

TEENS and TWENTIES

Its Time For a Change

by Shahed Latif



BNP's procession against opposition's non-cooperation

the government of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman and he had to pay a very big price for it. By forgiving the 'rajakars' he became unpopular among the people. And there were some other mistakes which led the downfall of a great political leader along with his party and ended up in the assassination of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman in 1975.

Then came the regime of Zia-ur-Rahman, he was an active soldier during the war of independence and was the founder of BNP, but he also seemed to be following the same steps as his predecessor and made the same mistakes all over again by not taking any actions against the 'rajakars' and even allowed them to come back to Bangladesh.

Other than that he tried to build up an image for himself and was trying to solve the problems faced by the country. He announced few programmes that would have solved out the problems, but that did not seem to last for long. President Zia-ur-Rahman met the same fate as Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman and was also assassinated.

Then came the autocratic regime of Hussain Muhammad Ershad who ruled Bangladesh with an iron hand for nine long years. He also came up with a party of his own. They also seemed to be following the previous two governments and instead of hanging the 'rajakars' in public they let them stay and grow into some kind of a political party. According to the government of President Ershad they were the only party that was working for Bangladesh, working for the development of the

country. He also came up with a party of his own. They also seemed to be following the previous two governments and instead of hanging the 'rajakars' in public they let them stay and grow into some kind of a political party. According to the government of President Ershad they were the only party that was working for Bangladesh, working for the development of the

BNP under the leadership of Khaleda Zia won 135 seats and came to power. At that election Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina won 88 seats, JP the illegal government of the 80s won 35 seats and the party that was against our liberation war won may be something around 28 seats.

It was a five-year term for the BNP government, they

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country and were looking after the people of Bangladesh. Even when the people did not want him, his policies or his government. But he kept on rigging the so-called election and emerged as the winner all the time. Thus began a bloody struggle to bring down the government but they were successful only after nine years.

After the fall of Ershad a neutral caretaker government was installed in power whose job was to see that the first election after the early 80s (unbelievable but absolutely true) was as free as possible. That seemed to have a tremendous result because it was the first election in Bangladesh which was free, fair and absolutely neutral.

completed their full five year term that ended up in a total mess. After about three years the opposition in the new parliament started opposing the government and they threatened to agitate unless their demands were met by BNP. But the government gave a deaf ear to what the opposition had to say and they continued with their own policies. And at that point it drove the opposition to boycott the fifth parliament, and said until a caretaker government was installed to power to monitor the elections

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they would not listen to any proposals. It drove the opposition led by AL, to take such a hard stand against BNP.

And for two years the opposition continued with their programmes of non-cooperations, hartals, blockages etc. but still they could not move the 'Aposh heen netr' an inch. she met all these with brutality, killings, arresting, raiding hostels in an effort to show that she was 'aposh heen' which she was very proud of. And then came the election of '96 which was held on the 14th of February. This election was openly opposed by the Opposition and rejected by the mass. Even though the opposition parties boycotted the election the democratic BNP government claimed that it was a free and fair, and they went on to say that it was fair than '91. Ninety-eight per cent of the voters turned out to vote (a historic event for Bangladesh because never in its 25 years of independence did 98 per cent voters vote) when only 8 per cent or less exercised their voting right.

However, the sixth parliament was dissolved within days and on the 30th of March 1996 the power was handed over to a caretaker government and fresh dates for an election was announced.

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All their manifestos, programmes are farce as far as real development or democracy or anything good for the country is concerned. If you really sit back and turn the pages of our history, you only see poverty, under development and vicious power hungry politicians for Bangladesh — our Sonar Bangladesh.

It is now really on the mass electorate out there to study, understand, feel the depth of the crisis and go for votes.

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The Plight of the First Time Voters

by Nameer Rahman

IN a country of a hundred and twenty million and above, a large part, if not the majority of the population is below the age of thirty. Whether recognised or not, this demographic cross section is a major voting force to be tapped and is quite often the deciding factor in the winning or losing of elections. Every election year this group grows substantially larger, with an ever increasing number of first time voters joining the ranks. However, the thoughts and ideals driving these electorate and their criteria for selecting the candidate and/or the party of their choice, are as diverse as the earth and the sky.

Whereas in many industrialized countries getting the younger population to vote is so difficult that they have to pass laws making it compulsory for them to do so (for example Australia), politicians abroad at least recognise the

worst scenario, the student wing of political parties are used like storm troopers to harass society into voting for their candidates with complete party protection from the police. They are supplied with transportation and weapons to threaten and intimidate, with cash rewards for every successful mission.

This disturbing practice has led to the exploitation of the first time voter corrupting the democratic process and younger generation and contributing to the downward spiral in law and order. As for the young voters going out of their way to vote, in a recent news article, of the several thousand applicants for the revised voters list, including all the first time voters, only forty six were found to be valid.

A large number of first time voters are actively involved in political activity even before reaching the voting age of

the total first time voters, will not in fact vote. From their standpoint of relative economic security they frequently consider the act of voting unnecessary, and are of the opinion that local politics and politicians have nothing more to offer than the best of a bad bargain. If they do vote its because they believe that they are voting for the 'lesser of the two evils'. Underprivileged first time voters on the other hand, those from rural or working class backgrounds will almost definitely vote. The reasons are obvious, they have everything to gain and nothing to lose, or so they believe. For them it represents the one time in life when their opinion matters. For the unemployed and those without almost any hope of a reasonable future, this sense of power and self importance that is gifted to them with the concept of one man one vote is irresistible. They believe their future, their



Election campaign going on

value of the younger voter and considerable effort is exerted to secure this vital section of society. Improving the quality of life and projecting a tangible future for the younger generation is therefore a cardinal policy of their party manifestoes. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh local politics dictates that the politician will remain complacent, because he is confident of the fact that his youthful supporters will go out of their way to vote for him, two or three times if possible, even before they reach the age of eighteen. In return the most they can possibly extract from him is the odd cup of tea and cold drinks with few refreshments at the party club house. The election is ultimately won for the politician with the liberal spending of money on frivolities that keeps the young people sufficiently happy in order for him to avoid making any real commitment for their betterment. In its

eighteen, taking part in processions and rallies in what is often fanatical support for party or candidate. Many become members of various student party organisations. This blind support and active involvement comes from being exposed to a highly politicised society from an early age. The influencing factors are friends, family, and political propaganda. Or just a personal belief that a particular candidate or party can fulfil more than the other. They may not have a particular criteria for selecting a party or candidate and, like most people, the reading of party manifestoes is irrelevant.

Whether the first time voter will actually take the trouble to cast that vote, depends on the social background and other influencing factors that surround his environment. One finds that most of the prospective middle to upper middle class voters, which constitutes a small minority of

prosperity as well as their quality of life depends on the outcome of the elections. Some vote because they feel a moral obligation to do so, others vote 'just for the hell of it', for these youngsters its like a joyride. Those who don't vote have a lot less to lose than their poorer counterparts. They are relatively secure, socially and economically, and know very well that the outcome of the elections will have little or no effect on their social and financial standing.

Which party will the first time electorate vote for? There is no clear majority. Some areas are more influenced by one party than another. Some, like Dhanmondi are more or less no man's land. Whichever party gets a majority you can be rest assured, whatever the reason, its due to the unseen hand, the unheard voice and the unrecognised face of the first time voter.



Police under attack BNP's procession against opposition non-cooperation.

power. Rahim does not want BNP or AL to come, he wants JP to come because its founder was an army chief, that is why he is going to vote for JP. [JP]

14. Jacob O. Razario (DU student) : He believes the election this time might be a free and fair one and then again it might not be. He would vote for BNP because he believes BNP is more experienced now because of its last 5 years. He believes that BNP had both good and bad qualities but given a chance BNP would prove its point. It was good for our economy. [BNP]

15. Jamil Ahmed (College student) : Jamil believes the elections this time would be free, fair, he mentioned that there might not be any problem. Jamil said that he would vote for Jatiya Party because he believes after the independence war most of the development work was done during the JP rule. [JP]

Survey conducted by — Shahed Latif



Violence in election, an almost inevitable phenomenon.

What the younger generation is thinking about the elections

TANZEEM (Class X) : According to Tanzeem the upcoming election should be impartial and rigging of votes should be stopped. She believes that if the party comes to power then the opposition in the new parliament should not bring up unnecessary points instead should help them to solve their previous mistakes. She also pointed out a thing that which ever party comes to power they should stop pointing at each others mistakes, rather should concentrate more on the development of the country. She mentioned that she would like Jatiya Party to win. [JP]

2. Tauseef (I.U.B. University) : According to Tauseef election under a caretaker government is a positive step towards a democratic government. Tauseef mentioned that elections should be unbiased which would definitely make a healthy government. He lastly informed me that he would vote for Jatiya Party and wants them to come. [JP]

3. Tasneem (I.U.B. University) : Tasneem told me that elections are for betterment of the country, she told me that some one else should come, she firmly mentioned that fundamentalists should never come, she also emphasized that law & law enforcing agencies should be stricter than before in the elections. She mentioned she would vote for JP and hopes that they

come to power again. [JP]

4. Simon-Bin Mansoor (1st year Radiant College) : He emphasized that the upcoming election should be free & fair, there should not be any kind of violence. He mentioned that he would vote for Awami League because of its historical achievements for Bangladesh & he sincerely hopes they win. And he does not want fundamentalists in power. [AL]

5. Paula Aziz (1st year Vigaroonessa College) : Paula wants a government that will look into all the problems of Bangladesh small and big with the same depth. She wants some one who can take the responsibilities, she mentioned about the independence of media and politics free universities. She strongly pointed out that fundamentalist forces should be uprooted. Paula emphasized that who ever the next government or opposition is instead of thinking about things on personal terms they should give a new shape to our new born democracy. She lastly mentioned that either BNP or JP should come.

6. Rehan (student) : Rehan mentioned that former president Hussain Muhammad Ershad should be freed & he should be allowed to participate in the elections. He mentioned that he does not want AL or BNP, instead if a single

party should come to power and that should be Jatiya Party and if there is a coalition then should be Jatiya Party & Jamaat. He lastly said he would vote for Jatiya Party. [JP]

7. Chayan (student) : Chayan mentioned that he wants the caretaker government to be very strict, there should not be any violence or rigging of votes. He then emphasized that who ever the next government and opposition is should work together for the country forgetting the past. According to him BNP has spend more money on education and tried to modernize it, they have raised the job quota from age 27-30. Then Chayan mentioned about the development works and said that is why he wants BNP to come again. He lastly emphasized that at any cost. He mentioned he would vote for BNP. [BNP]

8. Opu (HSC student) : Opu mentioned that the elections should be free, fair and without any violence. He mentioned that fundamentalist should not come, neither should Jatiya Party or BNP, he wants Awami League to come to power, because he believes they would develop the country. He emphasized that he would vote for Awami League & wants them to come. [AL]

9. Nafisa Mahzabeen (DU student) : Nafisa said that the

elections this time would be free, fair & without any violence. And she believes that there may be a 100% turn out. She thinks that AL has a very bright chance of winning this time, but personally would not vote for them. She wants the BNP to return to power because only BNP has the qualities to lead the country successfully. She would vote for BNP. [BNP]

10. Nafisa Noor (1st year Vigaroonessa College) : Nafisa mentioned that the election this time would be as fair as '91. She favours the caretaker government because the believes that to conduct elections in our country a neutral power is needed. She mentioned it very strongly and arrogantly that the fundamentalist's should not be allowed to raise their head, the should be banned. She also emphasized that who ever the next government or opposition is should work together and the opposition should not oppose just for the sake of opposing but should help the government. Nafisa finally mentioned that she would vote for AL. [AL]

11. Rumi (student) : Rumi mentioned that election should be violence free. He said that he does not want BNP and believe that some other party with dedication and sincerity should come to power. Rumi mentioned that fundamentalists should not come nor should JP, he believes that AL should be given a fair chance to see what they can do for the country. [AL]

12. Shadiza Zima (1st year Vigaroonessa College) : Zima mentioned that she is rather curious about the election not anxious. She believes that there is no one she can vote for. All the parties are same but mentioned that she is annoyed with BNP. Zima then said that Awami League might be given a chance and fundamentalist's like Jamaat should be banned from politics. [AL]

13. Rahim (student) : He does not believe in democracy, according to him one country needs military rule. He wants the army to take over the

Police attack on unruly mob.