

Nomination Seeking

With all major parties inviting prospective candidates to seek party nomination, the long awaited free and fair election appears to be finally at hand.

While the election spirit is certainly welcome, we are forced to express our concern about the scramble for 'winners' that all major parties are now involved in. Leaders of both BNP and AL are on record to have said that they will nominate only those people who have a good chance of winning from their respective constituencies. The argument is that loyalty to the party and to its ideals are fine, but at the end of the day the party must win. In a candid moment Begum Zia commented a few days back that her party must win because it is only behind winners that people flock. Sheikh Hasina was reported to have warned her party colleagues not to expect nomination just because they have been party loyalists through thick and thin. What the party needs are winners.

This all out drive to bring prospective winners into the party fold may lead to welcoming people with dubious background over the head of leaders of character, integrity and conviction. Take for example the welcoming of 'The Thief of Baghdad' or 'Street sweeper of Ershad' into the BNP fold. This shattered the morale of a large section of BNP loyalists for whom people such as these are the worst examples of corrupt and opportunistic politicians. It is our view that taking in such people harms political party of any standing, leave alone one of BNP's. Similar open door policy may bring in people whose company AL would be far better off avoiding.

The reason we are concerned about this trend is because we are witnessing a wholesale 're-cycling' of politicians many of whom are shifting loyalties for the 4th, 5th, or God knows how many times. Spirit to win is good, but not by sacrificing principles and good and deserving people from one's own fold. Such 'open door' policy also increases the influences of people with money and muscle power, because they also can deliver victory — of sorts. Do we want such 'victors'? Is that what free and fair election will ultimately give us? So, big parties, watch your steps. We, the voters, are watching.

Strange Facts

Very strange facts are coming to light from Khulna. A girl student of the Khulna University was molested inside the campus by known local mastans way back in October 1994. The University authority mainly in the person of the Vice-Chancellor, on receipt of the complaint and a request for action allegedly asked the father of the victim not to make a splash over the incident and promised to act himself. When nothing followed for nine months, the general students of the university gave the mastans a chase and catching three of them, handed them over to police. The university authority did not like it and served show-cause notices on 16 students it thought to be behind the student resistance. The authority topped this incredible action by expelling 13 of those students from the university for varying periods. Imagine who tops the list of the punished students! The girl who was molested. Yes, the VC has kept the word he is said to have given the father of the girl. He has acted.

We do not say that the bizarre action and its antecedent developments had any communal angle as such the doubly victimised girl being a Brahmin — but there is no escaping the fact that denominations other than Muslim will not be heartened by such gross display of injustice, and also that the wrong doers had an easy day over their prey's being a non-Muslim.

Read this along with a Rangpur kidnap where there is still no trace of Sandhya Rani of Pirkacha after a gang of six known miscreants had carried her away breaking into her brother's residence a month ago. The gang is moving about freely and threatening her brothers with wiping their whole family off if cases against them were not withdrawn. Because of the strange inaction of police, the claims of the criminals about minorities being violable at will would appear to stick specially to those at the wrong end of the rub.

The crimes must be stopped and only then their communal underpinnings — very dangerous to the society — would also disappear.

Press Freedom Day

Thanks to Unesco, we now have a World Press Freedom day, observed internationally on 3 May every year. Bangladesh marked the occasion with a function of sorts at the Press Club yesterday. It is our view that the need and importance of press freedom as an integral part of democracy is not fully understood by both our leaders and the general people. The reason for it is our failure to demonstrate to the public the need for it. The press in Bangladesh today enjoys far more freedom than it did in the past. Yet a lot of fetters still remain. The government policy on advertisement and newsprint quota, VAT on imported newsprint, arresting editors for their political views — all hamper the growth of a free press.

But a case can also be made that the press so far has not been able to give a very matured account of the use of the extent of freedom that it now enjoys. In the absence of an acceptable and credible media watch body, there is a free for all attitude in certain section of the print media. There is no question that often politics overtakes our objectivity and the difference between reporting and editorialising — a difference which is a fundamental aspect of our professional ethics — is blurred. We often seem to forget that what we sell are "newspapers" and not "views papers", that a reader pays Tk 5 first and foremost to get news of the day. Of course every paper must have an editorial position, and put forward multiplicity of views in its post-editorial section. But under no circumstances can the vital difference between commenting and reporting be given a secondary position. Because some of us play down this fundamental requirement of good journalism, many people feel that we take advantage of our press freedom and peddle our own political line instead of looking after the interest of the public at large. We think it is for this vital failure of ours that the notion of press freedom, while being accepted by all, is not so forcefully pushed forward as it needs to be. We must put our own house in order before we can expect the type of public support for press freedom that we see in matured democracies.

Adjustment and Reform: When Succeed, When Fail?

The most important determinant of success in the journey towards adjustment and reform seems to be a total commitment for the reforms not from the government alone (if at all) but also from the population and its different constituencies. Consensus is the key to the success.

FADED with prolonged economic stagnation, mounting poverty and accumulating debt, many countries of the world leaped to a series of structural adjustment programmes during the 1980s. The main purpose of such adjustment programmes was to revamp economic growth through resource shifts from unproductive and inefficient sectors to the productive and efficient ones. Out of many experiments with adjustments and reforms made so far, few success stories are found on record. On the other hand, a number of frustrating experiences tend to put the whole adjustment process into serious question and indictment. Resurgence of growth occurred in some countries *particular* adjustments but disappointing performance in many raised annoying questions about the virtues of the whole adjustment and reform programmes. The perennial question is, why some performed well while others performed worse despite having faced identical circumstances and similar constraints? Israt Hussain of the World Bank attempted to succinctly present some of the factors adducible to good or bad performance. The researcher thought it foolhardy to draw any grandiose generalization but, nevertheless, posited to give few answers. Given that Bangladesh is also one of those wearing 'adjustment and reform caps', the experiences

of others might provide her with some lessons.

The success stories tended to display the ownership and commitment of the government and the population of the country to the programme, including the willingness to sustain the policies in the face of pains and transitional costs. Such a consensus is believed to have positive correlation with successful outcomes. Any amount of outside interferences, coercing or coaxing by foreign donors and international financial institutions will not help in the absence of internal consensus. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, the adjustment programmes and reforms, allegedly, have been imposed by aid conditionals. Successive governments made little attempt to popularize the virtues of the programmes and build up consensus on these vital issues. In the name of 'state secrecy', the adjustment and reform agenda have never been placed in the parliament for discussion or for public debate. Thus, people at large felt alienated from, but not aligned with, the reforms. This half-hearted and haphazard implementation of reforms without having arrived at a broad internal consensus is not likely to create any positive durable effects. Adjustment programmes should be owned by the adopting

government and not perceived

to be imposed by outsiders.

Since adjustment and re-

forms appear to impose some

transitional costs, many govern-

ments, faced with pres-

ures from vested interest

groups within the economy

try to reverse or switch gears

in mid-term. This constitutes

an important impediment to

the success by tarnishing

credibility and continuity of

adjustment and reforms.

Those countries provided, according

to the researchers, automatic

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change, eliminated export

bars, and facilitated access to

intermediate inputs. As far as

Bangladesh is concerned, a

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oriented industries. Substantial

departure has also been made

from the import substitution

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Besides, exporters face insur-

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1975 but till today, allegedly, not much is said to have been achieved. According to one

study, despite massive denationalization and privatization programme of the early 1980s, public sector domination could be in evidence from the fact that in 1989-90, government-owned enterprises accounted for 25 per cent of employ-

ment, 60 per cent of fixed as-

sets and 29 per cent of gross

value added within the large

and medium industry category.

From the deliberations

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