

### Acceptance of Polls Result

The stage is set for the June 12 parliamentary election. Most people seem now convinced that the polls will be held in an atmosphere free from violence and troubles. Surveys carried out by different independent bodies corroborate this fact in unambiguous terms. This is no mean achievement, specially after the long shadow of doubt following a few recent undesirable developments. In fact, bringing the election process onto the right track is a reflection of the people's will.

So what once looked to be going out of control has been kept in a tight leash, thanks to the caretaker government's acumen and resolve. Now if the last couple of days before the election pass well, all attention will be on the election day proper. Already the EC has taken an elaborate preparation for ensuring law and order. What is even more encouraging is the fact that people of their respective polling booths have volunteered to resist any trouble that might be incited by outsiders. The increasing concern and involvement of people are a sure sign that as a nation we are maturing to welcome democracy.

However, this should in no way lessen the job of the law enforcers. On the contrary, as a first step the people's initiative for peace has to be given all-out support by the law enforcing agencies. That way the muscle power and anti-social elements will be forced to beat a hasty retreat. We reckon a few risk points of time on the election day that need to be attended to quite seriously. Contrary to popular belief, the risk of violence or trouble heightens at times when voting is thin and everyone is in a relaxed mood. The time is generally afternoon. Other high risk points are the moments before the closing hours for voting and the time of counting. The potential for trouble in all these peak risk times may increase proportionately with the overwhelming swing of votes for one candidate or party. The opponents, in the face of imminent defeat, are likely to resort to desperation. So we appeal for maximum vigilance against any such design to foil election results. Let there be a united defence of people and law enforcers against any disrespect for a popular mandate.

### AIDS: Reality Syndrome

UNAIDS, the joint United Nations programme on the disease, celebrated the unwelcome and undesirable fifteenth anniversary of AIDS in Paris with some statistics not quite devoid of novelty.

More than 25.5 million adults have been infected by the HIV virus since the discovery of AIDS fifteen years ago. Already 4.5 million have pushed up the daisies in the face of the unabated onslaught of possibly the most formidable foe science has ever known.

Of course there is reason to take heart in the revelation that the number of average annual HIV cases has experienced remarkable decrease with the figure coming down to 40,000 from 100,000. But where? In the United States of America. A country that has no peer in standing up to the economic and technical dimensions of any challenge to science, let alone medical science. The picture on the other hand is as grave as it was in the developing countries. Distinguishing Botswana as the chart leader with an adult prevalence rate of the disease at more than 18 per cent, the report exhausts itself of its share of grim reality with the statement that ninety per cent of HIV and AIDS cases live in developing countries.

Although sub-Saharan Africa has been highlighted as the hardest hit zone in the global context and Bangladesh, for that matter, may appear quite decently distanced, given the socio-economic reality of ours, we can ill afford any relaxation in our inchoate vigilance against the disease. Already what little room for a semblance of a false sense of security we could indulge in the name of conservative oriental culture, the report has arrived to effectively seal that. AIDS is no longer confined to the conceptual domain of the homosexuals. Worse, according to the report, 42 per cent of the victims are women and the proportion is growing. The government to emerge after June 12 and its successors would do well to think pragmatically along the lines of this revelation.

### Police Role

A policeman succumbed to his bullet wounds received during a gunfight with a gang of kidnapers in Sherpur. On the information that a couple had been kidnapped, a police team went to rescue them. Now the policeman's death brings us face to face with a few questions we often dislike to confront. Usually the police avoid any direct confrontation with anti-social goons, because of the risks involved in a fight where they have to respond with antiquated weapons against sophisticated ones. On the other hand, the reward for not acting in a manner they should is alleged to be lucrative.

No wonder, the proliferation of musclemanny against a subdued police role for long has turned society into something where lawlessness is the rule of the day. Policemen doing their duty run the risk of either getting killed or otherwise being punished. In such an unusual and extreme situation, the whole concept of policing the society needs to be changed. Let the police do their duty without fear or favour.

The death of a policeman on duty should have created public outrage, but unfortunately it will hardly create a ripple. All because the respect for law and order has gone and the temptation of money is often stronger than social and human values. If we want our society to flourish, we must reinvent the strength of those values that have for millennia held this society together. We must learn to honour the members of law enforcing agencies who lay down their lives performing their duty.

# Electioneering: Promises — Myth or Reality?

by Md Asadullah Khan

What people in the country want most is a peaceful transfer of power through an election shorn of violence, terror tactics and intimidation to either the voters or the officials conducting the polls process. But recent events and utterances by the party leaders have symbolised a situation that neither smack of love for democracy nor an attitude to accept the verdict of the election.

The violence that still threatens tens of thousands of them in the urban areas mainly Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna. Only a few days back, a student activist belonging to a certain political party was gunned down in the Alia Madrasa compound at Dhaka and on 31st May last a DCC Commissioner belonging to another political party was shot dead in about a few yards of his house in broad day light because of political vengeance. And, of late, two persons were killed and several others injured in Chittagong CEC's disclosure in the meeting that about 36/37 thousand terrorists have been arrested so far does hardly provide any fragrance of tranquil atmosphere during the election days, leaving aside a more muddled up situation that may, in case, loom up in the post-election days.

The unrest that still prevails in the country has raised questions if the caretaker government has the power to rein in violence that still continues to stalk as well as threatens to

tear the lull. People condemn the attacks as a "hideous spectacle" and call for vigilance without vengeance any more. The looming question is that law enforcing agency at the present moment, if they are at all serious about curbing this menacing trend, must change their methods and attitude. Armed plain clothes police personnel must fan out in the zones of Dhaka, Chittagong etc along with uniformed armed personnel who will be keeping vigil over the areas with vehicles and mobile telephone. This will help them crack down on the goons right at the moment they operate their vicious game.

Encouragingly, the assurance of the three Services Chiefs — Army, Airforce and Navy — to come to the aid of the civil administration in curbing violence, terrorism and malpractice either on the day of the election or thereafter during vote counting, most heartening. The superb show of commitment and sincerity of purpose that the

Armed Forces will display as they did in Bosnia and Iraq war zone and also in the Gulf areas in the past, at this critical juncture of the nation's history, will definitely earn them applause and will help them rise above the controversy they were unnecessarily dragged in recently. Their tough action in the face of criticism from the party stand point will manifest their love for democracy.

What people in the country want most is a peaceful transfer of power through an election shorn of violence, terror tactics and intimidation to either the voters or the officials conducting the polls process. But recent events and utterances by the party leaders have symbolised a situation that neither smack of love for democracy nor an attitude to accept the verdict of the election. The country's economy already battered by natural disasters, gyrations in the market forces, corruption in the high state offices, bureaucratic tangle and red tapism in the state ma-

chinery is bordering on an unsettled situation fraught with terrible consequences fatal to the growth and sustenance of a viable democracy.

Party manifesto of some political parties promising everything good on earth including old-age pension is bordering on utopian scale. Rather unemployment benefit to the educated youth who out of total frustration in procuring employment of any sort are now working as musclemen and mastans for the political parties and most often working on a tip-off could have been a salutary inclusion in curbing terrorism and extortion-sprees now rampant on the highway and even inside the safe boundary of the house.

Leaders of two major political parties, one inheriting her mantle from her father and the other from her husband (both now deceased) have been trading unashamedly on the dead men's names, featuring their pictures on every poster and pamphlet and airing their tape-recorded speeches in the

campaign offices. But without any shadow of doubt, people will be judging the leaders and the parties now in the election game on the track-records they left behind. People are thinking that the moral values of the party leaders have been greatly corroded by a trail of scams. This election might throw an opportunity for the right and honest citizens to rid the society in particular, and the country at large, of the opportunists in public life.

In recent electioneering campaign, some party leaders have been trading on religion to woo the voter's sentiment that make people look askance if they have gone away from the saner and religious way of life. Unfortunately, often it is the leaders who talk glibly about religion but hardly practice it in their life. Happily, despite the numerous crises the nation is facing, there is a ray of hope, though flickering. There is a growing demand of freeing politics from the clutches of fundamentalism, communalism, dishonesty and criminality and this could only be met with the pre-requisite of a strong moral character of the people's representatives that this election may possibly bring out. A note of warning might be sounded for the citizenry. Rare is the politician who means what he says and says what he means.

## Expected a Peaceful Polling Day

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

It really augurs well that during the election campaign the contesting candidates have gone door to door to meet the voters and shown respect for the dignity and worth of the human person. Exactly that is provided in Article 11 of the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, which reads: "11. The Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms, and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed, and in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured."

One might say it is momentary, only to solicit votes, which most of the candidates will forget after the polling on 12th June 1996. Still then, it is a departure, and a good departure indeed, from the past practice of keeping themselves aloof from the voters. Who knows the visits by the candidates in the slums of the cities or cluster of huts in the remote villages, within their respective constituencies, will not touch the voters' minds! Might be some of them will behave constructively in the post election period too.

Actually, the electoral update and change of laws, that were initiated last year, are now producing results. In spite of various constraints, the chief Election Commissioner started registration of voters and issuing identity cards, but could not make much headway in respect of ID cards, after completion of huge registration works. The Representation of the People Order, 1972, was amended, loan defaulter was disqualified from being elected as a Member and Electoral Code of Conduct was promulgated. Consequently upon taking over charge by the non-party caretaker government on 30th March 1996, and re-organisation of Election Commission, those laws and voters' lists were taken up for consideration, and again enforced through Ordinance and Notifications in April and May, 1996. The voters are now feeling the beneficial impact of these laws.

Meanwhile, the caretaker government has made some

transfers and postings, including that of some DCs, SPs and TNOs, believably to ensure free and fair election. The Returning Officers, who hold the key position in the electoral process, have been appointed and kept posted with up to date briefings. Presiding Officer, Assistant Presiding Officer and Polling Officer for each polling station are now in a position to carry out the responsibilities efficiently and independently. Apart from Tk 400 million sanctioned by the government for Parliament election on 12th June, an additional sum of Tk 50 million has been kept for re-polling, in case of postponement in any centre. Separately, UNDP has provided Tk 30 million to Election Commission for training, motivation, etc. Requisite fund, being available, it is expected honorarium of the polling personnel in the polling stations has also been suitably increased, as per logical demand vis-a-vis price spiral. It is often forgotten that the polling personnel, appointed for each station, do accomplish the heavy work and responsibility of election in law and practice; others have only supportive and supervisory roles. All out co-operation now be extended to the polling stations by the Election Commission and law enforcing agencies. The parties and candidates agents are there in the centre to observe the voting procedure. It is to be ensured that other local observers, say, from NGOs, do not unnecessarily vex them, who are at work from 8 am to 4 pm at a stretch to facilitate casting of votes according to law. Election Commission has decided that the observers will not stay in the centre at the time of counting of votes.

In the 300 constituencies, 25,950 polling stations have been set up by the Election Commission. The total number of registered voters is to the extent of 56,788 million, of which 50.71 per cent is male, and 49.29 per cent female. Separate arrangements will be made for female voters, in the usual manner, at the polling booths. It is reported that the

number of voters per centre range from 2 thousand to 6 thousand. Earlier, to facilitate voting in the voters' own village or nearby place, and avoid centre related different varieties of violence and malpractices, the optimum number of voters per centre was suggested to be 12 hundred. However, it is felt that the Election Commission has considered these issues, and presently located about 26 thousand polling stations in such a manner that these happen to be convenient to the voters, and not impair free and fair election, though the number of centres has not been increased. However, it is good that the candidates are not allowed to arrange transport for the voters.

The Election Commission could not make time to issue ID cards to the voters, which is a long felt need, and, as such, has kept the legal provision thereto suspended. The commission has requested the voters, through press advertisement, to collect voter number from their respective local election office to cast vote. Obviously, it will not be easy for the multitude of voters, who are poor and illiterate. In the meantime, the candidates have given a piece of paper to each voter, containing his/her voter number, name, polling centre etc, in their respective constituencies. This must not influence the voters, as they will seal the ballot paper secretly, according to their own choice. The paramount importance is that all polling personnel will always behave neutrally, even if a contesting candidate, say a retired official, was boss of any one once, etc! No doubt, training has been imparted to them to act impartially, to facilitate the voters to vote freely, and to avoid canvassing of any sort.

At the very inception of non-party caretaker government on 30th March, 1996, various quarters, political and non-political, urged to recover arms and put an end to terrorist activities, of any kind, irrespective of party or other considerations. Reports, till to-

date, show that the law and order situation has not improved to the extent desirable. The Chief Election Commissioner Md Abu Hena has said on 5th June 1996 that there were eight thousand very sensitive polling stations, and another eight thousand comparatively less sensitive. The leading newspapers abound in reports on terrorist activities, by so-called splinter groups, in Barisal-Khulna-Jessore areas, which are within the knowledge of Home Ministry and police. It is also alleged that such groups are booked by the wealthy candidates in the relevant constituencies in exchange of money. If CEC can prevail upon the concerned or top political leaders, to dissuade him/her or their nominees from 'booking' such elements, the number of centres, prone to risk, will be reduced. However, CEC, under arrangement with the caretaker government, has deployed requisite forces — Army, BDR, Police and Ansars in all centres for peaceful polling throughout the country. Further steps, if felt necessary, must be taken.

Another notable feature is that the Election Commission has allowed 32 thousand local and foreign observers to observe the election on 12th June, 1996, which is an unprecedented high figure in the electoral history of Bangladesh. The number of foreign observers is about two hundred, so the rest 31 thousand eight hundred are local observers! The electorate of this country always extend courtesy to the international observers. And in 1996, their presence is seen as a boon in the country's free and fair election, as usual. We will have to wait to see the activities of the huge number of local observers and benefits thereof.

So, can't the voters expect the polling day will pass off peacefully, with democratic fervour, to usher in a new government and politics of the production, after 12th June, 1996? Surely they can. The Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners are fully aware of the sentiments of the voters, they hope.

## To the Editor...

### BCS Exam: A painful experience

Sir, Any one, once visited a centre for the on going 17th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination has formed a concrete idea about the ineffective management of the Public Service Commission (PSC). It is observed that the examinees, get wide scope to adopt unfair means during the examinations, particularly in the compulsory subjects. We the people had a good idea regarding the transparency of the BCS examinations. But in practice it is observed that the process of selecting of candidates is faulty. Candidates do not obey the rules and regulations of the examinations. Again, the invigilators do not hold adequate personality to implement the rules as the candidates are mostly adult and highly educated. However, there may be hardly any exception to this general observation.

Some inspectors are engaged in mobile duty. But their number and duration of duty are not at all adequate. The examinees are seen adopting unfair means in their individual style. Some rules of conduct are mentioned in the admit card, but these rules are not followed in practice. Good candidates are fallen victims to such immoral practice. Because they keep themselves aloof from such habit and as a result they fail to compete with the candidates adopting unfair means.

If anyone does not believe upon my observation he/she might go to the exam centres to have a real experience. He need not go from centre to centre. A particular room in a specific centre is sufficient to build an idea. Somebody may differ with my view, but sin-

cerely speaking, I have seen none who keep himself aloof from such irregularity, advise the interested persons to visit the toilets of the exam centres. If you have a video camera you can picture the whole situation to make it credible.

People from abroad come to Bangladesh for poll observation. Gimmy Carter, Corazon Aquino, Paul Keating — all high ranking important personalities are expected to visit Bangladesh on the occasion of the election on 12 June. In accordance with this visit of observance team, I ask some voluntary organisations to involve themselves in observation of the exams halls.

Z A Haidar  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

### Obscene films: a curse

Sir, In our country there are many cinema halls; some of them display various English films. In many cases these films are extremely obscene. Their posters are also obscene. People go to these halls for enjoyment, but I want to ask: can these obscene films give us enjoyment? Or any moral lesson? No, never. These films only can devastate our morality and our character. The students of schools and colleges, almost the whole young generation, often try to enjoy these by not attending their classes or other important jobs. By doing so, they fully damage their character and career.

Obscenity is very destructive for their character. These films are not allowed by our culture. How these obscene films are allowed by censor

board? How the students get tickets from the hall counters? Tafsr-A-Hossainy  
Mohsin College, Chittagong

### Gilman's communique

Sir, Through your esteemed daily, I came to know that Mr Benjamin A Gilman, Chairman, Committee of International Relations of the US House of Representatives, in a blatant interference in our internal affairs has written to Bangladesh President inquiring on the reported trial of the Bangladesh Armed Service officers and tried to intervene in our normal and very private affairs of the state by putting his own opinion.

My question, as a concerned citizen of a sovereign and independent state is: 'are we a subservient nation and are we dictated by another country's representative?' I feel this audacious interference from a country that champions the cause of democracy is undignifiable and warrants an apology.

A Citizen  
Dhaka

### II

Sir, My attention has been drawn to a news item published in one of the national English language dailies. The Daily Star which reported that a member of the US House of Representatives who is also the Chairman of Committee of International Relations of the House, Mr Benjamin A Gilman

has recently written a letter to Bangladesh President, Abdur Rahman Biswas requesting the letter to make army officers' trial open, free and fair.

I appreciate Mr Gilman's concern but the question is: do the Army Act and Defence Services Rules of Bangladesh permit open trial of army officers who may be apprehended for any indiscipline while on active service?

Defence service's experts of the country may throw some light on the above issue.  
M Zahidul Haque  
Asstt Prof. BA, Dhaka

### 'President's Actions'

Sir, We had an opportunity to read the opinions of Dr. Zeba published on the 25th May in your esteemed paper. We should be neutral in every matter of the state policy. We should know in details the power and functions of the president.

For the interest of the state and security of the people the president can do everything as per the constitution even against the caretaker government as he is the appointing authority. We have accepted the 13th Amendment, so we should have accepted all misdeeds by the then ruling party.

Therefore, our comments should be limited and neutral.

M Ali  
Khilgaon, Dhaka

## Art Buchwald's COLUMN

### Golfing and Bidding

Of all the items up for sale at Jackie Kennedy Onassis auction, the one that impressed me the most was Lot 755: a set of golf clubs in a red-and-black bag with the initials "JFK" monogrammed on the outside. The item sold for \$772,500, and the buyer was Arnold Schwarzenegger, an avid restaurant owner.

Since I don't play golf I couldn't tell if Arnold got a bargain or not. So I called around to friends who are crazy about the sport.

The first person I called was David Woiper, a leading film producer. David didn't think that \$772,500 was too much for a set of golf clubs. For his money, Arnold got the clubs, the bag and at least a dozen 1954 golf balls. If you tried to purchase that in Kamart they would charge you double.

"Why didn't you buy them?" I asked him.  
"It was just bad luck. At the time they were being auctioned I was out playing golf."  
I called George Stevens, a top amateur player on the circuit, who turned down an opportunity to become the US ambassador to the Court of St. James's because he heard that British golfers did not replace their divots.

George said, "I would have bought them myself, but Arnold is a good friend of mine and I would do anything to save his game."  
My next call was to Jak Valenti, who has devoted his life to golf, even if it has cost him many friendships and goodwill in Hollywood. Jack said, "Only someone who has shot a 98 can appreciate a person paying \$772,500 to improve his swing. People just don't understand the importance of equipment in golf. There were two sets of golf clubs for sale. The other one went for \$350,000. I don't believe that any self-respecting golfer would play with the \$350,000 set. As a matter of fact, with the cheaper clubs they wouldn't even let him on the course at Burning Tree."

Dean Smith, a money manager, was upset. "Arnold knew all along that I wanted those clubs, and he heard that I was willing to bid up to \$690,000 for them. That's why he went to \$772,500. I'm waiting for Ivana Trump's garage sale, and when she offers to sell Donald Trump's putter, Arnold is going to be in serious trouble."  
Sheldon Hackney was the only one who thought that Arnold had paid too much. "Personally, I have never paid more than \$500,000 for a set of clubs, and if you keep your eye on the ball you can save \$222,000."

Except for Hackney, everyone I talked to envied Schwarzenegger and maintained that he had done the right thing. Don Brown, a real estate executive, said, "It's good for golf. The more money you pay for equipment, the more cash the game acquires. At our house we had a 'Gift of the Magi' situation. My wife wanted to sell our BMW to purchase the JFK clubs for me, and I wanted to sell my humidifier to buy her Jackie's simulated pearl necklace."  
By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.

## OPINION A Case for Awami League

Helal Kabir Chowdhury

As the election campaign has gained momentum, leaders are propagating their respective ideology and requesting the voters to vote in favour of them. In the process, naturally, there is no dearth of mudslinging, among the leaders, to mislead the voters. Very often, majority of the voters who are not literate fall prey to these high-sounding promises.

In this respect, Khaleda Zia seems to have gained an upper hand. Her criticism of opponents, mainly Awami League, is too harsh, at times rendering it almost unacceptable. The buzzword that Awami League will sell the country to India is still being used by their opponents. Very recently, AL seemed to have taken the same strategy and castigating BNP leadership in the same tone. These bickerings do not take the nation anywhere except giving rise to confusion. India has not yet shown any sign of taking Bangladesh under its gigantic fold. Promises made by the political parties seldom find a place in the implementation list of the party when in power.

What are the other shadows of fear in voting for AL? One is that the nouveau-riche, do not have to lose their wealth as the AL has declared to pursue a free market by not including socialism in their programme and manifesto. Staking the poor?

Now Sheikh Hasina has been urging the people to give her party a chance once more to serve the people. She has also been saying that they will correct the follies, if any, committed during their rule in the '70s. Hasina's plea has been misinterpreted by her rival camp, especially the BNP.

Khaleda Zia had been branding Hasina's call as begging. Well if this amounts to vote-begging, she is justified in her approach; candidates do beg vote during election time, don't they? One relevant question that arises: was enough time given to Bangabandhu to rebuild the war ravaged country? Did any infrastructure aptly exist for him to lead the shattered economy to prosperity in three years' time? Now AL is absent from power for more than 20 years. The new generation has little idea about its rule or misrule. The voters are led to vote for a party that party after being influenced by many factors. Vote-begging, I think, may be considered one of them.

We often notice that the AL speaks proudly about its role during the War of Liberation and claim to have guided the nation at the critical hour in 1971. The party seems to lack the strategy of letting the common people know, in the process, the true story of the Liberation. This education campaign should even if the AL loses the election this time. The present generation is virtually devoid of any 'true' knowledge about the liberation war. It is just not imparting their correct history that shall bring AL any immediate success, but in the long run, it is the truth that survives. This survival of truth may bear truth fruit for AL if they match their words.

And my words of plea for AL to get a chance to serve the nation is borne out of the fact that the tragedy of August 15, 1975 was such a heinous act which simply overrides the misrule of AL, if any.