

For a Flawless Electoral Roll

Election preparations for our sixth parliament began in earnest from yesterday with the starting of the process of voter registration. The new Election Commissioner, in a nationwide address on Wednesday night, laid stress on the preparation of a flawless electoral roll and sought co-operation of all in this effort.

These two steps are really the most critical to make a 'flawless' electoral roll. It is well-known that many defects existed in previous voters' lists, which have cast shadow on the election process and the outcome.

But the EC can perform this gigantic task only if people from all walks of life cooperate in this effort. Normally we could have expected a very constructive role to be played by the major political parties.

Water-logging to Go!

The watery spectacle of city roads after consecutive days' rains recently was enough to convince one that Tk 159-crore being spent on an integrated project is going down the drain.

For the WASA to inform the citizens of the inconveniences they will be facing for another two years is a nice piece of public relations work. The city-dwellers are often put to great distress without prior information.

It should be admitted that the WASA alone cannot take all the responsibilities of the water-logging problem. A mega city growing without any central plan poses a challenge no service system can meet.

A Popular Premier Passes away

Former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson is no more. His passing away at the age of 79 is not quite premature. Still his departure will be deeply felt by many perhaps across the globe and certainly in Britain.

More importantly, he brought about a discernible change in the style of premiership. In a sharp contrast with his predecessor Sir Alec Douglas-Home's lack of touch with people, he soon earned among them a popularity rare and unimaginable at the time.

Both his terms as premier saw immense changes in domestic and international politics. But the most outstanding are the legalisation of abortion and the recognition of equality of sexes.

THE government is barking up the wrong tree in Kashmir. For some time it has been doing so because of lack of policy. The problem is the alienation of Kashmiris which has only deepened with the destruction of the Charar-e-Sharif shrine.

Till today New Delhi has not realised its mistakes. The burnt site of Charar Sharif was first handed over to the army. What message was sought to be conveyed? It is not the iron fist that is needed, but an effort to understand and heal the hurt the Kashmiris have carried for years.

A person like General Krishna Rao was never the answer. His misdeeds in Nagaland are well known. To expect that he had changed was at best Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's indulgence for a Telugu brother.

Governor Rao's assessment is that a Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) is raging in Kashmir. And it can be tackled in the same way as he handled the situation in Nagaland.

The Government of India's jargon is that the Kashmir situation is the result of a proxy war between India and Pakistan. No doubt, Islamabad is arming and training militants, as well as instigating Afghans and those Kashmiris it controls to cross into the valley.

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From Rao to Rao: A Failure

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about infiltrators from Pakistan. The fact is that somewhere along the line the link between New Delhi and ordinary Kashmiris has been severely strained. The policy should have been a political strategy how to retrieve them.

The manner in which the government handled the earlier crisis at Hazratbal shrine underlines the point that force is not the answer. Human rights activists were brought into the picture at that time and they were able to persuade JKLF leader Yasin Malik to break his fast into death.

When it came to Charar Sharif, Prime Minister Rao apparently followed the advice of the hawkish Governor Rao, who made it a prestige issue. Some bureaucrats in Srinagar and Delhi are of the same bent of mind.

What is surprising is that the government insists on holding assembly elections before the middle of July. It will be quite a spectacle. Not even one per cent of the electorate in the valley is expected to participate.

for the smuggling in of arms. The result is known to all. The government depended completely on force. No human rights activist was contacted. Even Yasin Malik and another popular young Kashmiri leader, Shabir Shah, as well as veteran Kashmiri leader Abdul Ghani Lone, were stopped from going to the shrine and contacting militants to find a way-out.

Who burnt the Charar Sharif is not so relevant as is the ability of militants to be a focus of attention. Yesterday they were

vised against the elections. No doubt, periodical elections are the only way to know the people's attitude towards their rulers. But they are only a means to an end. The end is man's sovereignty. We talk of the good of Kashmir. Is this something apart and transcending the good of the individuals composing it?

Even if the government has to have elections, it must prepare the ground for them. That means initiating a political process that will culminate with the polls. One important ingredient is transparency so that the Kashmiris are seen to be determining their own destiny without any pressure from the state, militants or the people across the border.

It would have given credibility to what the government faced on the fateful night when Charar Sharif was demolished if the media had been given free access. The reason why Operation Black Thunder went down well in Punjab was that the flushing out of militants was done in the full glare of TV cameras, photographers and other press representatives.

The debate in parliament, where Prime Minister Rao was a glib spectator, should have come to grips with the guts of the Kashmir problem. The trouble did not start in 1990 when Farooq Abdullah resigned (he regrets that he should not have taken former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's advice and quitted because that aggravated the situation).

Essentially, the Kashmir policy is between two Raos, the state governor and the Prime Minister. Whatever that is, it has failed. Not only that, it has given India a bad name. Someone has to be held accountable. At least one of the Raos will have to be sacrificed to atone partially for the mistakes in Kashmir. It is obvious who that Rao should be.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

at Hazratbal shrine, today they are at Charar Sharif and tomorrow they may be at some other shrine. The government's responsibility is to seek the root cause of militancy. And we come back to the alienation of people. At least, a Supreme Court judge should have been appointed straightaway to hold an inquiry to find out who set fire to the shrine.

Whatever the propaganda, the country must know the truth. Kashmir is back to square one. Whatever little New Delhi had gained — people were getting tired of the gun culture — has been frittered away. Once again there are demonstrations and instances of defiance even in the face of teargas and lathi charges. Muslim fundamentalists are exploiting the situation; they have demolished six Hindu temples and set fire to some 20 vacant houses of Kashmiri Pandits. Even otherwise, they are polluting the atmosphere.

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Indignant Monks Deny Link with Tokyo Gas Attack

Vilma Wimaladasa writes from Colombo

While attention in Sri Lanka is focused on the flare-up in the civil war, police are also keeping an eye on a Buddhist offshoot of the sect which the Japanese authorities have been trying to link with a deadly nerve gas attack in Tokyo. The Sri Lankan group is indignant.

THE Sri Lankan authorities are keeping a close watch on the Aum Saccas Sangha Association, local branch of the secretive Japanese sect which Tokyo police suspect is linked to a nerve gas attack in a Tokyo subway in March.

After the death of 11 people in the attack and injuries to almost 5,000 commuters, police raided the offices of Aum Shinri Kyo ("Searching for the truth") in Japan and questioned its members.

No charges have been made against the Japanese group, which has denied any involvement, and no evidence linking the Sri Lankan group to the gas attack has been found. The Association's lawyer, Manel Weerasooriya, stated that the "Aum Saccas Sangha Association had no links whatsoever with any illegal activities, let alone violent action, such as those reported in Tokyo."

Nevertheless, police have been making regular checks on the organisation and the Japanese embassy says it has been monitoring the situation. Speculation and rumour have been rife, including reports by local villagers that the head of the organisation here, the Reverend Punna Thera, left Sri Lanka the day after the nerve gas attack in Tokyo.

Weerasooriya insists that the Rev Punna had gone to open another branch in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan and that his visit had been planned weeks before. There are other branches in New York, Moscow, Bonn and Vladivostok.

Punna Thera, a Japanese monk, is annoyed by the rumours: "All the accusations against our sect in Japan are false. This is a CIA (US Central Intelligence Agency) plot to destroy our spiritual movement."

The group was established in Sri Lanka in 1993, on part of a



Cult leader Shoko Asahara: Met the Prime Minister

48-acre site purchased three years ago by Aum Shinri Kyo amidst the lush vegetation of Ruhuna in the southern Galle district.

The original aim was to establish a nodule factory but later an ashram (hermitage) was set up. A police spokesman says previous efforts to ordain young people in the area were resisted by villagers fearing the spread of an alien cult.

Since its establishment here, it has donated Rs 100 million to various projects. It plans to expand its community services programme in Sri Lanka, open a radio station in Baddegalle in the south, and set up a university for religious studies and an industrial estate in the Galle district.

The Aum Shinri Kyo sect, which has its roots in the oc-

intellectual people and I cannot imagine them being linked to any kind of terrorist act.

"Some of the lawyers I met, from Japan, seemed to be very respectable professionals," she says.

Police in Colombo say the 285-member local sect is governed by a 16-member board headed by Rev Punna Thera, a prominent Buddhist scholar-monk.

When a group of journalists visited the ashram, the Rev Punna Thera was calmly distributing bags of rice to the lay employees and parcels of clothes to 30 children of the employees to celebrate the Sinhala and Tamil New Years.

— GEMINI NEWS
VILMA WIMALADASA is a Colombo-based freelance journalist.

cult and predicts that the world will end in 1997. She had contacts with prominent Buddhist priests and politicians in Sri Lanka.

During his visit to Sri Lanka in 1992 the now fugitive leader of the Tokyo sect, 40-year-old Master Shoko Asahara — a former acupunctureist known to his followers as "His holiness the Master" — met the then Prime Minister, D M Wijetunga.

Weerasooriya says she has personally met Master Asahara as well as other sect leaders, including the head of the Moscow branch, Ven Homiduru Joyo, who is currently acting as spokesman for the Master.

Though much of the international publicity about the sect has focused on its eccentricities, Weerasooriya says "they are a highly educated and

OPINION

T&T and E-Mail

Johny Brakkee

I read with great interest a report under the heading 'T&T plan to levy, regulate E-Mail providers protested' in The Daily Star of Sunday May 21, 1995 and want to add therewith some comments from my side as a telecommunication engineer. In the 25 years of my career as a telecommunication engineer, I must admit that I never have read or heard such a great nonsense! But thanks to The Daily Star for publishing the report, as this shows how unprofessional the T&T is. T&T once again does not know what it is talking about and I can assure everybody that this is not only the case with the E-Mail matters.

If we look at the entire T&T-related works, we only can conclude that it's all a mess. Even the basic communication system — such as Telephone and Fax etc — is still not running smoothly and will probably take years to develop. The reason is perhaps not the resources but the management itself.

National and international lines are still unreliable and resulting in ineffective working conditions, as well as an expensive issue, e.g. tests on a 24-hour basis of sending faxes abroad shows that 60 per cent of the faxes have to be re-sent up to 3 to 4 times! (Customers are even though billed for these trials).

Most of the days also telephone calls seem to be impossible or the customers have to re-dial up to 5/6 times, before a connection finally gets through.

Billing is not accurate and worse is that customers are billed for telephone calls they never made. This is happening repeatedly.

Customers lines are cut off by T&T because, as it says, the bills are not paid. T&T seems not, or does not want to understand that it is not the customers who should be blamed for not paying the bills, but T&T's administration itself as it is well known that bills are not received at all or received months later. The results are obvious, T&T just shuts off your lines!

I personally once was asked whether I was interested in cheap international calls. I, of course, was but after investigating how this would be possible, I found out that they have devised a very easy way: Just pay somebody Toka 1000 a month, and some of your international calls will be directed to somebody else's bill. An easy solution but a very nasty case of fraud. T&T probably seems not at all worried as this practice is still going on.

We also have to take into consideration that Bangladesh is a member of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Geneva. It is surprising that especially in the telecommunications, rules and recommendations of the ITU are not followed in Bangladesh. This is also true for the wireless radio communications in Bangladesh. Rules and laws in these regards need a thorough revision, but T&T seems yet to notice the need of it.

It will be far too much going into the details, and it is also not the intention here. I just want to remind that what T&T is planning regarding E-Mail, if it is true, it will be a catastrophe for the data communications industry.

Here again T&T really does not know what it is talking about. I think the following suggestions may be of some help to T&T.

present situation. By putting the blame on others, or dubbing them as 'enemies within', the Congress party cannot absolve itself of the responsibility of making a mess in Kashmir. None, not even Congressmen, know what is the government's policy beyond sending more troops to Kashmir and extending newer repressive laws. One minister complained to me on the debate in parliament that there was no briefing on Kashmir and that he did not know what he was supposed to say.

During the debate, much was made about the disappearance of Mast Gul, the Afghan who reportedly masterminded the Charar Sharif incident. Many other militants also disappeared. The security forces could not act on their own because the entire operation was conducted on the instructions of Raj Bhavan, which is said to be in constant touch with the Prime Minister's office in New Delhi.

Essentially, the Kashmir policy is between two Raos, the state governor and the Prime Minister. Whatever that is, it has failed. Not only that, it has given India a bad name. Someone has to be held accountable. At least one of the Raos will have to be sacrificed to atone partially for the mistakes in Kashmir. It is obvious who that Rao should be.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Money in the Bank

I keep hearing from the budget cutters of both parties that if we don't balance the budget, there will be no money left for our children and grandchildren.

On paper this is a telling argument, but then I wonder if making the sacrifice will be appreciated. Will our offspring say as much as "thank you" for what we have done for them?

This thought often comes to me when I look around at the generation we raised — the so-called "baby boomers" who are now worried that there won't be anything left in the Social Security system when they become eligible.

People of my post-World War II generation were very concerned about the welfare of our children — so much so that whatever they asked for, we gave it.

It didn't take long for them to realize that they were on to a good thing, and the more we gave, the more they took for granted. The reason it hurt was that none of them felt obligated to thank us. Most of them had never heard the word "no."

At some point — it might have been on the Fourth of July in 1970 — the people of my generation said, "We have been doing all this for the next generation, and they only spit in our eye. Let's spend a few bucks on ourselves."

Well, we started doing it in style. At first we used up the surplus, then we began to borrow money wherever we could get it. We hit a trillion-dollar debt in no time before some sportsport economists complained that we were leaving a legacy of enormous debt.

When one kid challenged me on the subject I told him, "It was our money, and we could do anything we wanted with it."

So here we are. We have been told that we must go back to our parsimonious ways, cut the pork and face a reality check. I told my friend Kevin Hennessey, "They tell us we have to stop spending the government's money... especially for Medicare and unwed mothers."

Kevin said, "What about farm subsidies? They're cutting those too."

"No one is touching farm subsidies," I assured Kevin.

"What about tax cuts?"

"The Republicans say that you can have a tax cut."

"What about school prayer?"

"We have to have that to balance the budget."

Hennessey said, "That does it. I'm going to take a nap."

Okay, so our generation will sacrifice Medicare to make up the trillion. We have every intention of balancing the budget — but it will be the last time we do it.

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To the Editor...

Political crisis

Sir, Reference Mr M A Laskar's comment (letter, May 7) on the Prime Minister's stepping down 30 days before elections; the PM has the right to resign at any time.

The Opposition do not want the elections to be held with Khaleda Zia as PM, but the Opposition want her to step down 60 days before.

So, what is the issue? Someone may kindly clarify.

A voter
Dhaka-1207

Unfair sanction

Sir, We have learnt with great regret about US Presi-

dent Bill Clinton's decision and announcement to impose a trade and investment embargo on Iran when he was attending the World Jewish Council. The claim by US President that Iran had intention to manufacture atomic bomb or accusing her of supporting terrorism are not something new. These types of claims have both political and destructive intentions.

I wonder that how it is possible that a country like US, its government and president, be so influenced and manipulated by Israel whose enmity towards Islam is doubtless.

If it is a matter of accusation of supporting international terrorism and develop-

ment of atomic bomb then all the blame should go on the shoulder of Israel and not Iran. Martyrdom of thousands of innocent people in occupied Palestine and unwillingness to sign the Non-proliferation Treaty are a few examples and evidences that no one can deny or ignore.

It is a matter of great concern that the United States has not yet taken any effective measure to stop the barbaric act of Israel in occupied Palestine and south Lebanon, and, instead, it is imposing unfair sanction on Iran!

Sayed Rahim Ashnakhah
BUET, Dhaka