

Governance Subverted

Eating the humble pie after the Pandora's box opens is high premium payment for blundering, a capitulation morally far worse than a surrender in a battle-field.

This is the impression one gets following the agreement reached between the autorickshaw union leaders and the BRTA and Police Department on the other side, which stopped the former's strike and the breaking spree that went with it.

The statistics are a horrific indictment of criminal racketeering on the part of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) which allowed itself to be infested by brokers during the past sixteen years.

To all other departments having public dealings we say beware of the windmill of truth revolving by natural forces. Let's preserve our institutions or else we go down with them to eternal perdition.

Not Even Average

The poor performance of our gigantic team to Madras in the first half of the 10-day Seventh SAF Games was on the verge of being forgiven, thanks to the sprinting successes in both track and pool events, and a shooting sweep in one category.

There were 448 medals at stake in Madras. The least Bangladesh could do was to bag 64 — the average of the seven teams' portions. It got only 59. With even the puny Maldives and the lightweight Nepal in fray, Bangladesh couldn't even reach the average.

While congratulating Mahbub Alam and Bimal Tarafdar and Karar Mizanur Rahman as well as our shooting team for their performances we refuse to accept the performance of the whole team. SAF Games is the right forum for Bangladesh to make a mark on the Asian platform.

Nothing will improve without strict enforcement of accountability in the sporting arena. Result must justify every Taka spent there. If it doesn't, wholesale firing should be the order of the day. The programmes and the conduct of every federation must be looked into and constantly monitored.

Good Prospect

The World Bank and the Swiss Development Corporation have a full measure of our thanks for agreeing to finance construction of rural roads and markets in 14 districts under a five-year US 172m dollar project.

This rural infrastructural project has the merit of not being the one-off type to be left on completion of the construction work; instead, provision is being kept for the maintenance of the roads and markets.

A construction project such as this would provide work instantly to many rural people; but its real potential for employment generation must be seen in terms of the epicentres of development that are likely to grow around the markets and along the roads.

We are all for a holistic approach with a proper mapping of the areas to be developed according to a national plan of action.

THE recent general elections in Turkey has not produced any major surprise but there are trends which deserve attention.

A little over 34 million voters went to the polls throughout the country including the eastern region, which lies buried in deep snow and the temperature drops to around 30 degrees below zero.

The voters, who have a traditional right-wing tilt, went further right at the expense of the fractious left. For the first time in the history of the 70-year-old secular Republic established by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, fundamentalist welfare party (RP) led by Necmettin Erbakan, came on top with 21.1 per cent votes and got 158 seats in a Parliament, whose number went up from 450 to 550.

Another right-wing party with racial overtones led by 80-year-old Alpaslan Turkes saw his party Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) wiped out due to a system of a 'barage' of a minimum 10 per cent votes countrywide. The quarrelsome Turkish left saw its fortune sag badly. The Democratic Left Party (DSP) led by Bulent Ecevit, a former Prime Minister came on top with 14.6 per cent votes and 75 seats.

There has been jubilation

The election verdict is in favour of a centre right coalition and this applies for the fundamentalist RP of Erbakan, an engineer-turned-politician. During the height of the election campaign, Erbakan was careful not to attack directly Ataturk's reforms, which transformed the Turkish society.

Elections in Turkey



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

in the camp of Erbakan, whose RP two years ago scored a stunning victory in the Municipal polls. The general elections demonstrate that this was no freak result. If there are RP Municipal Chairmen in the two largest cities of Turkey, one must not jump to the conclusion that a RP Government is in the horizon in Turkey.

In the triangular contest of the Right, the voters have shown no partiality to either the outgoing lady prime minister or the male opposition leader. They lead two right-wing parties which are really two sides of the same coin. It is much more the personality than the sex, which separates them. The voters have sent the message that the two parties must unite, which

would bring them close to a majority in the Parliament. In that event finding a small third partner would not pose any problem. In any case unlike the outgoing two-party coalition of centre right and centre left, the next government must be a three-party coalition.

The only other alternative would be a minority government of two right-wing parties, that would be supported by other parties from outside. The pressure for the two right-wing parties to unite is bound to mount inexorably. A suggestion is currently making the rounds in Ankara-DYP and ANAP should form a

coalition on the model of Israel, where the coalition partners decided to share power on the basis of each serving a two year term.

If RP's score is impressive, no less impressive is the result of the pro Kurdish HADEP in south-eastern Turkey. HADEP came out first in such Kurdish inhabited provinces as Hakkari, Diyarbakir, Batman, Sirnak and Sirt although it failed to send any MP to the Parliament in Ankara due to the 10 per cent 'barage'. More than 250,000 security forces have been fighting a murderous war in the inhospitable mountains of the south east



Necmettin Erbakan



Tansu Ciller

against PKK terrorists. This 11-year war has claimed nearly 11,000 lives and the entire region has a desolate look in spite of these adverse circumstances. Polls were held in that region as well. Kurds are nearly one fifth of Turkey's 60 million population and successive Turkish governments have been unable to find a solution although there is consensus that the problem is largely economic backwardness of the region and the solution must be political.

The election results are a clear setback for Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and the DYP. Although she has a tiny consolation that she has received nearly the same percentage of votes as her arch rival Yilmaz of ANAP, her own party came down, from 27 per cent in the last election to current 20 per cent. She is an Economics Professor, who joined politics only five years ago. Yet her management of the Economy has left much to be desired. She had taken over the government with a vow to control inflation but has seen it soar to nearly 100 per cent. The value of the Turkish lira has fallen dramatically.

At the end of the campaign she scored a real success by engineering the entry of Turkey into the Western European Customs Union, an essential stepping stone for Turkey in her quest to join the powerful European Union (EU). Even this success has not helped Ciller in her home election front. During her five-year political life, this first lady Prime Minister of Turkey has proved herself an adroit politician. Yet the poor performance in the economic front may prove to be the real Achilles' Heel. The Turkish voters have

clearly signalled that they are unhappy with the economic burden they have to carry. Yilmaz and his ANAP will find small comfort that they have barely equalled the score of the ruling DYP.

The election verdict is in favour of a centre right coalition and this applies for the fundamentalist RP of Erbakan, an engineer-turned-politician. During the height of the election campaign, Erbakan was careful not to attack directly Ataturk's reforms, which transformed the Turkish society. Even on a sensitive subject like Islamic banking or Turkey's into the EU, he has been careful not to take any hard position in his attacks against all the regimes that have ruled Turkey for the last seven decades.

In Turkey, the ruler and the ruled have a long tradition of interaction, whatever the nature of the regime. It would be unwise to jump to the conclusion that in Turkey the swing is towards extremism, which goes by the name fundamentalism.

The election results clearly demonstrate the voters' preference for a centre right regime but there is no mandate for any kind of adventurism. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of more than half a dozen Turkic Republics, Turkey's recent entry into the European Customs Union, have brought her onto the world stage from a peripheral role in Europe following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. The Turkish voters have demonstrated that they are conscious of the new role that has fallen on her.

Real Chance to Break the Deadlock

by Dr Kamal Hossain

If, however, there is some point on which agreement cannot be reached in the informal dialogue, there should be agreement on the ground rules for the televised dialogue at which a sincere effort could be made at the highest level to resolve any outstanding unresolved issue by making such adjustments as may be necessary to achieve agreement.

THE holding of elections to Parliament has so far been made to appear as a contentious issue only between the government and the opposition, with the people being treated as silent and passive spectators. But in fact it is a matter which vitally concerns every citizen and the entire nation. For what is at stake is the most fundamental right of all citizens to vote in a free and fair election to choose their representatives who together will constitute the new Parliament which must replace the old Parliament which has been dissolved. Article 7, which is the very core of the Constitution, recognises that all power in the Republic belongs to the people, but such power can only be exercised through an elected Parliament. In a parliamentary democracy, the Parliament is not only the sovereign legislature, but its members, who constitute the majority, form the government and those in the minority constitute the opposition. This is why the Constitution requires that within 90 days of the dissolution of Parliament, a new Parliament has to be elected.

If no election is held within that period, it is the people who totally lose the power that according to the Constitution belongs to them. For experience shows that

the resulting vacuum is filled by different types of anti-people element, who neither represent nor are accountable to the people. But while it is undeniable that it is a matter of vital importance to the people that an election must be held in due time, it is at the same time also crucial that the election is truly free and fair so that people are not denied their freedom to choose their representatives without being intimidated by mastans and their illegal arms or by the influence of black money or by the abuse of state power for rigging.

The opposition has pressed for holding the election under a caretaker government in the light of the experience of by-elections in which the incumbent government had interfered in the electoral process so as to undermine a free and fair election. We have, for over a year, pointed out that to hold a free and fair election there are a number of essential measures which had to be taken. We had underlined the importance of flushing out illegal arms, of disarming mas-

tans and in particular the armed cadres maintained by different political parties, and taking effective measures to protect the elections from being inundated by black money.

We had urged that defaulters be disqualified and an Electoral Code of Conduct having the force of law be promulgated with effective arrangement to enforce the code and to prevent and punish violations of the Code. The strengthening of the Election Commission was urged so that it could not plead lack of power to justify its importance as it had done in the case of the controversial by-elections, with adequate powers to take effective measures against misuse of power and of state-owned media and other amenities. A number of these measure have been taken on paper, but have yet to be implemented on the ground, such as disarming mastans.

Together with these measures, we strongly urged that an agreement be reached on the matter of having a caretaker government in-charge

of the administration during the election period. We repeatedly pointed out that this could only be achieved by an agreement through a dialogue. But instead of discussion and dialogue what the entire nation has witnessed and suffered is conflict and confrontation. Instead of a consensus there has been continuing deadlock. Time is now fast running out.

Reports of informal dialogues between government and opposition representatives, and of some friendly intercession, have raised hopes as people earnestly crave a solution, and an end to violence and uncertainty. The highest priority is accorded to a restoration of social peace and stability, and a peaceful election, in which all sections of the people can participate.

The latest indication from the opposition leadership that it is prepared to engage in a dialogue at the highest level if it is broadcast live on television and the radio provides a real opportunity for ending the destructive and suffocating political deadlock.

We urge the government and opposition representatives who are in contact with each other and engaged in the informal dialogue to make every effort to achieve an agreed solution without further delay. This could then be referred to the Supreme Court for its Advisory Opinion, which will be necessary to enable it to be implemented within the framework of the Constitution. If there is agreement, the televised dialogue could re-affirm the agreement before the entire nation and enable a joint appeal to be made seeking people's co-operation in implementing the agreement.

If, however, there is some point on which agreement cannot be reached in the informal dialogue, there should be agreement on the ground rules for the televised dialogue at which a sincere effort could be made at the highest level to resolve any outstanding unresolved issue by making such adjustments as may be necessary to achieve agreement. A sincere and reasoned dialogue could achieve such consensus since

the entire nation would be witnessing this dialogue and would expect such a solution to emerge.

Two basic ground rules could help to achieve a positive outcome. Each side should at the outset table a written text of the essential elements of its position. If agreement on any issue still remains outstanding at the end of the dialogue the written texts of both sides would be forwarded to the Supreme Court with a request for its Advisory Opinion under Article 106 of the Constitution. It should be understood and agreed that everyone would abide by the opinion of the Supreme Court since the role of the Supreme Court as the ultimate arbiter of all disputes and as the guardian of the Constitution and of the people's rights is recognised by all.

Let us all move forward towards a meaningful dialogue and resolution of the deadlock, so that democracy can be re-invigorated by an election in which all can participate as we start the twenty-fifth anniversary of our independence.

(Given its importance and timeliness we reproduce the full text of statement of the Gonoforum President, which was delivered at the press conference on Wednesday last)

To the Editor...

PSI and National Board of Revenue

Sir, Recent move by the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to revert back to the older system for certain importable instead of the Pre-shipment Inspection (PSI) raises certain question regarding our methods of governance. Most noticeable in the episode is the fact that the decision was taken abruptly without giving specific instances of under-valuation. So, for that reason they haven't brought any case against any of the culprits namely evaluating foreign companies or not for that matter against any of the offending importers. Given that common people like us are provided with very scanty information, so we can only talk only in terms of certain hypothetical exercises.

In most probable instances, the evaluating agencies might have been really corrupt. In that scenario there was widespread under-valuation. So, the consumers were paying a price in the following manner: Market price-Purchase price of the importer-bribe to evaluating agencies+undervalued tax. But earlier also the price

used to be fixed in the same manner. And given the level of corruption the question shouldn't arise in terms of the extent of the corrupt practices but in terms of the level of the bribe. More precisely, the amount of bribe taken to make this under-valuation. If corruption is taken as a deadweight loss to the whole economy then in that sense it is better to tolerate corrupt foreign evaluating agencies because their asking rate most probably was much less. Or as a distant reality if it can be proved that the level of corruption is nowhere near what the donor agencies assumes and common people take for granted then the NBR has solid case.

Now, let's come to the issue declining prices of these importables. Perceptible decline in the prices of the commodities can be because of reasons other than due to under-valuation:

• It can be due to timely valuation thus helped to decrease the interest burden of the importer.

• Because of better organization structure of these agencies more importers entered into the fray. The dramatic rise in the number of reconditioned car im-

porters can be an indicator. If we take this view then an existence of a pressure group to revert back to the old system cannot be ruled out. Lastly, the NBR needs to give more valid reasons with specific instances to take these sort of decisions of national interest. If we are really in a democracy then authorities at the NBR should be more responsible for informing people of the context of their decisions. Otherwise common people will always smell of rotten fish.

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BTV's dubbed films

Sir, Recently BTV has taken a ludicrous measure to present the popular English serials dubbed into Bengali. This measure is no doubt preposterous. To be precise, the standard of English in our country is absolutely deplorable. People can't even communicate in simple English. Students at the Master's level write and speak such horrible English that one often wonders if the English language is taught in this nation.

Discouragement and less importance attached to this particular language is mainly responsible for the present unfortunate state of education. Dominique Lapierre in his famous book 'The City of Joy' has indicated that 'English language is the key to social ascent.' What a perceptive and logical observation! His statement is particularly applicable in the case of the Third World countries.

In a country like Bangladesh if we want to see some developments, we must give emphasis on the learning of the English language. If we want to attain self-sufficiency in all sectors we must master the English language. In order to master this element of development, we must learn colloquial English. By learning colloquial expressions, we can consolidate the foundation of our English language proficiency. But how do we learn colloquial English if we do not watch English serials in English? Many people have supported BTV's foolish step to present the English serials dubbed into Bengali.

Their opinion is that if any one wants to learn English he or she should do so by

watching either the Star TV or the video. Their opinion is that these TV serials are not educational programmes, therefore, it is insignificant whether the programmes are in English or Bengali. Now for the people belonging to this category, I have a question: 'Will people like us living in the metropolis as afford to switch to Star TV whenever we want to see English films but what about those living in the rural areas, what about those who can't afford the luxury of owning a video set, what about those who can't subscribe to Star TV? Have you thought about them?' They are not as fortunate as we are. Their only scope for learning colloquial English was through the serials shown by BTV.

Now one might suggest 'Why don't these people watch CNN or BBC?' Well, what about the students of colleges and universities, surely they can't skip their classes to watch BBC and CNN. Under such circumstances, can one expect the colleges and universities to install TV sets in the class rooms? No, of course not. That would be preposterous. Then there are others who

say that our children find it difficult to follow the events of the English serials. Now if these young people find it difficult to comprehend simple English, then what they should do is improve their English language proficiency. There should not be an easy way out. Dubbing the films into Bengali is like providing an easy way out for our boys. These boys will initially appreciate this step but in the long run they will finally realise the damaging effects of this scheme.

Touheed Feroze Dhaka University

Our country

Sir, At the beginning of the twenty-fifth year of independence, we are passing through the most critical period of our history. We are being spent-up politically, socially and economically. The entire nation is passing anxious moments.

We want an end to this crisis. We want a prosperous Bangladesh established through correct and matured leadership.

The country is ours and not owned by any individual. Mrs. Mahera Zaman Dhanmondi R/A Dhaka-1200