

E C Gherao

Saturday's Election Commission 'gherao' by the AL and the same action by JP yesterday, brings home a new bone of contention in an already charged political scene.

There are two sides to the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner. The purely legal side and the equally important one of his general acceptability, a non-partisan stature, and an image that is beyond reproach of any kind.

The extent of callousness becomes critical when seen in light of the political stalemate that is in existence for more than a year now.

We think that the opposition is correct when it criticizes the process of the CEC's appointment. But we are, frankly, a bit worried as to how far the opposition will go to vent its criticism.

Now that all sorts of protests have been lodged, the opposition's full attention should be focused on other measures to ensure a free and fair election like proper voter registration and accurate and fair delimitation of constituencies, etc.

Waiting for Relief

When reports said diarrhoea had taken six lives in tide-hit Noakhali, we said it would spread and take more lives. Now three days later 300 people are reported to be dead of that disease and 50 thousand afflicted only in Noakhali which is but one among the five or six districts affected by tidal surge.

That should mean that the drinking water problem has not been solved in the devastated areas. And also that enough ORH preparations are not reaching the spots.

It is as usual the same old story. Most devastated areas are yet to be reached by administration. Sandwip is going to repeat its unbelievable record of being inaccessible to government supplies for close to a week after tidal surge had struck it.

This year's early Jaishtha calamity has, however, been distinguished singularly by a new phenomenon of the government completely ignoring the disaster. So far the Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali and a mini-minister Mosharrif Hossain Shahjahan have gone down to the sites of devastation.

Remembering Nazrul

Poet Nazrul Islam's birth anniversary is usually celebrated on the 11th of Jaishtha or May 25, although there remains serious controversy about the correct date of his birth.

Nazrul was, to his core, anti-establishment, whatever the nature of the establishment. That explains the pet epithet - rebel - that goes with his name, better than all other attempts.

Nazrul was the embodiment of Bengaliness. More than many of the stupendous stalwarts of our culture and history. And Bangladesh as a nation-state founded by the Bengali people is a vindication of Nazrul's idea of his national and cultural identity.

THE bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was undoubtedly an awful crime against the citizens of the United States. So far safe America seems no more safe as the source of such a tragedy is now within the US.

Not that terrorism is not taking place through Middle East and other connections but such assumptions with wide publicity network as those media agencies have do create or add to the existing tensions between various religions and nationalities.

What is necessary is that the media should avoid making such conjectures on any such serious matters and keep their opinions open. Indeed, these media agencies are well respected and generally relied upon and indeed they deserve appreciation for the vivid coverage of the carnage at Oklahoma city.

Three years ago peaceful demonstrations demanding the resignation of the armed forces chief Gen Suchinda Kraprayoon from premiership were brutally suppressed by the military.

May 1992 was a watershed in Thai political life and the democracy we witness now would have been impossible without it.

One important change that has come about in the past three years had been the heightened participation by villagers, farmers and students in movements around the country fighting on a host of issues ranging from ecological preservation to corruption.

According to a Bangkok-based research group, more than 900 demonstrations and rallies, around the country have taken place since the Chuan Leekpai government came to power.

Both the Anand Panyarachun administration that took power temporarily after the May events and the elected Chuan government have taken care to appoint 'democratically oriented' military officers in key positions.

Despite these positive impacts the democracy movement has also left behind deep wounds within sections of the Thai people. A civil court in Bangkok is to take up a petition filed by relatives of those who died or went missing, demanding 23 million baht in compensation from the key military figures in power at the time of the violence.

Monetary compensation is only one side of the issue for the relatives whose attempts at filing criminal charges against former military leaders have been blocked by a controversial amnesty decree passed by the parliament absolving all

Lessons from Oklahoma City Bombing

by Muslehuddin Ahmad

Though political reasons including suppression of people's right, forcible occupation and expropriation of people's land etc appear to be the important causes for worldwide terrorism, happenings in Waco (Texas) and Japan clearly show rise of religious cult in many places around the world. These cults preach fanaticism and destruction of established civilised system.

and the deaths at Oklahoma city. As terrorist attacks are on the increase in many places around the world it is high time to give very serious thought to these, look for causes and see how these could be brought to the minimum when total elimination is not possible.

These need to be nipped in the bud. It seems that Oklahoma bombing's main suspect Timothy McVeigh had initial connection with Waco's branch Dravidian cult but later with some local militia groups within the US.

The US being the most democratic and free society probably allowed these militia to grow at different places but Oklahoma bombing should provide enough lessons to the authorities for having a serious look at militias' activities.

Liberty, freedom, individual rights etc. are precious things in any democratic society but the government must ensure security and safety of the citizens and hence the need for curbing activities of such fully armed groupings. Such local armed militia groups appear to be the organisations working against the democratically established governments. Non-

violent political opposition is one thing but preparation for armed resistance is another.

As various reports show, the activities of these militia groups in the US are no longer confined to the US, they have well-established network abroad. Former Police Chief of Iowa, Joseph Melnichak said, "The more you look at the militias, the more you see links to neo-Nazi and other far right groups both here and abroad."

But as the events are unfolding, far right militias apparently having anti-Semitic views and vowing to establish white power supremacy may ultimately create havoc in terms of terrorist activities in the US and Europe. This is no conjecture. Some reports (New York Times Service) show that "Americans express high anxiety over militias."

He is particularly critical of the way the Chuan coalition government has survived in power by even accepting into its fold political parties that supported Gen Suchinda during the 1992 crisis.

Despite harsh criticism of the government, activist groups are confident about the future of democratic institutions in the country. The say, the major lesson from the May 1992 events for any would be dictator is that there will always be those who resist tyranny whatever the odds.

Following the May demonstrations which ended with the intervention of the Thai Monarch Bhumibol Adulyadej a compromise was reached between the pro-democracy and pro-military parties to work together to democratise the constitution.

By reneging on this deal the country's politicians, say democracy activists, have turned the political clock back to where it stood on the eve of the violent events.

No elected government can succeed in all that it is to do but what is worrisome is the fact that the present administration has even stopped trying to bring about meaningful change, says an activists with Campaign for Democracy, a lobby group involved in mobilising people during the May 1992 demonstrations.

Thais Remember their May Day

S Satyanarayan writes from Bangkok

Three years after the pro-democracy demonstrations that ended General Suchinda Kraprayoon military government, Thailand enjoys much greater freedom, reflected in its vibrant media. But the work of democracy activists remains unfinished as the army continues to dominate Thai politics.

When Bangkok's traffic weary motorists tune into their radio sets these days they are bombarded by a host of talk shows discussing hitherto taboo topics, ranging from sexual misdemeanours of the Buddhist clergy to the importance of the Thai military in protecting national security.

On the third anniversary of the momentous events of May 1992, for many Thais such increased media and political freedom stand out prominently as the rewards reaped by the country in return for the sacrifices of pro-democracy martyrs.

A major legacy of the democracy movement has been the discrediting of the military, which has traditionally dominated Thai politics in the name of protecting the nation, religion and the monarch.

Both the Anand Panyarachun administration that took power temporarily after the May events and the elected Chuan government have taken care to appoint 'democratically oriented' military officers in key positions.

Despite these positive impacts the democracy movement has also left behind deep wounds within sections of the Thai people. A civil court in Bangkok is to take up a petition filed by relatives of those who died or went missing, demanding 23 million baht in compensation from the key military figures in power at the time of the violence.

Monetary compensation is only one side of the issue for the relatives whose attempts at filing criminal charges against former military leaders have been blocked by a controversial amnesty decree passed by the parliament absolving all

those involved in the May events. If punishment of former military leaders has proved too tall a task for the elected government so have its attempts to make the constitution more democratic.

The Chuan administration's proposal to introduce constitutional amendments was defeated last year after opposition MPs and senators in the parliament's upper house joined hands to push through an entirely new constitution.

Among the proposed reforms were the lowering of the voting age from 20 to 18 years, greater access to information, setting up of an independent election commission and a cut in the number of non-elected senators in the upper house.

The opposition promoted constitution, still being finalised by a specially formed parliamentary committee, is considered by many democracy activists as being even more 'retrogressive' than the one sought to be changed.

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To the Editor...

Brutal murder

Sir, While going through your newspaper of 9th of May, I was deeply touched and upset to read about the brutal murder of Mr Jinnah at the hands of a few hijackers just two days before Eid.

Imagine what the late Jinnah's son, Dipu, who all along accompanied his father, might have gone through! Imagine what agony and depression the victim's other family members have gone through during Eid! We can only sympathise... but the one who loses really feels the pain. Will Dipu ever forget the gruesome incident? This cruel change in fate will now compel him to lead a revengeful and hateful life.

The authorities have again proved their failure to check even open broad day light murder and immediately put the criminals behind bars. I often think what is the use of having this sort of a police force, which is found to be sloppy in protecting the lives of the citizens? What is the reason behind this strange attitude? Are not the public

paying taxes, or are the forces not so trained or efficient? It is felt that providing our hard earned revenue for maintaining such a large force is not justified.

Time and again there have been so many suggestions to help check crimes, out of which the most sensible suggestion perhaps is to set up check posts in every nook and corner of the city or at least at main points and stop suspicious movement through body check. Take drastic measures against those found guilty without fear or favour. Rather surprisingly, no such appropriate steps have ever been taken. Why, and who must we accuse for?

Murder and hijacking are not unusual these days although certainly unwanted. Therefore, what is preventing the authorities to keep mum about it? Why not their legalise use of arms? This will greatly help the 'innocents' to fight back rather than die like flies. Let one take at least one 'criminal' on.

I might not sound sensible and wise or may seem over-

emotional, but that may not be the case with those who have lost their beloved ones at the hands of some frustrated drug addicts, greedy and mentally sick youths.

A citizen Dhaka

'Making Govt Work'

Sir, 'Analyst' was factual in his interesting column (May 7); but, typically, as a former bureaucrat, he has fallen into his own trap, by suggesting the formation of a 'committee' to look into 'meetings'.

It is hoped he will deal with the flirtations with 'committees' in one of his future columns. Also on the 'noting' system; and the 'Yes sir!' syndrome.

Cantonment gossip tells me that curtains are being removed from junior officers' entrance doors, for transparent vision (2-way) in the office. Let us remove the purdah from Eden Buildings (no longer a female college).

A retired bureaucrat Dhaka

heard such talk." She said "I'm Jewish, so there is that extra fear. Where is all this anger coming from?" The signs are ominous. And if these militias can link up with other terrorist groups, though their agendas are different, on some possible common elements - say anti-Semitism - then the worst may happen.

In the US itself - whether it has been well-realised or not - drugs, guns, racial hatred, devastating onslaught on moral and ethical values, homosexuals, AIDS, broken families, undue emphasis on individual's rights much of which can hardly be distinguished from licence to do whatever an individual wants to without having any regard to its effects on others etc pose a real threat to the society as a whole.

All these call for total rethinking on the part of the US authorities and politicians on domestic and foreign policies. In the foreign policy area, it seems relevant to mention that for getting Jewish vote, political support to Israel's expropriation of Palestinian land in Jerusalem and moving bills in the US Congress for shifting of US embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem which has so far been resisted by the successive US Presidents including the most conservative President

George W. Bush would not only endanger the Middle East peace process which US itself successfully brokered but may also give ammunition to these militias for more anti-Semitic views and create hatred within the US society.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN



Hail to Thee

EVERY spring I choose one graduating class to address. This year was very special because I spoke to one that never was. On Sunday, May 14, 1995, George Washington University was supposed to hold its graduation. Chairs had been set up outdoors on the Ellipse to accommodate 3,000 students and 17,000 guests.

At 9 am that morning it began to rain. Unbelievably, the university officials, having failed to make any alternative plans, called off the graduation.

I was one of the guests. The daughter of a friend of mine, Julie Margulies, was expecting to get her masters degree. Julie's party consisted of her grandmother, mother, father, sister and seven or eight out-of-town friends.

When to everyone's dismay the graduation was called off, we retired to the Four Seasons for a disconsolate brunch. It was there that I was prevailed upon to speak at a graduation that never happened.

"My fellow Americans: This is the greatest day of your life - or at least it could have been if someone hadn't rained on your parade. Your administration feels sick about the inconvenience, but it urges you to turn this into an educational experience that you will remember in the years to come.

You are experiencing your first 'life is unfair' trauma, or what people in charge of graduations call an 'act of God.' This means that if you or your relatives and friends who came from all over the globe are upset, you should blame the Lord, not GW, for failing to have a backup plan.

In the academic world, we call a failed graduation tough luck and obviously something that no administration is pleased with. But there's no reason for parents who shelled out \$100,000 to make a big deal of it.

And one more thing - just because you paid a \$ 50 fee for your cap and gown doesn't mean you're not going to get it back even though your graduation never took place. Originally your school intended to use the \$ 50 fee as a contribution to find out why no administrator thought to have a plan B - despite the fact that the weather experts had forecast rain.

I wish that I could personally hand each of you your diploma, but I can't because by now almost every graduate and his family is speeding down the highway hardly talking to each other because someone goofed.

I know that many of you are asking, 'Why me? As a truly educated person you should be asking, 'why not me?' When thinking back on this day you will always remember that even though it was wet at GW, the rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain.

Could this graduation, and the 20,000 people who had hoped to be part of it, have been held in a dry gymnasium or Constitution Hall or the Kennedy Center?

Yes, it could have, but that would have meant someone needed to think about it. You can't assume that university administrators with Ph.D.s think.

My fellow students, do not despair because you are out in the cold in your rented caps and gowns. In the years ahead when your children ask you what you did on graduation day, you can honestly say, 'I was canceled.'

I'm pleased to report that although it was a small crowd at the Four Seasons, I received a standing ovation from all the disappointed families in the room.

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Selecting the Election Seekers

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

NOTWITHSTANDING the present political turmoil over the issue of election under a neutral caretaker government, the contending parties in the arena are busy working off the selection of the potential candidates as respective party nominees.

Still then, faulty nomination often proved suicidal. Despite the known strength of the party in the constituency, placing of a lesser candidate invariably runs the risk of failure. As a result, the party laments the erroneous decision.

It is not to suggest, however, that a more formidable candidate does not have any risk of defeat. He has it though at a minimum. That unpredictable episode happens when the electorate is divided between more than two contending political parties.

Keeping such a remote possibility in view, a reasonable list of the most potential and widely acceptable candidates can be drawn up. Such exercise will, of course, demand a pragmatic approach to address the realities obtaining in the constituencies. The required pragmatism is never expected to shower from high heavens. Rather, it shall be handy if the discerning eyes can locate it.

I am consciously driving my regards to the basic point of information. This is the principal area whereform the proposed exercise should start. In fact, correct data-based information has no more effective alternative, in making the right choice of the right candidate as the most suitable party nominee, due and dispassionate care must be taken to make the ultimate judgement on some pertinent information about the person(s) vying for party nomination. In this, the party bosses will have to ensure total neutrality.

These are the essential particulars needed to make the objective evaluation of an aspirant for party nomination. 1. Name, age and educational

qualifications.

2. Since when he/she has been enjoying primary membership of the party?

3. Is he/she ordinarily a resident in the concerned constituency?

4. If not, what is the approximate period in a year that he/she stays in the constituency?

5. What is the nature of his/her linkage with the party in the constituency? As a member of the Central body? As a member of the Local committee?

6. If he/she belongs to the local committee, what position does he/she hold?

7. What documentary evidence can he/she furnish on the distinguishable contributions that he/she has made over the past several years?

8. His/her specific contributions to expand party membership with statistical data.

9. Brief resume about his/her present profession and/or source of income.

10. His/her personal contribution so far to the local fund of the party.

11. Brief statement on the specific contributions that he/she has made to the socio-economic development of his/her constituency.

12. Brief statement about his/her own contributions to education in the community.

13. Any specific contribution that he/she has made to activities related to cooperative ventures in the locality.

14. A clear and specific picture about his/her personal rapport with the local administration even though there is an anti-party bias.

15. General views about the family of the nomination seeker amongst the local residents.

16. If nominated in the past but without success, how

would he/she explain the failure?

17. If, as the nominee of the party he/she emerged successful in the past what specific contribution he/she could make to improve the lot of the local people?

18. What specific programme he/she has to undertake for the welfare of the general public in his/her area if he/she gets elected to Jatiya Sangsad?

19. Does he/she have any objection if an independent evaluation as to his/her honesty and integrity is conducted before deciding on his/her prayer for nomination?

20. How would he/she evaluate himself/herself to justify that he/she is the most competent candidate for party nomination?

21. In the event he/she does not get nomination, for the greater interest of the party, shall he/she still be willing to:  work selflessly for the actual nominee;  remain inactive;  contest election as an independent candidate;  support other contestants?

These are some of the more important points that will have to be dispassionately addressed to arrive at a reasonably better solution to the problem of selecting the best and most acceptable nominee for a party.

It may, however, be borne in mind that the proposed exercise may not be a panacea. The practical variables and diversities being enormous in size and nature there cannot be a full proof answer to the problem. It will be just an honest endeavour to reach the proximity of a tangible solution. The central principle will have to be a consensually decided process and a reasonably acceptable judgement. A fair and just dispensation is thus envisaged.