

Keeping Tab on pre-Eid Traffic and Prices

Strike in one transport sector or the other has been a routine experience for us prior to any major festival. If on earlier occasions there had been either the private transporters' or the truck drivers' shut-down there is this time around the launch operators' strike, now well into its fifth day.

In the normal course such a spate in demands on the other modes of transport would make their operations extremely profitable but reports suggest that those who run the long distance coaches are lustfully charging twice or thrice the normal fare from passengers in distress and without option of a river journey.

The situation would have eased somewhat if all the various special train services offered during the festival season would run according to promise. It has been reported that sometimes there is gap between the announcement made and the reality on the ground.

One aspect of the chaotic transportation scene has got our hackles up. Reports and photographs show that transport spaces that are out of bounds for passengers because of the high risks involved are being occupied by them.

We have to put a halt to all these, no matter what it takes to do that, otherwise we shall see disasters on a mass scale in not-too-distant a future marring the very spirit of festivals.

One dreads very much a strike or a natural disaster for the inducement it can give to most of the traders to jack up their prices. Even though a festival season like the Eid provides them with the rare opportunity of earning a lot by horizontal sales they tend to look for a vertical get-rich-quick profiteering.

Return of Shilpacharya's Art Pieces

After long two years the police have recovered 10 out of the 15 paintings stolen from Jainul Abedin Sangrahashala, an art museum named after the great Shilpacharya, in Mymensingh. Credit certainly goes to the men in uniform for this outstanding, although belated, salvage work.

This euphoria however does not last long when we hear the man, from whose possession those 10 pieces have been recovered, say that the other five have been thrown away because they were in a poor condition.

So, the claim he has made about doing away with the other missing five pieces may indeed be a hoax. Maybe, he has already sold them to local or foreign art smugglers.

For Iqbaluddin does not look like any ordinary offender, he is a villain who is aware of the value of those art works and yet does not feel remorse for leaving the nation poorer.

Evidently, this theft has been committed with this man's active co-operation if not directly by himself. He had access to Shilpacharya's house and the art museum. Similar stories about the smuggling of antiques, particularly the stone and bronze statues of past centuries, have been reported in newspapers.

THE DAILY STAR PUBLIC DEBATE

THE PROPOSITION IS: SHOULD THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS BE HELD UNDER A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT?

WHY...?

The Arguments of Zillur Rahman, General Secretary, Bangladesh Awami League:

ALLOT is the best medium to ascertain public opinion and there is no alternative to a free and fair poll to have the verdict of the people. But the purpose of any poll will be totally defeated if the people are deprived of the opportunity to express their opinion freely.

Certain quarters allege that Bangabandhu tried to remain in power for life by introducing one-party rule in 1975. They are totally wrong. Bangabandhu's desire was to ensure democracy for the have-nots and the exploited masses for which he formed the BAKSAL after dissolving his party Awami League and all other parties.

Late Ziaur Rahman, during his rule, conducted a referendum and obtained 96 per cent of votes. Can anyone believe that a candidate can get 96 per cent votes? It is impossible and absurd. It was a farce in the name of a referendum.

After him, Ershad grabbed power. This man did everything in the name of elections. He adopted all unfair means - rigging, vote dacoity, media coup, terrorism - and what not? And he established himself as an autocrat, and we know all about his misrule.

We, along with the BNP and others, waged an all-out movement against Ershad and dislodged him from power and an election was held in 1991 under a caretaker government. BNP was then much vocal for a caretaker government. But now BNP is against the election under a caretaker government, terming it 'unconstitutional'.

According to election rules, after announcement of an election schedule for a constituency, the area concerned remains under the jurisdiction of the Election Commission. The government cannot transfer any official from that area nor can appoint any until the election is over.

Hydraulic horns Sir, After many protests from environmentalists, doctors, and public in general, last December our government was kind enough to issue orders prohibiting import and use of hydraulic horns by all vehicles. This was a relief particularly to people residing on main streets of Dhaka city.

Interviews by Chapal Bashar

party during the election. 2. After the declaration of the by-election schedule, a new Superintendent of Police was appointed for Magura.

3. Musclemen belonging to outlawed Sarbahara Party were detained in the jails in and around Magura. But on the eve of the by-election, these people were released who were found to campaign for the BNP candidate and terrorise the voters.

4. About a dozen of ministers and state ministers were in Magura for about a month for campaigning during which they misused their official power. They made so many commitments for development and even provided grants which influenced a number of voters. This is totally illegal.

5. Even some special flights were arranged to Jessore to carry ministers and others for campaigning in Magura. 6. The seized goods like cloths, which were stored in, Jessore Custom House, were distributed as relief goods by some ministers at certain areas of Magura to influence the voters.

7. The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) went to Magura before the election day. He proposed to form an observation team comprising representatives of the EC and also of major parties including BNP. All the parties agreed to join the team, but BNP backed out at the last moment.

It is a known fact what happened on the election day in Magura. The results show that 74 per cent of the voters of the constituency turned out to cast their votes, while in some centres the turn out rate was around 94 per cent. Can anyone believe it?

Let me mention that, in the elections of 1954, the United Front led by Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazul Haque, Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy, and Maulana Bhashani won the election with a landslide victory over the Muslim League. In that election, the turn out of voters was 56 per cent. Even in the elections of 1991, little over 54 per cent of the total voters cast their votes.

So it is clear that the ruling party resorted to massive rigging in Magura by-election for which the turn out of voters was recorded so high. In fact, the turn out of voters was very small due to terror unleashed by the ruling party.

BTV news on satellite Sir, A news item on the last page of your paper on April 25 has made me uneasy. The bulletins of 10 and 8 pm, if cast around the globe, will, I fear, give a bad impression of our country. These news bulletins still are more or less the propaganda about the government and/or ruling party or its chief.

WHY NOT...?

The Arguments of Abdus Salam Talukder, Secretary-General, Bangladesh Nationalist Party:

THERE is no provision for the caretaker government in country's constitution. The demand for holding parliament elections under a caretaker government is not only against the democratic spirit, but also contrary to parliamentary political culture.

The people elected a sovereign parliament through free, fair and impartial polls held on February 27, 1991 - and an elected government having people's mandate is now ruling the country with a tenure of five years. In this circumstance, replacement of the elected government by an unelected one will only mean lack of confidence in people's verdict.

Elections are never conducted by any government. According to the constitution of Bangladesh, the Election Commission is an independent institution which conducts all the elections. Besides conducting the parliament elections in 1991, the present Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) also conducted polls of some 4000 Union Parishads, about 100 municipalities and four city corporations.

The CEC also successfully conducted 16 by-elections of the Jatiya Sangsad. No complaint or question was raised against these elections except that of Magura-2. Objections were raised about the results of Mirpur-by-election for which the Election Commission recounted the ballots and found the results same as before.

Therefore, raising of the demand for a caretaker government on the basis of the results of only one by-election, is not at all justified. If the results of the Magura by-polls would have gone in favour of the opposition, it would neither bring them to power nor dislodge the BNP government.

The anti-Ershad movement was initiated on the basis of five-point charter of demands. But those five points did not contain any demand for establishing a caretaker government. The verdict of the people could not be reflected in the successive elections held during Ershad's rule. The examples of such 'elections' led the political parties to raise demand for holding national elections under a neutral and non-partisan government at a later stage after the 5-point movement. The political alliances continued their movement with the active support of the people to realise this demand for which Ershad was finally compelled to resign.

So, the demand for an election under a neutral and non-partisan government was raised during the five-point movement waged against an illegal military government. The government of Begum Khaleda Zia, which is now in power, was elected through a free, fair and impartial poll. The election was acclaimed to have been the most fair ever held in this country not only by the people of Bangladesh but also by the international community.

The perspective of Ershad regime and that of the present government is not the same and cannot be the same. The opposition's demand for a caretaker government not only puts the past illegal government at par with an elected one, it also reflects their (opposition) lack of confidence in the people's verdict. It also casts an aspersion on people's will and power, which does not appear to be acceptable to them.

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ment), then those elections will have to be held and supervised by the Election Commission. In that case how such elections (of the local government bodies) will be considered as legal and acceptable?

The local government bodies are also elected through the same electoral process as the election to the parliament. There cannot be any distinction as such between the people's representatives at various tiers, except for the difference of power they enjoy and the difference of field of activities. May I ask the opposition that under which government the local body elections as well as by-elections to the parliament would be held (assuming that the national election is held under a caretaker government)?

With the passage of 12th amendment bill, we switched over from presidential system to a parliamentary one. Our purpose was to make the parliament sovereign and to allow the elected government to function for a specific tenure. During the presidential system, the parliament was not sovereign in true sense. Another objective of ours in adopting parliamentary system was to ensure accountability of the government. And also to bring an end to the process of one-man rule.

The 12th amendment bill was prepared by a committee and scrutinised in detail and finally passed by the House through a consensus. Our aim was to avoid any infringement between the sovereign parliament and the elected government.

I would like to mention that during the scrutiny of the draft of 12th amendment bill by the parliamentary committee, the inclusion of a provision for the caretaker government was suggested by two members of the committee - Rashed Khan Menon of Workers Party and Sheikh Ansar Ali of Jamaat-Islami. But the members belonging to Awami League and BNP declined even to discuss the suggestion and finally it was rejected by both the AL and BNP. But, now the Awami League has raised that very demand. I wonder, what is their motive?

The opposition members who are now staying outside the House, have raised the demand for a caretaker government. But how this issue can be settled if they do not join the parliament session? So, I urge them to join the session and to strive for making the parliament more effective.

Tomorrow's interview: Mohammad Nasim, Chief Whip of the Opposition in Parliament and Organising Secretary, Bangladesh Awami League, and the day after tomorrow: Rafiqul Islam Miah, Member, Standing Committee, BNP and Minister for Housing and Works.

To the Editor...

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OPINION

Fermat's Last Theorem

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