

Updating Voters' List

After Thursday's meeting of several political parties, including the two leading ones, the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) announced that within the next ten days updating of the voters' list would have to be completed following which election schedule would be announced. Given the fact that elections will have to be held by 30 June, there is really not much time for the EC before it needs to announce the dates for the election. The issue of updating of the electoral rolls has been one that the opposition parties have been demanding with passion and persistence. We think the EC did the right thing by allowing for ten days to make up whatever deficiency that exists in the current list. We urge all those voters yet to be listed to make good use of this opportunity and enlist themselves.

During CEC's discussion with the political leaders, another issue featured prominently, which we from this newspaper has also raised on numerous occasions, namely the issue of a code of conduct for the political parties. As this has been demanded by both BNP and AL during their discussion with the CEC, there should not be any difficulty for the EC to make some quick progress on this score. The formulation of a code is of crucial importance because the next election will be fought tooth and nail by AL and BNP. There should also be a detailed expenditure code for the parties and the candidates. The EC must really do everything it can to reduce the impact of black money in the elections. Already election expenses have reached such heights that only the very rich, or candidates sponsored by such people, seem to have any chance to take part in the polls. If the election is to have any meaning for leaders of modest means then the impact of black money must be curtailed.

We also feel strongly that the ordinance barring bank defaulters from participating in the elections should once again be promulgated. This would be another means of keeping the influence of illegal money under control.

So far the EC has moved with confidence and consensus. It cannot expect to do so on every occasion. Therefore, it must develop its confidence and its organisational strength to take the tough, and may be lonely, decision as soon as possible.

Water Famine in City

Water scarcity in Dhaka city is no new problem. Supplying water anywhere near actual demand will call for a radical rise in water production capacities and new installations costing Taka in terms of tens of crores and taking time spread over years. It is hardly likely that supply will ever catch up with the demand of 8.6 million Dhakaites without some breakthrough in water technology. So, when temperature tends to approach 40 degree Celsius what will people do in Dhaka city?

People can go without electricity for some time as they can without gas — till the other day most of them had neither electricity nor gas. But without water? Yet it is true that people in many of the metropolitan areas are going without water. How? They are adjusting to the crisis by, one, managing headloads of water from luckier areas and, two, by lowering living standards and life style to sub-human levels.

There has been agitations in the city over water related suffering. From reports and photographs of these it would seem that this is a problem of the poor — and of the poorer areas of the city. And this is not untrue. As with every other thing, preferences work in water supply. A smaller and privileged section gets more and regular and perhaps better water. This must change. But changes cannot come overnight. So, to respond to the present crisis, something must be done resembling the power load-shedding practice. Supply shutdowns must be fair and evenly distributed among zones and day-night perennial supply must be a thing of the past even in, say, minister's residences.

A pattern of seasonal water famine is now well set in the city. We know by now next year the situation will get worse. So, let WASA be very generous and farsighted in buying and mobilising a goodly fleet of water tankers, ready to respond in an hour's time.

By the way, exactly as electricity is being pilfered from main grids, water is also being stolen from main pipes. While stolen power is not less healthful than the regular stuff, tampered water poses threat to life. When will WASA act on this?

Consumer Protection Laws

Just as private enterprise is on the rise in Bangladesh so also is the awareness about consumer rights. Though theoretically one does not necessarily follow from the other, but in practice it does. It is only when products compete with one another to win the heart of the consumer, that the rights of the latter can be assured. So, it is our view that consumers' rights will get its real play only when industrialisation will have advanced, and there will be more consumer products in the market. But that does not, however, mean that we will not enact laws or carry out consumer awareness campaigns right now. We are fully in favour of suggestions made in a seminar of CAB last Thursday that we should enact more comprehensive laws to protect our consumers, yet we feel compelled to point out that sufficient use is not being made of many existing laws. This is primarily due to lack of knowledge on the part of most consumers as to the existence of such laws, and also a widespread feeling that these laws are more for the statute book than for the use by the affected people.

This is an important area where CAB can make a great contribution — making the general public aware of their rights as consumers, and demonstrating the relevance of consumer protection laws. May we suggest that CAB undertakes a few law suits about violation of consumer rights. A few punitive judgments against companies who violate consumer rights will go a long way in restoring people's faith that these laws really work. Even one such demonstration will take the consumer movement a long way forward.

When Cows are Not Useful Animals

The mad cow disease has already crippled the wheels of British farm economy. Only time can say how long it will take to turn the cows as the most useful animals.

growth rate, inflation and employment situations.

The British policy makers are now in hot soup. Their agonies are being aggravated by the decision of the EU agricultural ministers to ban the imports of British beef into the European market. The nervousness of British government surrounding the mad cow disease episode tends to hang around, as *Financial Times* reports, four corners. First, it would be unwise to ban a food stuff when the risks are so low. Lower risks provides no room for complacency since public sensitivity to the issue is quite high. Second, the government cannot afford to declare the situation safe when it cannot be sure of the safety syndrome. And third, research should be generously funded to look deep into the affairs but at the moment not much of it is available. Sandwiched by the hue and cry, the British government proposed a dramatic solution to the crisis. Douglas Hogg, Britain's agricultural minister, declared that "all British cattle over 30 months old would be incinerated at the end of their productive lives

thus preventing meat from some 4.6m animals getting to people's tables." According to *The Economist*, "Europe's farm ministers demanded that Britain come up with an even more drastic plan which could mean the slaughter of millions more cattle."

The overall situation seems to be a grim time for British

cattle farmers. As may be recalled, there was another big BSE scare in 1989 which adversely affected the farmers and from that wreck they are still fighting to stage a comeback. What are the probable economic impacts of the current cattle chaos on Britain's economy? The latest issue of *The Economist* tell us something on this.

The slaughter of all of Bri-

tain's 11.8 million cattle would require a compensation of £865 per slaughtered infected cow and at that rate the total bill would be £10.2 billion. Further, the cost of killing and burning each cow would be £120. The total cost of killing and burning would thus stand at £2 billion.

The British Meat and Live-

stock Commission estimated that around 400,000 people are engaged in beef and dairy farming. The treasury stipulates that every 100,000 rise in unemployment pushes up the social security bill by £275m. "So, even on the assumption that the entire workforce were fired and unable to find other work, the cost would be £1.1 billion a year. In addition, payments

to workers laid-off in beef-related industries

to consumers value the assurances of a "no danger" situation given by the government and lower prices and second, how successful the producers are in differentiating beef produced from diseased herds and beef produced from unaffected herds.

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that the impact on domestic beef sales will depend on two factors: first, whether consumers value the assurances of a "no danger" situation given by the government and lower prices and second, how successful the producers are in differentiating beef produced from diseased herds and beef produced from unaffected herds.

Another adverse impact that the current crisis would impinge is reported to be on the cosmetic industry. Specifically France, the country producing fabulous cosmetics, is likely to be hard hit as a result of the current crisis. Since many of the cosmetic derivatives are supplied by beef cattle, a demise of millions of cows might adversely affect the cosmetic industry. And along with it, the prices of cosmetics might soar high.

We thus find that the cows are the most harmful animals as far as today's Britain is concerned. The mad cow disease has already crippled the wheels of British farm economy. Only time can say how long it will take to turn the cows as the most useful animals.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



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Accountability of Politicians: Post-movement Reflections

by M M Ahmed

cal programmes. It should entirely be left to the discretion and prerogative of the people to follow or not to follow — none has any right to force people by adopting violent means.

Is the Pattern Still Valid?

There were times when, for example, Gandhi started and successfully implemented the process of political agitation. People of this country have their highest regard for the newly appointed Chief Adviser. It is expected that the following views may be considered by him and, wherever agreed, legal coverage provided, during his present tenure, as people virtually have lost their confidence in all political leaders by now.

Who are to lead? Only those persons are to engage in politics and seek election to the parliament who are first approved by, say, a "People's Front" established in the locality of residence of those persons. This will be a sort of passport to politics which must be locally obtained to enter politics — this will no more be available at the whims of the offices of the Dhaka-based high commands of different political parties to meet their seemingly narrow political goals and ambitions. We have seen "People's Curfew", "People's Mancha", etc — now let us establish "People's Front" to first clear the politicians all over the country. It needs no mention that such a "People's Front" will not be manned by politicians of any shade. People in general must have the initial right to decide whom they want to be led by — it cannot be thrust upon them by extraneous elements. Being someone's wife or daughter should no more be the sole criterion of admission into the arena of politics. It has to be earned with full qualifications, experience and dignity and with local people's mandate.

Forcing to stop working: While it is always the avowed responsibility of any administration worth its name to ensure provision for its people of basic necessities like food, shelter, clothes, medical care and education, not only these were not provided but situations were created to ensure that the heads of the households, no matter how rich or how poor, were not allowed to go to their respective places of work for earning their livelihood thereby compelling them to abandon taking care of themselves and their families.

Where is the mechanism of people's sustenance in these circumstances and who is going to take the responsibility of deaths occurring in these situations?

Forcing to stay indoors by stopping communications: By stopping almost all modes of communication people were forced to stay indoors and neglect meeting their responsibilities towards themselves and their families. Some of the direct adverse consequences of this: meeting food and medical requirements was disrupted; people were incapacitated to meet family emergencies.

Again, who is willing to take the responsibility of deaths occurring in these circumstances?

Stopping the process of education: For lack of resources and other factors our education system already suffers from stagnation, session jams, prolongation of courses and consistent degradation of standards. In the name of movement, educational institutions were not spared. Who is going to account for these losses?

Wiping off respect for the law: By forcibly implementing various disruptive programmes, groups of activists were set loose to perpetuate a reign of terror upon people obviously with political patronage, support and encouragement (let us not be naive about it — every one knows it). Innocent students, youngsters, workers, labourers, rickshaw-pullers and the like were and have been turned into trained bandits, bomb-throwers, vehicle-breakers and, worst of all, law breakers. Who is going to take the responsibility of deaths occurring in these circumstances?

The Answer is "No" The answer is an emphatic "No". People are simply fed up — starting from the millionaire businessmen down to the rickshaw-pullers on the streets. We have to learn to engage in politics like decent and civilized people and formulate a set of norms for doing that — by clearly ensuring that fundamental rights of the people are not touched in any way. People are free to pursue the activities of their daily lives and they must be allowed to do this. There cannot be any compulsion, not to speak of coercion, in expecting others to join or not to join the politi-

cal parties.

Differing leaders have to be accountable to the "People's Fronts": If the activists of any party break the law that party

must be held responsible.

How should the differing leaders behave? Country's laws

must be respected at all costs. Till the time the country's constitution is there it has to be respected. Everything else emanates from that constitution.

If we haven't learnt this yet we belong to the jungles.

Each department of the society — military, para-military,

police, judiciary, civil servants,

businessmen, professionals,

students, etc must respect the law and carry on with the duties and responsibilities entrusted to them. We do not want another show of disobedience recently exhibited by the government servants. If the Secretaries can get away with flouting government rules and orders, who and what will discipline the government employees of lower strata?

Look at it from another angle:

What would have happened if the police or the army engaged

throughout the country to

maintain law and order in the past few weeks would have exhibited the same kind and degree of disobedience showed by the govt servants? Anyone, no matter who and in what circumstances, flouting the law must be punished — otherwise one day we may have to consider a system under which even murderers can go unpunished and pardoned!

To the Editor...

CTG's/CEC's task

Sir, At this juncture, your editorial, "New Govt's Task" (DS, 31.3.96) is a praiseworthy effort. The DS on the matter of the next poll has only mentioned, "the prime function for the CTG will be to hold the national election within 90 days of the dissolution of parliament." But so soon, should we forget the terms, "impartial, free and fair", those so long and so frequently harped as keynote catchwords? If I am not wrong, the whole gamut of the struggle of the political parties was to become cock-sure of an impartial, free and fair poll held under a selected and not under the elected government. Your editorial would have sounded

wonderful if this important fact was reflected and emphasized.

The following editorial, "For a Dignified Exit" (DS-31.3.96), in which the DS has rightly suggested that the CEC should exit for its controversial role in 15-February poll. I wished, if DS could also have cautioned the CTG on the pitfalls of poll process in our country, I would like to suggest the CEC, through this letter, that as CEC has adopted the voter ID card to ensure flawless voter list and make sure a genuine voter cast his own vote, he should also adopt ways to ensure neutrality and fairness with all the minions deployed around the polling booth.

When the Servants of the

Republic themselves cast shadow of doubts about their neutrality, and the Republic has to get the election completed by them at various stages, some visible action

would be necessary to bring back confidence of voters on the public servants conducting the poll. Otherwise, it will not be logical if some one terms the next poll too as "farcical" on that ground. I hope good sense will prevail.

The CTG is our last resort to show the world that our best selected person has not failed, also avoided the "sukarma karchupi" of any party in the next poll.

A R Chowdhury

Uttara, Dhaka

When the Servants of the

OPINION

People's Victory: Some Thoughts

Shafiqul Islam

The resilient people of Bangladesh again proved that they are indomitable by forcing the government to yield to the non-party caretaker government bill. No obstructions can stand in the way. We are very proud of their sacrificing spirit, firm determination and consciousness of their rights.

We should take very careful

steps to utilise this high stan-

dard of will-force in reshaping

the country's socio-political

and economic and

and economic and