a billion dollars. Very soon it can rise up to a billion dollars and its backward linkage with domestic manufacturing of fabrics and spinning of yarn is possible.

Following the footsteps of garment, foot-loose industries such as footwear, toys, plastic goods and electronics should be attracted to sustain the high growth rate of the manufacturing sector. Transition from LDC to NIC would largely depend on our capacity to attract the importers, manufacturers and investors from abroad to the strong competitive potentials of the large unutilized manpower resources of the country. But the only way such competitive potentials can be realised is hard work and discipline.

From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

The preferred source of protein in Europe and North America. The vigorous growth of the sector would therefore complement the growing demand in the world market.

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The Tottenham 3: A New Challenge to British Justice

Heenan Bhatti and Shaun Waterman write from London

RELEASE of Britain's "Birmingham Six" has served to highlight other possible miscarriages of justice within the British legal system. Prominent among these is the case of three men who have become known as the "Tottenham Three."

The Birmingham Six were convicted of an Irish Republican Army (IRA) bombing in Birmingham in 1974. They spent 17 years in jail and were released this year, after a revealing inquiry which uncovered layers of fabricated evidence and testimony.

The Tottenham Three were jailed in 1987 for the murder of a policeman which they claim they did not commit. Their case has been taken up by civil rights campaigners who believe the evidence which led to their conviction was seriously flawed.

Their sentencing came after what police called the "worst rioting on mainland Britain." The rioting was a response to a police raid on the flat of a black pensioner in Tottenham, North London in late 1985. In the course of the raid, a pensioner, Cynthia Jarrett, died of a heart attack.

The incident started a violent confrontation between youths and the police. Tension had been running high for some time already. Bricks were thrown, cars went up in flames and a policeman died when youths attacked and stabbed him several times.

The police, outraged by their colleague's murder, mounted what became the biggest-ever hunt in London to find the culprits.

They raided more than 200 homes, arrested 369 people and analysed over 1,000 photographs to try to identify the murderers.

Over a year later, six people were brought to trial. Predictably, British tabloid newspapers had a field day demonising the accused. One even printed a front-page photograph of one of the accused, saying it was the face of an accused cop-killer.

It was in this climate that three men were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment for the policeman's murder. They were Winston

The recent release of the Birmingham Six and the admission by the British courts that they were wrongly convicted has given new hope to another group of prisoners. The "Tottenham 3" were convicted in 1987 of killing a police officer, but have always maintained their innocence.

Scott, 32, Engh Raghip, 25 and Mark Braithwaite, 23.

The three have always maintained their innocence, and their case has been taken up by members of Parliament, by a local committee formed for their defence and by Amnesty International which has called for a review of the convictions.

The MP for Tottenham, Bernie Grant, said: "The Birmingham Six case has made people realise that the British justice system can wrongly convict people and that there should be a better system of appeal."

Silcott, Raghip and Braithwaite were convicted on the basis of their uncorroborated confessions made during police questioning while they had no access to lawyers.

Raghip and Braithwaite took back their confessions once they had been allowed to see lawyers. In court they pro-

duced evidence to show that they were elsewhere on the night. Their confessions, they said, had been made under duress during long periods of police questioning.

Their claims would appear to be supported by new facts. One of these is psychological evidence which shows that Raghip has a low mental age; his IQ is just 73 and he is highly suggestible according to a qualified doctor.

Mark Braithwaite is claustrophobic, according to another doctor. He was questioned in a small police cell, and in fact had persisted in calling the police from his cell, asking to be questioned. The reason he called, say his defenders, was to escape his claustrophobia, not to admit to murder.

Braithwaite made an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, but there, the British government success-

fully argued that there were avenues within the British criminal justice system that could still be pursued, namely the appeal procedure.

Back in Britain, however, Braithwaite's attempts to gain access to the appeal procedure have been denied, despite renewed calls by supportive campaigners.

Silcott was convicted partly on the basis of a short statement he is alleged to have made during police interrogation, and which he now says is not an accurate account of what he said. Many argue the content of the statement does not even constitute a confession.

Police say this evidence is backed up by statements they took from three accused youths implicating Silcott. Campaigners maintain that not only is the evidence false, it has cast serious doubt on police behaviour during their in-

vestigations. A psychologist testified that one of the youths had a mental age of seven and a severely diminished ability to remember events. In addition, he had been interviewed six times while he was held for three days and had no access to a lawyer — which is illegal.

The second youth said he had seen Silcott commit the murder, but his evidence collapsed in court. The third, Jason Hill, aged 13 at the time, had been questioned all but naked and held incommunicado for 48 hours.

Circumstances such as these have led to questions about the lengths police will go to in order to secure a conviction. The senior police officer who dealt with the third youth was criticised by the judge at the original trial and also disciplined by an internal police hearing for the way he handled the youth.

The judge described the evidence of the three juveniles as "fantastical" and he directed

the jury to find them innocent. The jury did not follow the judge's directive, and many blame the fact that the jury was not permitted to hear the legal discussion which led to the dismissal of the testimony of the youths or why the judge so trenchantly criticised police handling of the case.

The problem for the Tottenham Three is that the appeal system can be used only if legal mistakes took place or if new evidence comes to light. Neither of these can be used in this case.

Their convictions were based on statements made without the presence of a lawyer — a practice permitted nowhere else in Europe. Amnesty International has already criticised this aspect of British law.

The case of the Tottenham Three is likely to be high on the agenda of the Royal Commission set up to look into the fairness of the British system of justice, in response to the case of the Birmingham Six.

The process of justice can be a long one. The Birmingham Six had to wait 17 years. Said Winston Silcott: "People ask, aren't you excited? Of course. But you can't get too hyped up. This is a long struggle. You have to pace yourself." — GEMINI NEWS



Predictably, the British tabloid newspapers had a field day!

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.

Students and varsities

Sir, Dhaka University has been the torch bearer of the Language Movement, the spirit of the Liberation War and finally the architect of Ershad's downfall and rebirth of Democracy. Does the legacy end there?

The hopes and aspirations of the people of Bangladesh have always been linked to the Dhaka University and when politicians failed, the students delivered. The recent happenings at the Dhaka and Chittagong universities are, in fact, manifestations of the gangrene which has been spreading in the educational sphere. The silent majority watches in anguish as they (?) destroy our glorious past and the hopes of our children brick by brick. Are we left with no other alternative but to hang down our heads in shame and watch our educational institutions turn into the 'Chernobyls' of Bangladesh?

Lutful Anis Ahmed
Agrabad C/A, Chittagong.

Canal digging

Sir, The new government is contemplating to re-start the 'Canal digging programme' which was introduced by late President Ziaur Rahman. Dig-

ging of canals to preserve water is a practical step toward ensuring irrigation facilities during the dry season. These canals may also be used for fish and poultry culture. The hydrological and agricultural experts also recommended digging of such canals for effective water management.

But I like to recall our past experience on canal digging. Many canals were excavated but most of them couldn't be used due to unscientific planning and digging. I feel that a well-planned and technically sound canal digging programme should be undertaken instead of staging mere political propaganda.

M. Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor,
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A scene on the street

Sir, I appreciate the attitude of Ms Sabah Chowdhury in 'Dhaka Day by Day' (June 7) in your daily. She is bold enough to highlight a woman newspaper hawker and encourage the new scope of occupation towards struggle for survival. But unfortunately we do not have the same mentality. I saw several times how she begged people to take pity

on her by purchasing a magazine but in vain. I think she would get alms more easily than she is earning the same amount by selling a magazine. The cost of a magazine is less than that of the two sticks of cigarette of a banned brand which we do not bother to consume one pack a day. I have observed in Kuwait that the hawkers at every traffic signal are quite busy and they pass by the waiting cars only once. The buyer prepares the desired coin not to waste time and not to disturb the traffic movement. I hope we shall learn to honour any person who works and does not beg.

Zafar Shaheen
Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

A job well done

Sir, Operation Sea Angel is complete now. Everything done by the (bionic) US marines for the wretched Bangladeshis in the southern belt devastated by this April cyclone is a splendid example of humanitarian service. The unparalleled contributions of the Gulf War heroes, on way back home, to the sufferers of climatic assault on this LDC will survive in the memory of civilized earthlings. Any attempt to make value judgements on the performances of an individual or of a group trying to get the leftover of the season's big bite back in place again will be an inhuman gesture. This is simply not an occasion for neat-picking, rather a period to stand by the afflicted humanity instead — a time to forgive and forget the

M. Rahman
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Mymensingh 2200.

The misplaced poet

Sir, Your second editorial on the National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (May 26) was misplaced. It should have been the leader. A photograph of the poet should also have topped the news item on his 92nd birth anniversary. It certainly is an occasion when picture and words go meaningfully together.

You are admittedly free to exercise your editorial discretion. But I think I have given vent to the feeling of a very large number of your readers who firmly believe that the poet's uniqueness in the field of Bengali literature should be more respectfully reflected in the press.

And it indeed is very strange that the news of the function on the birth anniversaries of Poet Rabindranath Tagore and Poet Nazrul Islam was not considered important enough to be flashed on the first page of your paper. This is disappointing.

Shabnam Huq
Siddeswari, Dhaka.

OPINION

Curing Our Health Woes

Many thanks for your timely editorial of June 12, titled "Curing Our Health Woes." You seem to have gone for reorganisation of "Available resources to make existing facilities more efficient."

This should be the demand of all walks of people in a democratic setup. Health woes are not all caused by doctors and as such, unlike the presently held views, cannot be cured by the doctors and their medical associations alone. At present, doctors in the upazilas are controlled by the upazila chairman; the former are in a regular service whereas the latter are not so regulated. Democracy is yet to be practised as to allow its norms to pervade through all cadres of the society. Democracy does not only mean the government by the people, for the people, by the people; it also means maximum benefit to be derived by the optimum utilization of resources.

In the health sector, as in others sectors, we are constrained with money-power-resources, but our manpower resources as on today stand surplus and unutilized. Not only the products of eight medical colleges but of the eighteen homoeopathic medical colleges numbering over six thousand today are yet to be gainfully employed.

Homoeopathy is recognised by the government as an alternative system of medicine. The Homoeopathic Board is established under the Act of the Parliament in 1965. The Health Ministry has recently established the Directorate of Homoeopathy and Indigenous Medicine under the Directorate General of Health Services. A degree Homoeopathic College, at par with any other medical college in the country — a ten crore taka project — was envisaged as early as 1978 by the late President Ziaur Rahman in the Second Five-Year Plan period and it came into a reality by 1990.

All these developments are the expression of the will of the people and in the democratic climate, as now prevailing in the country, it is fervently hoped that homoeopathy will come up with its due share in the health service management of the country, in curing our health woes. By homoeopathy alone the problem of "chronic absenteeism of doctors posted in the upazilas"

can be solved. Homoeopaths are doctors who although not so sophisticated as their brethren in profession, but are available in abundance in the countryside. Their armoury is a chest of a few phials of globules plus their own brain computer powerpacked with disks of disease conditions.

I was astonished to see a philanthropic institution in a village off one hour's journey from Dhaka city over the Friendship Bridge across the Buriganga where three homoeopaths were serving one lakh patients annually over a hinterland of over 25 kilometers for the last six years.

Silently, these homoeopathic doctors were sharing the load of our health woes that the Health Service was supposed to bear! It is time the government and the newly created Directorate of Homoeopathy should assess the impact of this homoeopathic medical care upon the health service and gainfully utilize the services of this homoeopathic manpower that is available in the country.

As for the gainful employment of the surplus medical manpower, a suggestion was put forward to the Director General of Health Services in 1985 at his own behest. Soon after he retired, and successfully there were five in the services, but perhaps no one cared to know the fate of the plan. It was time when every one was busy saving one's own skin and deriving whatever benefit for oneself.

The plan, in essence, was to employ doctors in the industries under the Directorate of Industrial Health in a planned way. If all the industries were provided health and medical care service by the Government under the Ministry of Health, then a minimum of ten thousand doctors could be absorbed overnight. The cost of this medical care service, as has been the practice, will be borne by the beneficiaries i.e. the industries concerned. Industries mean sophisticated and most of our medical personnel would prefer the industries to upazilas. Health service will boost the health of industrial workers who, in turn, will help educate the whole nation to take care of its own health.

Badrul Alam,
AGB Colony, Dhaka.