

Chafing Chittagong

Just at a time when the road to the June 12 elections looks destined to be deloused with all the threats of hidden and unforeseen trouble taken care of by the recent, reassuring avowal of the Chief Adviser, the report on election related violence in Chittagong comes as a downer for the spirit of an optimist and a real tonic for that of a cynic. Two deaths and an unspecified allusion of victims receiving injuries may not be enough for the concern of someone steeped in Chittagong's legacy of violence and political feud, but what worries us most is that the electoral preparations has triggered off a spree of violence that has been going on in the port city for quite some time making a scarecrow of the law enforcing agency.

The drive for recovering illegal arms with a view to ensuring ideal atmosphere immune to the provocations and possibilities of violence at least until June 12, has apparently come ungummed to some extent if not wholly. People have been quoted to have observed that sensitive areas like Phatikkhari, Rauzan and Rangunia have by and large remained untouched by the arms recovery operation. It would be unwise to play down the pre-election spate of violence in view of the popular evaluation of the arms recovery drive as a customary and stock reaction simply because the contestants and local leaders who are expected to have the feel of the people and places they belong to, too have expressed their apprehension in no uncertain terms.

Given the milieu now prevailing there, the observation of one senior police official that violence is an indication of tough electoral contest sounds as an undesirable, untimely study in irrelevance and ineptitude. We have no pretensions at being labelled as journalistic disciples of Antithesis but we would not pretend either to hide our worries about what is happening in Chittagong. It looks like the port city, second only to Dhaka in importance for every conceivable reason, needs more than its allotted share of authorities' countrywide vigilance in connection with the June 12 polls.

The Recovery Rewards

Its good intentions notwithstanding, the tele-ads dangling lucrative cash rewards for information — not the real stuff — on illegal arms makes an eerie reading. And its repetition in the span of one evening's televiewing, and unfailingly over every evening, do tell upon the nerves. An ironic smile comes over the viewer's face and he or she is more disgusted than amused by reward promises. Because no one, in fact, believes that this would work.

There is now news that it works. Taka ten lakh, out of double that amount allocated for the job, has been disbursed to the different police ranges. Dhaka and Khulna police have reported exhausting their first funding of Tk 1.5 lakh.

The point is, is it enough to take satisfaction? There is a widespread — and deep rooted — perception that cadres, running into thousands and armed to their teeth with modern weapons, remain solidly untouched. And that arms are still now flowing to undesirable hands. Compared to this the tele-ads and their results are less than specks of dust.

We do not, however, say the cash rewards and the recovery of arms haven't any use. The recovery campaign and even the reward ads are indeed being instrumental in creating, together with the general election ambience, an atmosphere in which the cadre wouldn't feel encouraged to go into action on the election day.

That should be a great thing if it indeed comes to that. But the arms will continue to be there in the society, vitiating every post election day's prospect of building a stable and dynamic society. The underground arms are a time bomb ticking its minutes away. One does not know when it will take its toll. It must be defused before that. If the present government has failed to do that, the next will do it on pain of its being hurt mortally. The question is whether that government would be wise caring enough to heed this point of inevitability.

Now is the Time

A recent study conducted by a group of Dhaka University students has brought under the spotlight five evils as the perpetrating sources of violence on the campus. Financial problems of the students, cadre based politics, bottle-necks in the university administration, grouping among teachers and corrupt practices in the administration have been desirably put in the line of fire. Have they been really? Because studies of similar nature were conducted in the past too and the uncelebrated funeral of those findings have occasioned the latest one. Whether this one too is destined to meet a similar fate or not only futurity knows but the boys who carried out the survey-based research deserve a pat on their backs for the courage and the sheer timeliness of this effort.

The whole country is poised for a transition and the party that is going to be in power will do a world of good to its future by taking some sincere steps to eradicate violence from the campus. The would be oppositions are saddled with even more responsibility and sincerity in this respect. For their part the Dhaka University authorities can do something towards solving two major problems — lack of scope for self-employment and the want of adequate halls of residence — with the deposit of Taka two crore lying, according to the study report, unutilised in the DU Trust Fund.

The President and the Precedence

At the moment, there is no substitute for a free and fair election. The only substitute, if at all, is anarchy, despotism and political mishaps.

All eyes are now cast on 12 June 1996 — the day of a general election for Bangladesh. Within a span of only five months, two general elections would be recorded in our history. There was, of course, one of this sort on 15 February of this year but that election was rejected en masse due to its non-participatory and rigged attributes. The mass upsurge that challenged the earlier notoriety called for the re-establishment of a caretaker government to hold the general election. It is the second time that Bangladesh's general election is going to be administered by a caretaker government and, possibly, the process would remain alive for sometime to come.

The socio-economic and political ramifications of a free and fair general election in Bangladesh is well documented. It is "likely" to help establish a people's government with a proclivity towards transparency and accountability. But, as has been noted on several occasions, holding a general election *per se*, even though by a caretaker government, would sound as a necessary condition to install a democratic process in Bangladesh. The sufficient conditions e.g., separation of judiciary from the executive, freedom of the press and electronic media, establishment of local government bodies etc., are yet to properly land in this part of the globe. To have an empirical underpinning one needs only to note

that the earlier government also came to power through a historical neutral election organised by a caretaker government but soon went broke in the absence of those sufficient conditions. It is, therefore, in the interest of democracy alone that we should not lose sight of those sufficient conditions while in a spree for the necessary condition.

To this effect India could, possibly, be cited as an example where democratic institutions are so anchored that nothing can upset the democratic calculus. The EC of India and the President of that Republic are said to be the vanguard of their democratic movement onwards. Not only that no allegations are raised about the neutrality of the election commission but also that the chair of the President is generally kept above all means. In fact the president, although elected by particular political party, was never heard to display any partisan attitude in a moment of grave crisis. We feel tempted here to cite few instances to establish that the acts of the Indian President could be the precedence for the President of a country like Bangladesh.

First, before the recent Indian general election, when the election schedule was announced the then Congress government sent some pro-

posals to the President for approval. The President of India thought that, once approved, those might have an influence on the upcoming general election. So he set aside those proposals of the party which elected him as the President of India. Can the President of Bangladesh hold the courage to be that much non-partisan? Perhaps not. Yesterday, a group of teachers from Barisal BM College is reported to have met President Abdur Rahman Biswas.

Abdur Rahman Biswas, allegedly, tarnished the image of the head of the Republic. He should have been more cautious in the wake of a number of complaints against him for being partisan. Second, BJP won the single majority in the recent Indian election and Indian Congress — the party that nominated the President — suffered a serious setback. But, nonetheless, the President asked the BJP to display the command of the

easily rock the boat of democracy. Historical records, for as India is concerned, tend to show that the post of the President played a magnificent role in nursing the democratic process in India.

Besides the Presidency, the status of the Judiciary also went a long way in strengthening the democratic process in India. Relatively speaking, the judiciary there is immune from party or government influences to provide an equal access to justice for all. The other most important strata of a sustaining a democratic process is the democratisation of the local government institutions. Local government bodies are headed and managed by elected representatives at regular intervals to ensure smooth functioning of the local level planning and implementations.

For a number of reasons Bangladesh needs a representative government immediately. The Paris consortium meeting was postponed till a representative government was installed. It implies that the flow of aid is also postponed. The domestic and foreign investors are eagerly waiting to see a popular and representative government to take over so that their investment decisions are guaranteed by a majority of the people. The reform programmes are stalled in the absence of the earlier government had to face.

And in this whole process of transformation the titular head of the state has a particular role to play. The onus lies on him to see that the harvests of the long-drawn struggle for a fair general election are reaped home by the nation. Suspect as he is for his alleged partisan activities in the past, time has now come to prove that everything is otherwise. Let our President set good precedence.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



Biswas who assured them that the said college would be turned into a university very soon. Should the President have done that? It is, allegedly, a clear violation of the electoral rules of conduct. The assurance is more disconcerting since the President's son Mr. Nasim Biswas is contesting from that constituency. When the highest post of the Republic tends to show no respect to the electoral rules, how can we expect that the lowest ones would abide by?

By giving promises to the people of a constituency where his own son is contesting Mr. Biswas who assured them that the said college would be turned into a university very soon. Should the President have done that? It is, allegedly, a clear violation of the electoral rules of conduct. The assurance is more disconcerting since the President's son Mr. Nasim Biswas is contesting from that constituency. When the highest post of the Republic tends to show no respect to the electoral rules, how can we expect that the lowest ones would abide by?

With No Malice.....

by Zaglul A. Chowdhury

Mr Vajpayee, as a person and a leader, is undeniably the most charismatic and honest politician in the Indian political scene today.

M R Atal Bihari Vajpayee has been the prime minister of India for a very brief spell. When his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had formed the government in world's largest democracy, it sent tremors down the spines of several countries because for the first time a party perceived as communal rose to form a government in multi-religious India where Muslims alone account for more than 10 crores in a population of 90 crores. But Mr Vajpayee, as a person and a leader, is undeniably the most charismatic and honest politician in the Indian political scene today. He was widely seen as a future prime minister of India not only in the recent past but in the early 60s as well when India's first prime minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru introduced him to a foreign dignitary as the future prime minister of his country even though Mr Vajpayee's Jan Sangh party was in the opposition then. Mr Nehru could read the potentials of a much younger Vajpayee despite their political differences and had no hesitation to portray him as the future leader of India.

Mr Vajpayee a sad man after working as the prime minister for such a short stint

and going down in history as a prime minister who was given the chance but could not demonstrate the majority support in the floor of the House and instead preferred to resign rather than facing the test confidence motion? Maybe he is not a happy man, but certainly he will bask in the glory of having made no attempt at all to resort to "horse-trading" to win over members from other parties to muster majority support. His party might have made efforts, but prime minister Vajpayee did not. At the very beginning of his government he had made it clear that under no circumstances he would engineer defections so as to ensure the survival of his government.

Probity and integrity should constitute inseparable features in public life. But this quality is definitely on the wane not only in our country but also in India which once used to boast of honesty and cleanliness in public life. At a time when top Indian politicians are being tainted with corruption (like involvement in the "Hawala

case"). Mr Vajpayee stood out as a person of integrity.

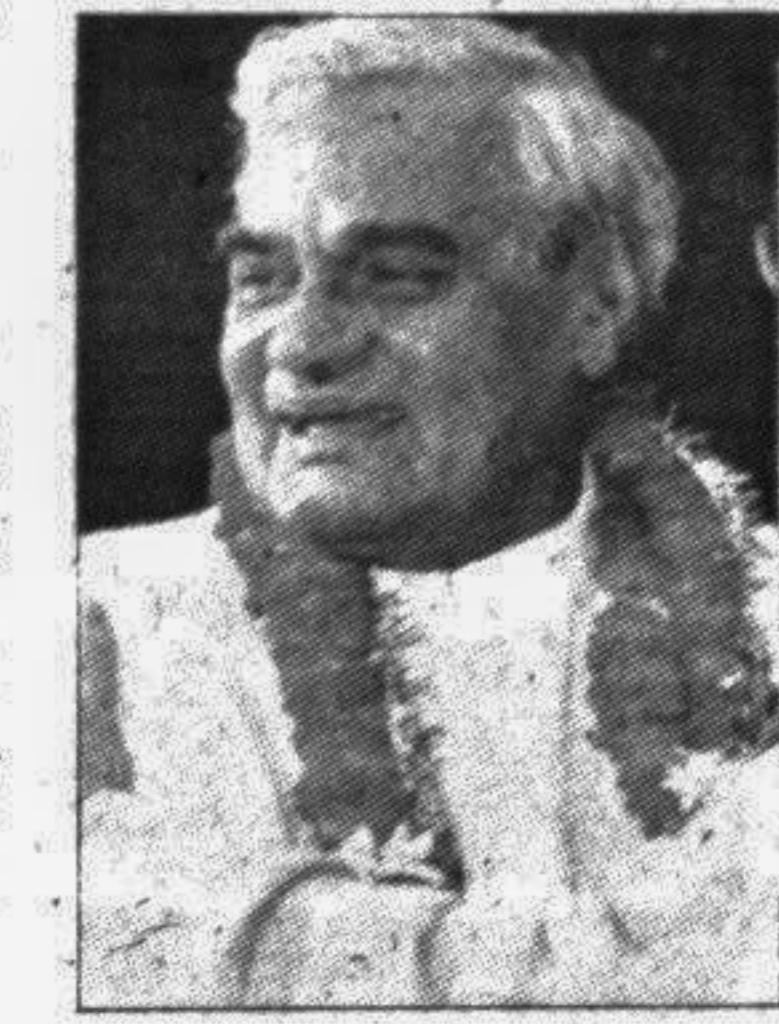
I had the opportunity of knowing Mr Vajpayee when I was posted in New Delhi as a Bangladesh journalist in the early '80s. One day on my way back from office, I got down at New Delhi's INA market for my routine shopping. The market is known for good fish in addition to other items. As I came out from the market on my way to my residence at Panchee Park along with a Bangladeshi friend, I found a gentleman was buying fruits and vegetables. The man in white kurta and dhoti was in his early fifties but what surprised me was that he was the first to greet me before I could do it. I had come to know the gentleman since it was already more than a year of my four-year stay in the Indian capital.

One could not but know him, at least by name, during one's stay in New Delhi. He was the most spell-binding orator in the Indian political scene even at that time and Delhites knew him as he used to campaign for

his party candidates in every national election.

As I arrived in the Indian capital just before the 1980 general elections that saw the triumphant return of late Mrs Indira Gandhi to power, I attended several public meetings addressed by Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee. A master orator in Hindi and often punctuated in English, he had a mesmeric effect on the listeners. I myself could not leave a rally at the Boat Club near the India Gate till the hour-long speech of Mr Vajpayee was over. But later when I had the privilege to know him personally, as a foreign correspondent, I was charmed by his simple and austere life. He would walk down from the parliament frequently with some friends towards his residence in the area given by the government to the members of parliament and other high-ups.

When I responded to his greetings at the INA market, he immediately asked me about my welfare. A journalist friend from Bangladesh, Mr



Zahirul Alam, who was at that time in New Delhi attending a course, was with me. I introduced him to Mr. Vajpayee who immediately asked about Bangladesh etc. Mr Vajpayee, then already one of the most successful foreign ministers of India, left with two of his companions. When I had exclaimed, "Sir, you are in the market!" He, wearing a smile,

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

"President's Actions"

Sir, I have read your first editorial on May 22, 1996. I would like to say that it was not at all a right editorial at a right time, as Mr Rafiqueul Haq thought of. In my opinion, it was rather in "Lightning Speed" and pre-mature.

The pre-maturity is always vulnerable to cause sudden death and I am afraid your views may have the same fate. It is always better not to have "Lightning Speed" in commenting on "Delicate", "Sensitive" and highly important "National Matter". The arrow once off from the bow cannot return to its position and the damage is inevitable. In this issue the damage could be colossal and it could lead to a national disaster.

One should not be so bold in passing the comment to general mass when most of the people do not know the fact. In this respect my opinion is that The Daily Star could wait a little to ventilate its views to the general people by knowing the whole truth about the incidence.

I also think Mr Rafiqueul Haq is confusing us by thinking all of us uneducated and making the Article 62 as "Greek".

I do not know how the caretaker government and its Chief can be compared with that of a parliamentary form of government. In the parliamentary system the Chief should be a people's elected person, but in our case the concept of "Non-party" caretaker government itself is contrary to that system. The 13th Amendment gave us the caretaker government and the same amendment gave the power to the President to hold the portfolios of Ministry of Defence.

As a layman I do not understand how one part of the amendment can be legal and another — illegal? In my opinion the "Caretaker Government" and its chief in no way can have same executive power as that of the parliamentary system. Because he is not an elected person and he is meant only to hold a neutral election. In all country of the world, only EC is enough to hold election smoothly and

neutrally but not in Bangladesh.

The question is why? Why we need a "Caretaker Government" and what not to have a neutral and smooth election? Is it due to the people of this country? Or due to the political people and the leaders? I think the poor and innocent people of this country are good but the fault is with the leaders and educated people who are having suspicious mind and not ready to accept the defeat.

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It would be evident that candidates dominated by different political parties for the coming parliamentary elections are frequent to people's houses and coming to mosques especially on Jummah Days with a view to meet common people and to request them to vote. This is indeed a very good sign.

Actually we need to elect honest and patriots who after winning would organise the honest and patriotic forces of the country for working with the common people for poverty-free, peaceful and happy Bangladesh.

M Zahidul Haque
Asstt Prof BAI, Dhaka

Benjamin's letter to the President

Sir, Mr Benjamin A Gilman, member of the US House of Representative, has written a letter to President Abdur Rahman Biswas regarding the trial of some top-ranking military officers who were allegedly involved in the recent incidents. In his letter he urged the President to make him certain whether the rights of the arrested army officers are respected and the trial process would be open, free and fair.

We do not know whether our President has sought any direction from him in this regard. Bangladesh may be a small country in comparison with the USA. But it is needless to say that Bangladesh is an independent and sovereign country. We have achieved independence at the cost of 3 million martyrs and had to fight for over 9 months to liberate our country from Pakistani butchers. We could not understand how Mr Benjamin can write such a letter to the President of UNAIDS.

It reminds us of the miserable failure of the United Nations as regards the outcome of much expensive UN summits in Rio de Janeiro, Copenhagen, Cairo and Beijing, and very unsuccessful efforts of UN in tackling the inhumanity in Rwanda, Somalia, Chechnya, etc. Now the world people believe that all these failures were mainly because of absence of moral and human aspects in UN efforts and strategies. Now it is becoming clear to the people that no efforts of the UN or any other organisation can never achieve the targeted goals if it does not incorporate the moral and human approaches as a dimension in their strategies and programmes.

So, in this context, we want to draw the attention of the United Nations and all other organisations concerned to a recent widely talked-about

international attention, for that, many dignitaries will come to observe CTG's performance very closely.

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popular issue viz. "a universal moral development proposal to UN" by Dr Abu Obaidul Huque from Bangladesh for solving all the crucial problems of mankind today. It may be noted here that the universal moral development proposal of Prof. Obaidul Huque is not only the main solution for worldwide AIDS prevention but also the ultimate solution to curb the disastrous problems of the contemporary world like poverty, environment pollution, violation of human rights, oppression on women, terrorism, drug abuses, smoking, etc. There is no denying the fact that this universal moral development proposal of Dr Huque is an "integrated, comprehensive and package-deal approach" to combat almost all the severe ills and vices on the globe today and this proposal is the most important factor to promote the causes to ensure everlasting peace and justice for mankind at all times.

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UN and AIDS prevention

Sir, You deserve congratulations for publishing a very timely letter under the above mentioned caption in *The Daily Star* on 25.5.1996. We fully agree with the letter writer who expressed that the recently declared worldwide AIDS prevention programme UNAIDS can never be successful if it is not touched upon by the essence of morality because according to the social scientists and medical doctors AIDS, in most cases, multiplies through immoral sexual interactions.

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