

## News Analysis

# Is politics going out of the hands of politicians?

By Nurul Kabir

Some findings of a recent opinion poll, especially those relating to "patronisation" of hoodlums by candidates in the ensuing elections, are alarming enough to cause headache to many who sincerely want to see that the coming general elections are held in a free and fair atmosphere.

Another finding that sheds light on the socio-economic status of the candidates is bound to appear as a disturbing fact for those who believe in the people's participatory approach towards democracy and development.

The findings, together with the report that only 21 per cent of the candidates are politicians, poses a serious question: Is politics going out of the hands of our politicians?

The opinion poll, conducted countrywide by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), reveals that the political parties in general have developed a "tendency to sponsor hoodlum" at an increased rate over the last five years. According to one survey, 34 per cent of the nominees of various political parties are "sheltering hoodlums". In 1991, the percentage, on an average, was 21.

What is more alarming is that, according to the PPRC survey, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League (AL), the two major parties desperately contending for state power, have "substantially increased their patronisation of the criminal elements". The BNP's "patronisation of hoodlums" increased to 49 per cent this year from 11 per cent in 1991 while that of the AL rose to 34 per cent from 18 per cent.

The political economy of sponsoring hoodlums suggests that the parties concerned might try to use these goons to achieve their ultimate target to to power. In a market economy, one cannot get anything without money. It is, therefore,

presumable the political parties had to invest money to ensure loyalty of the thugs. On the other hand, an investor always tries to make sure that his or her investment is realised with adequate returns in due course. How do the hired hoodlums pay back effectively their politician masters during an election? Electoral history says: By making attempts to rig polls in favour of their patrons.

The alarming increase in the political patronisation of hoodlums, as shown by the PPRC opinion poll has made the Election Commission's task of holding a free and fair election difficult.

The PPRC survey further shows that only four per cent of the candidates come from the low income groups. Of the rest, 34 per cent come from the middle class and 62 per cent from the upper class.

The statistics indicate that the lowest number of candidates come from the poor, the majority of our population. Conversely, the highest number of candidates come from the wealthy ones, the minority in our society. The picture becomes more clear when we look into the professions of the candidates. Forty-four per cent of the candidates are big industrialists and businessmen, twenty-eight per cent professionals, twenty-two per cent politicians, four per cent small traders and three per cent peasants.

Even if we take almost an absurd proposition for granted that all the candidates coming from the low income groups would win the polls, the representation of the vast majority of our population in Jatiya Sangsad would be terribly low. Clearly, majority of our people stand little chance to have laws enacted in their favour.

Under such circumstances, the fashionable concept of the people's participatory approach towards development,

**Our weekly feature 'Down to Earth' has been dropped to today for unavoidable reasons. We regret inconvenience caused to readers.**

## 25.5 m infected

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Ninety per cent of HIV and AIDS cases lie in developing countries, with sub-Saharan Africa being hardest hit. There, UNAIDS estimates, 13.3 million adults — or more than 20 per cent of the population — are HIV infected.

Heterosexual transmission accounts for the majority of infections in the region," it said, "while transmission through blood transfusions accounts for less than 10 per cent."

East Asia and the Pacific, which includes China's one billion people, apparently has fewer than 50,000 adults with HIV or AIDS.

In North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, the HIV case count stands at 1.2 million with Australia facing an affliction rate of 0.12 per cent.

The single hardest-hit country is Botswana, with an adult prevalence rate of more than 18 per cent.

In northern Africa and the Middle East, the figure is 0.12 per cent.

One bright spot is a decline in the number of new HIV cases to emerge in the United States, where AIDS first came to light in 1981 in the homosexual community.

There, some 40,000 new cases are being discovered per year, compared with 100,000 a few years ago.

## CEC

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when summoned by Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers, Presiding Officers or Magistrates on duty, he added.

He also said polling would be suspended at centres disturbed by acts of terrorism. Abu Hena said he stood determined to resort to suspension of polling in the face of terrorism.

"Polling will be held twice or thrice if necessary to enable voters to cast their votes without let or hindrance," the CEC said expressing his determination three days ahead of the general elections.

He appreciated marked changes in the attitude of political parties. The code of conduct formulated by the Election Commission is backed by moral sanction of political parties.

He said political parties and their candidates were by and large trying their best to abide by the code of conduct. This signals a bright future for democracy in this country.

The CEC also referred to actions being taken against candidates for violating the election code of conduct. Those candidates are being warned against violation of the code of conduct and also being summoned to explain the causes of their violation.

Abu Hena concluded with a note of optimism that the election would be free, fair and peaceful.

**Editor : Mahfuz Anam**  
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## 23 of 40 SAARC observers arrive

Twenty-three members of the 40-member South Asian Non-governmental (SAARC) observer group from Sri Lanka, Nepal and India arrived in Dhaka yesterday to observe the June 12 elections, reports BSS.

Coordinator of the group from Sri Lanka and eight delegates from Pakistan arrived earlier.

The persons who arrived yesterday are: Sri Lanka — Nalin Abeysekera Oleal (legal draftsman), Ms Jezima Ismail (educationist and social activist), Justice JFA Soza (chairman, judges training institute and former judge court of appeal) and Dr (Ms) Deepika Udugama (lecturer, faculty of law, University of Colombo and Director, Centre for Study of Human Rights).

**COG chief meets President today**

By Staff Correspondent

The chairman of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) Tan Sri Dr Mohd Ghazali Shafe is scheduled to meet President Abdur Rahman Biswas today, according to a COG press release.

During the meeting the COG chairman would be accompanied by Alice Kilam, an Electoral Officer from Canada and two officials from the Commonwealth Secretariat, Prof Reg Austin, leader of the observer group's support team, and Michael Fathers, the media adviser.

The COG chairman is also scheduled to visit Chittagong the same day in the afternoon and expected to return to the city the next day, the release added.

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## Recording of JP leader's speech today

By Staff Correspondent

Recording of the speech of Jatiya Party leader for broadcast over radio and television is scheduled for today, according to an earlier official programme.

As part of the election campaign, heads of the parties with at least 30 candidates have been given opportunity to put forward their party programmes over the state-run radio and television.

But Saeed Tarik, a presidium member of the JP when contacted told The Daily Star that they were not officially informed anything about the scheduled recording till last night.

**10 political activists held in Jhalakathi**

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, June 7: Jhalakathi police on Wednesday arrested ten activists of Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jatiya Party and sent them to jail hajat the same night.

Police said they were arrested under Special Powers Act.

**Policeman killed**

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napped yesterday evening as a sequel to a family feud and kept in a house at the village.

Champa's family members reported to the Nakhla thana police. A five-member police team led by one ASI raided the house. The captors fled away after an exchange of shots.

Nakla thana is about 52 kms off Sherpur town.

## Most Indian parties

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Both Gowda and External Affairs Minister I K Gujral would make a relentless effort to improve relations with its neighbours. They would endeavour to lower the level of tension in the region, he said.

The visiting scholar said that outstanding problems between Bangladesh and India required to be solved on the basis of multilateral discussions where necessary. He felt that the water issue could be settled amicably if it was done at a multilateral level.

"Nepal should be brought in at the behest of India at the water talks with Bangladesh. It would be beneficial to all three countries for taping hydroelectricity production, flood control and water management," he said.

Dr Ganguly felt that the challenge of fundamentalism could be contained in the region across the world if civil governments continued to meet the increasing expectations of the people.

Turning to Indian politics, he said: "The neglected and deprived classes have started to speak out. And they must be given the opportunity of participation in both nation building and governance. That is both the challenge and the essence of democracy."

## Violation of Code of Conduct

### AL complains against Biswas with EC today

The Awami League yesterday accused President Abdur Rahman Biswas of violating election code of conduct by making commitment to convert a college of Barisal to a full-fledged university, reports UNB.

Awami League will lodge a formal complaint in this regard with the Election Commission today said SAMS Kibria briefing newsmen yesterday.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas on Thursday held out an assurance that the government Broto Mohan University College would be turned into a university in near future.

The assurance of the President came while talking

to a 30-member delegation of the college, who called on him at Bangabhaban on Thursday.

Kibria, the political adviser of Awami League president Sheikh Hasina, said the Electoral Enquiry Committees were summoning everyone who violates the code of conduct.

"President's commitment is a clear violation of Clause 3 of the code of conduct," he pointed out.

It is to be noted that President's son, Dr Nasim Biswas, is contesting the June 12 election from the constituency where the college is located, he told newsmen.

Drawing the attention of the Election Commission, Kibria wondered "how a person occupying the highest office of the state can violate code of conduct."

Not only this commitment to convert a college to a university but the President's recent visit to the constituency of his son should also be taken as violation of the code of conduct since it was "ostensibly designed to influence the voters", said the AL leader.

## 3 parties

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Following are the nine districts for which ballot papers were given to the representatives of returning officers yesterday: Gazipur, Narayanganj, Narisingdi, Mymensingh, Netrokona, Kishoreganj, Munsiganj, Manikganj and Dhaka.

The team leader, Tan Sri Mohd. Ghazali Shafe, a former Foreign Minister of Malaysia, will stay in the capital with one of its members, Ms Alice Killam, an electoral officer from Canada, to watch the campaign and balloting in its adjoining areas.

Three observers — Justin McClain Daniel, chief election officer from St Lucia, Johannah Joy Plumpah, a member of parliament from Botswana, and Dr Kanwaljit Soin, an MP from Singapore, will go to the port city of Chittagong.

## Historic June 7

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Rahman at the Bangabandhu Bhavan at Dhammandi in the city.

On this day in 1966, some political activists were killed by the then Pakistani autocrat Ayub Khan as Bengalees gave call for a general strike and tried to organize a rally for realisation of the six-point demand and release of its architect Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The agitations for realisation of the historic six-point demand under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman turned into a mass upsurge in 1969 which culminated in the War of Independence in 1971.

Special prayers were offered at mosques and other places of worship on the day seeking divine blessings, peace and progress of the country and for holding of the coming election in a peaceful manner.

Speakers at a discussion meeting at the AL central office said that the movement for realisation of the six-point demand had led to the emergence of Bangladesh. They also explained the historical background of formulation of the six-point demand in the then Pakistan.

City AL office secretary and president of Joti Bangla Sangskritik Oikya Jote, Salauddin Badal presided over the meeting. The discussants included SAMS Kibria, political adviser to AL chief Sheikh Hasina, AL office secretary Sayed Fazul Haq, publicity secretary Mozaffar Hussain Paltu, Mustafa Sarwar, Dr Harun-ur-Rashid, Habibur Rahman Milon, Dr Mizanur Rahman, Nurul Fazal Bulbul and Sheikh Abdul Kader.

**Hasina**

From Page 1

ernments at union, thana and district levels on the basis of people's elected representatives, she said this is necessary to take the administration to the doorsteps of commonmen.

The Awami League, if voted to power, will set up health complexes in every nook and corner of the country to spread the health care facilities for the suffering millions to remote inaccessible parts in the countrysides.

She concluded her address by requesting people to cast their votes for the party.

The AL chief introduced her party candidates Fakhrul Islam Munshi (Comilla-4), Yusuf Abdulla Harun (Comilla-3), Alhaj Shah Alam (Brahmanbaria-4), Advocate Lutful Haq (Brahmanbaria-3), Abdul Halim (Brahmanbaria-2) and Sayedul Haq (Brahmanbaria-1) at different meetings in their respective constituencies.

Later, Sheikh Hasina addressed a number of public meetings at Habiganj, Chunarughat, Shayestaganj and Srimangal at night.

Addressing a huge gathering at Srimangal, she said if voted to power, her party would try to improve the lot of the labourers of tea gardens and fix wages for them keeping consistency with the prices of essentials.

The Awami League President also said that her party would make efforts for the survival of the fishermen and to protect flash flood in the region.

Sheikh Hasina will address public meetings at different places in Moulvibazar, Sylhet and Sunamganj districts tomorrow (Saturday).

## Reported influx of people from across border worries BNP

The Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal (BNP) vented concern over the reported influx of thousands of people everyday into the country from across the border to cast votes in the coming election.

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