

Poll Outcome in Pakistan

The poll outcome in Pakistan which seems set to put Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League in power may have filled a democratic void but perhaps not much beyond that in terms of long-term political stability.

While the low voter turn-out somewhat cuts down on the glory of Nawaz Sharif's victory it goes to his credit though that he has bettered his performance by bagging more seats and has also got more votes than he did at the last hustings.

In passing, the political newcomer former cricket star Imran Khan-led Justice Party's poor showing underlined a message that politics is a different ball game where organisation rather than an individual charisma taking a rub of public scrutiny on the periphery mattered decisively.

How far the poll results are going to change the objective conditions in Pakistan's politics for the better has to be seen to be believed. For one thing, the voter turn-out around 35 per cent indicates — the cold and Ramadan notwithstanding — that the people of Pakistan are feeling alienated from their country's political process.

Call it by whatever name you like — a tendency towards a presidential system, a contrived balance of power, or a distortion of democracy — that blend of Pakistan's polity seems poised to last till such time as a single political party musters an absolute majority or political parties get together to be able to carry out some required constitutional amendments.

Nawaz Sharif's business-friendly image could be his asset in taking Pakistan forward economically. Our felicitations to him on his convincing success.

Unfair Fares

Every year, during the festival time home-bound people are put to a severe tolerance test by transport operators. The greatest of all ordeals is faced in managing tickets for a homeward journey — irrespective of the types of transport. This year the situation is no different. Reports have it that the systematic racketeering with tickets is at its loathsome height at the bus terminals.

To impose the burden of inflated rates the usual and known ploy the transport operators and touts at the launch or bus terminals resort to is to create an artificial crisis of tickets. No tickets are available at the counter but if one is ready to pay double — or even more than — the normal fare, there is no problem to manage tickets.

Rates of tickets for buses and launches are fixed by the government depending on the distances of journeys undertaken. These cannot be changed, taking advantage of the people's eagerness to go home at the festival time. It goes against the religious spirit of Ramadan or Eid.

We ask the authorities concerned to take stern action against those who are out to fleece passengers through dubious means. This is a clear violation of law and any indifference to it will be deemed as condoning a crime.

Unpardonable

A six and a half years old girl was seriously injured when ropes of the round-about swing at the Shishu Park gave in on Monday. At a time when children in many countries are enjoying the best of amusement in the high-tech theme parks, our premier park, even with its rudimentary facilities, cannot ensure minimum safety to children using these.

Clearly, children parks like these should make enough profit to ensure proper maintenance and even expansion of internal facilities. But look how indifferent the people in charge are! Can we ask if there are equipment to measure how much stress the ropes of the swing or arms or wheel of other machines can take? If not, how is the load-taking capacity measured? Regular check and repair of those machine are a must.

Evidently, the accident has taken place in the absence of a system for regular checks, repair and replacement. Can we draw the concerned authorities' attention to this much-neglected aspect so that in future no such mishap takes place at the Shishu Park.

M IAN Nawaz Sharif has been asking the people of Pakistan for a clear mandate, what he got was a tidal wave, a clean sweep that even his most ardent PML (N) supporter could never have dreamed about.

Ms Benazir is on record that she would not accept the results if she did not win, a screwed up logic that only a Bhutto could devise. Post her TV performance in Election Hour after the Supreme Court of Pakistan verdict, did she honestly expect her disheartened and demoralized supporters to come out and vote for her? The PML (N) has got almost a million more votes than in 1993.

An Overwhelming Mandate

The PPP has been well and truly beaten, they should at least have the grace to admit it and let this poor nation, which they have robbed clean, get on with their lives in eking out a meager existence, but now with some hope for the future.

56 million and actual votes cast is expected to be 20 million ie. about 36%.

Part of the reasons for the low turnout is that while PML (N) votes went up about a million to about 9 million ie. 45%, PPP voters stayed away in droves or deserted to (also-ran) Tekrik-i-Insaaf and is projected to drop by almost 2 million total around 5.5 million votes ie. 27.5%, a fall of over 12%. However, it would be wrong to conclude that Mian Nawaz Sharif benefitted from the negative votes of the PPP disenchanting who stayed at home, the million extra votes cast for him established the PML (N) leader as the clear choice of the people of the country.

Barely surviving in poverty and privation, beset by corruption in the likes of which they had never previously experienced, the people believe Mian Sahib when he says he will deliver on his economic promises. As for Benazir Zardari, the people of the country have simply confirmed that the many accusations levelled against her by the President in dismissing her as PM on Nov 5, 1996 and upheld as true on all counts (except one which was sub-judice) by the learned Supreme Court of Pakistan on Jan 29, 1997, were absolutely true in their eyes also.

nepotism and corruption, mainly on the past regime, but not including the practice of years of merciless looting of the national till. While taking steps to ensure that accountability really becomes institutionalized on the pattern of the PML (N)'s oft-stated views in public and private, Mian Nawaz Sharif should get on with implementing his economic policies because the people really need immediate economic succour more than any other palliative.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

While the victorious PML (N) leader has indicated in a magnanimous gesture even before his outstanding success that in power he would avoid the politics of retribution, his victory is more than a reflection of the judgment that the people have rendered on Benazir and her spouse. Throughout the last 90 days there has been a rising crescendo for accountability across the board and the future PM will find that he will be hard put standing between the people's desire for vengeance and his own penchant to be a gentleman, to 'honour while you strike her down, the foe that comes with fearless eyes'.

must go its full course, for Mian Sahib must step out the way and let destiny meet up with Zardari and spouse.

With respect to charges of rigging being aired by Benazir and her disinformation experts, these are patently untrue. The sweeping PML (N) victory clearly points the fact that 'rigging' if it took place, was done in 1993 when 15 urban-rural NA seats were computer-engineered past midnight away from Mian Nawaz Sharif on votes counts of less than 1000

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each to PPP, not to count the solid 15 MQM bloc that was lost to a possible coalition with PML (N) due to the MQM elections boycott contrived by some uniformed functionaries on PPP payroll. It is time to clear the mystery as to who was responsible for this outrage, they must be held accountable. The people of Pakistan have paid an enormous economic price because the machinations of these absolute scoundrels took this country into the three years Zardari-age of darkness and deceit, corruption and crime. We have been set back many decades in our quest for economic emancipation. Now the people have given their verdict as regards what they believe to

be the truth and what they know is a blatant lie. In the face of such condemnation, it can only be expected from Benazir that she should parrot charges of 'rigging'. What about the many sets of Observer Groups that have been closely monitoring the Polls?

Does she also call their impartiality into question? Why did the Commonwealth Observer Group led by the former Australian PM, Malcolm Fraser, the SAARC Observer Team led by the former Caretaker PM of Bangladesh, Justice Habibur Rehman, the US-based National Democratic Institution (NDI), etc., all give a unanimous observation that the elections were free and fair? In their wanderings over most constituencies, why did they not notice one single case of rigging, unfair practices, etc? Moreover the Caretaker Government was headed by a card-carrying PPP veteran as PM, the President is formerly a PPP person as are Governors and Chief Ministers of Punjab and Sindh, does she really expect the world to believe that in turning against her they would hand over the elections to arch-foe PML (N)?

Their penchant would have been rather for a hung Parliament so that the President would be supreme. It is what Benazir Zardari has been repeatedly telling the world. The very fact that a hung Parliament did not come about confirms the lie that she has been bandying about to all and sundry.

The PPP has been well and truly beaten, they should at

least have the grace to admit it and let this poor nation, which they have robbed clean, get on with their lives in eking out a meager existence, but now with some hope for the future. The extent Mian Nawaz Sharif's victory has been staggering but he must spend some time in retrospect lest the breadth of his victory go to his head and put the future of this nation in doubt. Pakistan is today in dire straits, in economic peril of the highest magnitude. Instead of throwing up walls, it is time to build bridges. Armed with this sweeping mandate, Mian Sahib can reach out to the best in the country, friend and foe alike, to build the new country and take it into the 21st century information age as a modern state. We have a lot of ground to cover in the next few months to ward off economic disaster. While we must worry about education, health, transportation, fuel and electricity charges, our revenues have come to a standstill.

To rejuvenate the economy, we need to bring down fuel and electricity prices, compensating the shortfall in revenues by increased revenue collection. This will be quite a balancing act but can be done by decentralizing authority and devolution of powers, by having Local Bodies Elections without further delay, an event that Benazir, the self-proclaimed apostle of democracy, successfully evaded for more than 3 years. The people have put their trust in Mian Nawaz Sharif by giving him an overwhelming mandate, let the young leader now reciprocate that trust by giving power to the people to run their own lives at the local level. That is the first step in the long journey that had already commenced when the first person cast his or her ballot in the 1997 Elections.

South Africa's Bad and Good News

As an international journalist based in my native England, I make it my business to find out what is going on behind the politicians' pious pronouncements and the dire headlines in the Press, both black and white, writes Neville Stack from London

It shouldn't have been so surprising, a white face in Soweto. After all, this is the New South Africa, where black and white are free to work together, to mingle socially, to live side-by-side. So why did I get all those curious — even startled — glances when I strolled at ease down the street?

Johannesburg has three unenviable worlds for murder, rape and cop-killing. A lion's den was a haven of tranquility compared with a township. I was assured on every side, by black as well as white.

Violence punctuates the daily life of the thousands without jobs, without much hope.

These ghastly issues dominate discussion at the dinner-table of the white enclaves and the frugal repasts in the former all-black township ghettos, especially Soweto, once the focus and symbol of the black struggle.

But as an international journalist based in my native England, I make it my business to find out what is going on behind the politicians' pious pronouncements and the dire headlines in the Press, both black and white.

So when I was invited by the Sowetan newspaper and the Sunday Times to run a training course for their news executives, at Times Media's headquarters, I asked my new friend Ruth Bhengu, the brilliant Zulu columnist, to take me behind the facade presented to the world.

And what I found was bad news and good news. The bad news is all around, in the headlines and on the streets. Horror upon horror. And much of it in the townships.

The good news has to be sought out. I found some of it in Soweto.

Ruth and her friend Mathabe Khumalo took me to a bright modern house, past the guard-hounds Lady Diana and Prince Charles, to meet Dudley Mekoeg and Ken Dlamini.

I spent a most agreeable afternoon, relaxed, laughing and at ease, listening to fine jazz and solving the world's problems, with as good companions as I could have found. As it happened, this was Soweto — but it could have been anywhere else in South Africa, or in England.

Then on to Wandie's tavern, haunt of the international press pack during the times of trouble. No problems there, just the good-natured joshing of a stranger come to share their company. The guys perched on the wall outside, and the young couples within, could have been customers of my own local pub, The Sun, in my home village.

Next day, on our way to the home of Bokwe Mafuna there were glances from the lads playing football in the street, the church-going ladies, the gossiping neighbours. No hostility, just curiosity.

Minus you, fierce and feisty little Ruth would have been more than a match for any ill-wishers, had some appeared.

What a pity, I mused, that in a nation that is struggling to heal its social wounds, black faces in white enclaves are familiar and accepted, while the reverse is not the case. White families do not take an evening stroll through Alex or Crossroads, willing to exchange pleasantries with their contemporaries on the other side of the colour barrier.

One day, perhaps. Of course, the dream was too good to last. Badness, madness, frustration, rage — call it what you will — prevail today.

It was in the spartan little home of a brilliant, gentle man

and his loving family that I was brought abruptly back to another of the realities of township life. Bokwe and Khaya had been fugitives in France, exiled for their activism against the brutality of apartheid.

They returned to their own people, poly-lingual, sophisticated and optimistic.

Then the burglars came. Again and again. The Mafunas had not got much to start with, and the thieves in their own community left them next to nothing but their unassailable dignity.

Bokwe was not bitter, only sad. He has learned from his past many lessons for the future that his people would do well to take into their own hearts. Perhaps, one day they will.

Certainly little Ntsiki is already on her way to wisdom, through the meditation her father is teaching her and other Soweto children. She and her sisters — yes, and white ones too — must surely be the future for South Africa: indifferent to bigotry, unafraid of criminality, always looking beyond pigmentation.

I pray that they will be spared the vile ordeals suffered by other innocents everyday. Bad news, good news. Far too much of one, tragic lack of the other. But even in the bad times, there are good grounds for optimism. And I found the seeds in Soweto.

Maybe I was a fool to rush in where white men fear to tread. Maybe. But if we don't reach out we will never make contact. Perhaps this foreign scribbler may have started something.

I will walk down the black people's streets again one day, calling on my new-found friends and trying to make more, if I see some other white faces there. I will know that there is yet hope for us all.

Significance of Ramadan

ISLAM stands on five main pillars i.e. 1) Iman (faith in one Allah and his Prophet Muhammad Sm.), 2) Salaat (five times obligatory prayers in a day), 3) Siyam (obligatory fasting in the month of Ramadhan), 4) Hajj (pilgrimage to holy Makkah for those who are financially sound and able to perform it) and 5) Zakaat (obligatory giving away of one fortieth of the possessed wealth above necessity).

So, Siyam or obligatory fasting in the month of Ramadhan is the third main pillar of Islam. Allah has made it obligatory for Muslims through a commandment in the holy Quran: Oh, believers, I have made Siyam (of Ramadhan) obligatory (farz) for you as I made it obligatory for your ancestors; so that you may learn to restrain' (Surah Al-Bakarah-2:183). It is from this Ayat (revelation) that Siyam was obligatory for our ancestors also. Moses (Musa A) fasted for forty days on Mount Sinai. Jesus (Isa A) fasted for forty days and forty nights.

The Quran says, The month of Ramadhan is one in which the Quran, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs of guidance, and the criterion of right and wrong, was revealed. So whoever of you is present during this month, let him fast during the whole of it and whoever of you is sick or on journey, let him fast the same number of other days. Allah desires ease for you. He desires not hardship for you and that you should complete the period and that you should glorify Allah for having guided you and that you be grateful (Surah Al-Bakarah-2:185). 'Eat and drink until white thread becomes prominent to you from the black thread of dawn. Then strictly observe fast till the night set in' (Surah Al-Bakarah-2:187).

Compulsory Obligations (farz) of Siyam

To know the beginning of the month of Ramadhan: This is known from the sighting of the Ramadhan moon or completion of thirty days of the month of Shaban, then the Siyam becomes obligatory for all Muslims. To resolve (Niyat) to fast for every Siyam specifically every

night with faith. It is not acceptable to resolve at a time for the whole month of Ramadhan. In Hanafi School of thought Niyat can be done before noon of the day.

To prevent entry of anything into the stomach consciously remembering the Siyam. But unconsciously or unwillingly if anything enters into the stomach, it will not harm the fast.

To remain away from sex with wife during the day.

Internal Obligations of Siyam

The great Imam Gazzali stated three stages of Siyam: a) Siyam of common people — to keep the stomach and the genital organs restrained from fulfilling their natural instincts. b) Siyam of Special persons — to keep eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet and all other organs away from sins. c) Siyam of the most special persons — to keep the conscience away from adventurism and dauntlessness, from the mundane thoughts, and to keep restrained from everything else other than remembrance of Allah.

The following six activities make of Siyam full and perfect: 1) To keep the eyes down, not to see bad things and to restrict the eyes from looking at those sights which may distract the concentration of mind. 2) To check the tongue from unnecessary talks, telling lies, speaking ill of others, quarrels, etc. and remain quiet, engaged in remembering Allah and reciting the Quran. 3) To restrict the ear from listening to bad talks. The Quran says, 'They are the listeners of lies and eaters of prohibited (haram). The Prophet said, 'The speakers and listeners of ill of others are equal sharers of the sin.' 4) To restrict the hands, feet and other organs from bad activities and keep the stomach away from taking doubtful foods at the time of breaking the fast (iftar). It is because, if any one keeps himself away from permitted things (halal) for the whole day and breaks his fast with prohibited things (haram) then his fasting bears no values and gets spoiled. He is like that man who builds a palace but destroys a city. 5) Not to over fill the stomach with permitted

food during breaking the fast (iftar). It is because, to Allah nothing is more bad than the stomach filled exorbitantly with permitted foods. Taking more food during the fasting period flouts the physical as well as spiritual purpose of it. 6) After breaking fast there should be existence of hope of being the Siyam accepted by Allah and also fear and doubt of being rejected by Him. It is because, one never knows whether his Siyam has been acceptable to Allah.

Significance of Siyam

Siyam is one fourth of faith (Iman). The Prophet said, 'As sabru nisful iman' — Patience is half of faith and 'As Siyamu nisful sabr' — Siyam is half of Sabr. In that calculation Siyam is one fourth of iman. Among all the pillars of Islam Siyam is connected with Allah and as such it is the best of all. In the Qudsi Hadith Allah said, 'Returns for all good work will range from ten times to seven hundred times; but as the Siyam is only for Me, I will give its returns.' Allah said, 'Those who fortitude patience (Sabr) will be given unlimited returns'. Siyam being half of Patience will also get unlimited returns from Allah.

All prayers are for Allah, yet Siyam has the importance like the holy 'Kaba' though whole of the world surface belongs to Allah. It is for two reasons:-

1. Fasting means to eschew from few activities and to abandon few. It is an internal matter. There is no activity in it which can be seen by eyes. Other prayers can be seen by man but the Siyam can only be seen by Allah. 2. Siyam creates pressure on the enemy of Allah i.e. the devil and becomes powerful over it. It is because the natural propensities or instincts are the abode of the devil which become strong through eating and drinking. Fasting makes the abode weak and narrows down the way for the devil.

The Prophet said, 'As Siyam annihilates the roots of the devil, closes roads for his movement and narrows it down; so it has become eligible to be connected to Allah.'

It is said that if any one performs the Siyam perfectly for the whole month of Ramadhan, he will be sinless as he was born anew.

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.

Stock market revival

Sir, In order to bring a long-term stability and a level playing field for the investors as well as the other operators in the country's two bourses, the Finance Ministry, Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) and the authorities of the DSE and CSE should adopt a comprehensive policy so that the capital market is used as a means of raising fund for setting up new industries, undertaking BMR for the already established ones, while at the same time provide the investors an attractive income in the form of dividends and capital appreciation.

Some of the immediate measures which may be considered are: Mutual funds in the private sector. Presently ICB manages eight mutual funds with a market capitalisation of Tk 188 crore which is only 0.75 per cent of the total market capitalisation of the DSE. Mutual funds allow public fund to be

professionally managed in the securities market by a team of investment experts. Since the fund is institutionally managed, speculation is reduced to a minimal. The fund managers are held accountable for any vagaries in monitoring their portfolio.

The retail investors should have an opportunity to have access to the capital market with a very low investment amount. Ideal institutions to float mutual funds are banks, insurance companies, corporate bodies i.e. foreign companies operating in Bangladesh that may set up subsidiary company to invest in the stock market with their excess liquidity.

Mutual funds would also discourage the kurb market as people would prefer to hand over their savings to a recognised institution instead of engaging in off-floor trading where speculation and fabricated rumours are rife.

Circuit breaker which played a crucial role in preventing an inevitable crash in November 1996, should now be withdrawn, and monitored on selective basis. The circuit breaker is mainly used to cool an overheated market or hold up a massive decline in prices. It does not play a positive role in a normal trading scenario.

Trade margin of brokers: The stock exchange authorities should set up a daily trade margin on the outstanding balance of the brokers, whereby the brokers are asked to deposit the margin amount on their outstanding balance with the exchange, the following trade day pending final settlement. The margin amount may be increased when the market enters a dangerous bull phase. Brokers' margin will prevent speculative trading by the brokers, as well as ensuring that they don't default in their payment to the exchange.

Bonds and Debentures: In developed capital market bonds and stocks are complementary as well as competitive to one another. The interest rate or price of one has an immediate effect on the other. In Bangladesh, debenture trading is practically non-existent, although some debentures offer interest rate of 15 to 17 per cent paid semi annually.

The basic difference between a share and a debenture is that the former is risky whereas the latter is risk-free with assured return.

The capital market regulators should revamp debentures trading in the secondary market. Also companies going for rights issues must offer a certain percentage of their total public offer in debenture subscription.

Transparency: The healthy trend in the global outlook in the stock markets is transparency. Transparency is nothing but openness in deals and prices in the exchange. Foreign offloading, syndicated deals, bid offers, in-house trading are the areas to be made public. The DSE and CSE may consider giving weekly press notes covering these and other areas of public interest.

To prevent big deals made outside the exchange floor, listed companies should not accept shares for name transfer unless accompanied by a valid howla copy of the respective share.

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Netaji and Bangabandhu

Sir, With sparkling gala, charismatic fanfare and glamorous razzmatazz, Sheikh Rehana, on behalf of her father received posthumous the Netaji Subhash Bose award on Jan-

uary 23 in Calcutta on the occasion of centenary birth anniversary of Subhash Chandra Bose. It is indeed a coveted honour for Bangabandhu.

We, however, cannot evaluate and equate Bangabandhu with Netaji since the former being a fire brand, did not do with a dash of incredible exploits, daring escapades and heroic feats. Was a hard hitting iconoclast. While as a student in Presidency College, Calcutta, he vigorously slapped Prof F. E. Otter who uttered some derogatory remarks against the Indians, since he was an inveterate patriot and could not tolerate the British imperialists.

He also built up the concocted story of so-called Black Hole Tragedy when Nawab Serajud-daola allegedly captured 145 English men and women and packed them like sardines in a

room which could hardly accommodate 40 persons. This room was later on demolished and a plaque was set up. Ultimately Sher-e-Bangla knocked it off.

In 1920s and '30s, Netaji led and motivated the extremists and hard liners of Congress party exhibiting violent resistance to British rule in India. He vehemently opposed Gandhi's formula of non-violence and ahimsa on the grounds that this strategy would be a fruitless exercise. His confrontation with Gandhi came to a head following which he was deposed and removed from Presidency of Congress Party. He was jailed by the Britishers for six months in 1940 but escaped from his house arrest in a dramatic way by wearing a 'burka' through Khyber Pass to contact Nazi Germany and the Japanese army exhibiting violent resistance to British rule in India. He was in the British-occupied World War II under way.

In 1943 he formed Indian National Army from soldiers who surrendered to the Japanese in Singapore and led them against the British Indian Army in the eastern state of Assam. Unfortunately, he was believed to have died in an air crash in Taiwan just three days after the Japanese surrender to Allied Forces.

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