

TEENS and TWENTIES

Its Time For a Change

by Shahed Latif



BNP's procession against opposition's non-cooperation

I am not a politician, nor an intellectual. I am just an ordinary citizen of this country that I love more than anything and I want to see prosper day by day. But unfortunately the country that has been liberated by the sacrifice of millions of innocent people still seems to be fighting with itself to stand on its own feet.

Bangladesh has tasted freedom for twenty-five years, and in this long span of time it has gone through bitter and happy days. Let us look back to the history of our motherland, starting from the British rule.

After much struggle and sacrifice, the great politicians of our subcontinent compelled the white men to leave our soil. But they did not give up that easily, they made sure that cultural and religious differences take root among the people of the sub-continent. And they have been quite successful in this, because they not only divided the people, they even divided the politician's so much that two separate countries were born, the first one was 'Hindu' dominated named India and the other one was 'Muslim' dominated 'Pakistan', we by the virtue of being Muslims became a part of Pakistan.

The difference between East Pakistan and West Pakistan, culture or heritage, was as far apart as the two countries itself. We were 1200 miles apart but still were ruled by an alien country that systematically tried to destroy our rich cultural heritage. But our political leaders and the students did not sit quietly to live up with something that was meant to be ours.

We all know about our historical movements of '52, '69, '71 and ultimately our independence. We are all aware of the pain that we had to go through for sovereignty.

Anyway, after Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman was released from Karachi jail, he took charge of our war ravaged country. Due to some unusual circumstances things did not take the desired turns for our new Prime Minister.

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What the younger generation is thinking about the elections

come to power again. [JP]

4. Simon-Bin Mansoor (1st year Radian 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 Vigaroneesa 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

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

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 should 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]

10. Nafisa Noor (1st year Vigaroneesa 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 Vigaroneesa 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

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' 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.

I earnestly believe that our country is still not free. It is now under the clutches of its own people, a sad but true phenomenon. Its leaders are all power hungry and their reign is self-oriented. Whoever is in power, their sole obligation is to their party, its members and their relatives, never the mass that elected them.

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.

Our country's fate is in our hands and lets forget and forgive the past, the false promises and mistakes and try to help her own lost time, before she is totally doomed and before she loses her credibility as an independent state in the face of the globe.

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 manifestos. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh local politics dictates that the politicians 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 surround his environment. One finds that most of the prospective middle to upper middle class voters, which constitutes a small minority 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 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

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



Election campaign going on

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 it's 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 Dhamondi 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.



Violence in election, an almost inevitable phenomenon.

