

## A Response to EC Appeal

The FEMA or Fair Election Monitoring Alliance, on Thursday, presented to the Election Commission its recommendations on electoral law reforms. The EC had appealed in April this year to the political parties and concerned organisations to send in their recommendations for reforming the electoral process. The appeal hasn't so far met with much success.

The EC appeal had specially failed to move the political parties, including the two major ones. The appeal has been totally and abjectly ignored, so far, by both AL and BNP. Why? Don't they have any thought on the subject in which they are unsurpassably interested, namely, election? This is clean bankruptcy on the part of the parties.

Unsolicited we volunteer a point or two that may be pondered over by EC, hopefully with profit. The Election Tribunal must be made more effective, indeed inordinately more so, by compelling it to turn in its verdict within a month of the lodging of a complaint. As everyone knows of the uselessness of going to the tribunal, the contestants choose to rely on all kinds of infringement, conceivable or otherwise, of the laws and laid down conduct in the field of contest and then in case of adverse outcome resign to it. If the tribunal could turn an unlawful win into a defeat within a month of the result, recourse to unlawful means could substantially come down. The law setting such a limit must also provision that possible appeals be also dealt with in a jiffy.

As things are, the CEC does not intervene into a returning officer's affairs unless he has been requested to do so by the latter. This must change. It should wholly depend upon the CEC's discretion to look into the affairs of all returning officers. And he should be encouraged both by the spirit and the letter of the law to withhold results of any polling that he feels has been less than fair.

About the aborted ID cards one would like to point out that the gigantic amount of organisation and application and expense that would be needed to cover the entire electorate, could be put to a doubly useful exploit. A national database on every adult individual of the nation could be compiled at one and the same go. To make it possible we should not shy of starting the whole job afresh.

## Let It be a Pattern

The District Bar Council of Jessore has recently taken an imitable decision. It, as a smallish report in the weekend issue of a vernacular daily claims, suspended four lawyers on grounds of unethical practice. Licenses of some law clerks, found guilty of deceiving people, were confiscated too.

It is a purge drive in one corner of Bangladesh that, one wishes were replicated by the other professional bodies of the country. Newspapers these days are replete with the news of loan defaulters and the government action against them. Much of this hassle would have not been required if only the various business bodies themselves had singled the defaulters out in their ranks and ostracised them socially.

Corruption has gone so deep and wide in the society that the laws of the land simply stand no chance against them. Yet, for a civil society to thrive on the idea of social justice the enforcement and effectiveness of law is absolutely essential.

Although the exemplary incident exclusively deals in moral depravity, the purpose of law, it should be noted here, gets beaten in Bangladesh primarily on two counts : a frighteningly archaic, inept legal system inherited from the colonial days and the dearth of good legal training centres. Along with steps to simplify and modernise country's legal system, the government must think about establishing new well-equipped law colleges apart from taking a critical evaluation of the standard of the few that are there.

In a poor, problem-ridden, developing country the concept of social justice will remain a mirage unless there dawns a sense of responsibility and consciousness on the members of the society in general. The instance of imposing punitive measures by the Jessore District Bar Council to reform some of its 'own' men is a tell-tale sign of this awareness.

Let's hope this spirit of idealism turns into a social movement and suffuses the imagination of all professional groups of the country. Who says corruption cannot be beaten?

## People with Crores

If bank balance is any indicator of gauging the richness of the rich, then the number of *kotipoti* or people with money amounting to eight digits has entered the pleasing realms of thousand. A recent statistics given by the Bangladesh Bank puts the number of people with crores at 2500. Some development for a country that once used to be reckoned as a part of the monopoly of 22 families! But that was when the world was not aware of a country named Bangladesh and hardly any Bengalee featured in that elite and small group of those rolling in money.

Despite our independent identity and the emergence of a new big club of the rich, the question that continues to haunt us until this day is that how much of this money contributes to the development of the country.

The general problem with most of those fortunate few who make money in Bangladesh is that they are normally devoid of any type of societal concern. An investigative look into the tales of the economic ascent of most of these privileged people will bring to light acts that have not only gone into usurping the right of great many individuals but also corrupting systems enormously. This absence of altruistic element and a concern for the society is what explains the general reign of poverty in this country.

Money rules the world. And there is no harm in making it. But there should at least be a semblance of social responsibility in the whole process of its accumulation and use. Otherwise only the number of people with millions would grow, the country would not stand any richer for that.

**B**ANGLADESH Bureau of Statistics (BBS) undertook laudable efforts to dispel the widespread and deeply rooted notion that GDP estimates of Bangladesh seriously suffer from underestimation and methodological inadequacies and that the data of various sectors and sub-sectors of the economy, allegedly, are not adequately covered. So far BBS prepared results of widespread data revision and methodological improvements rebasing the GDP to 1989-90 from the "somewhat outdated base of 1984/85". Rebasin to a more recent year is reported to be in progress. The DG of BBS and his officials deserve appreciation for accepting the challenge of erasing the age-old bad notion on BBS and for working hard in producing two draft reports within reasonable time frame.

BBS has revised the GDP estimates by production method and by industrial sector from FY '90 to FY '96 on the basis of new information/statistics generated by a plethora of censuses, surveys and studies carried out during 1988 through 1995. A total of 28 studies/reports/censuses on agricultural, manufacturing, trade, transport, construction, housing and community services were consulted to arrive at a revised estimate.

The draft report postulates that the total revised GDP of Bangladesh in current producer prices for FY '95 should be Tk 1526 billion compared to Tk 1170 billion estimated using old methods and old coverage.

The difference of Tk 356 billion (or 30.4 per cent higher) could be adduced mainly to wider coverage of data.

According to the revised estimates, the average real GDP growth during the last five years (i.e. FY '91- '95) was about 4.6 per cent per year.

From FY '90 to FY '95, revised estimates for GDP stand higher by an average of 32 per cent. The overall growth of rate of GDP, for example, in FY '95, is estimated to be 5.8 per cent compared to the estimated 4.4 per cent under the old methods and thus indicates gross underestimation.

Under the revised series, the sectoral share of industrial sector (at constant prices) is placed at 25.2 per cent as compared to 19.5 per cent under old series.

At current prices, they are 24.2 per cent and 17.6 per cent, respectively.

It appears that the share of the industrial sector

has gone up significantly under revised series in the event of a wider coverage of sub-sectors like manufacturing, mining and quarrying and construction. Within the manufacturing sector, the growth rate of small scale industries at constant producers' prices under the revised estimate averaged almost 8 per cent during FY '90-FY '95

share (excluding fishing) declined from 32.8 per cent to 25 per cent (at constant prices) — under the new assumption.

The per capita Gross National Product (GNP) for FY '95 is estimated to be \$336 compared to \$254 given by the old estimate.

The new series reveal that from FY '90 to FY '95, per capita GNP was underestimated

by 6 per cent as opposed to 16.6 per cent under the old estimate.

It is interesting to note that under the new calculations, investment/GDP ratio

rose from 18 per cent in FY '90

to 19.1 per cent in FY '95 — a very thin increase over the years.

In other words, during the last five years, investment/GDP ratio almost stagnated.

Under the old estimates, domestic savings/investment

ratio seemed to have increased

from 2.7 per cent to 8.2 per cent in FY '95 — while national savings/investment ratio went up

from 9.1 to 16 per cent during the same period of time.

The revised estimates provide a big difference: 10.6 per cent to 12.8 per cent for domestic savings/investment ratio and 15.4 per cent to 18.7 per cent for national savings/investment ratio.

It seems, thus, that so long

we have been harbouring and

tinkering with wrong statistics

in the realm of our policy planning.

The sectoral growth rates

at constant producers' prices

tend to show that the difference

between the old and new esti-

## Putting Statistics Right

*Correct statistics are needed for correct plans and policies. It is very urgent that the base-year adjustment is made for the most recent periods and all data are revised taking that into consideration.*

mates or GDP growth rate could be, on average, by 6 per cent for the last five years. The growth rate for the last fiscal is estimated to be around 5.7 per cent and considering 6 per cent as underestimation, the GDP growth rate could be 6.2 per cent for the most recent fiscal. If these figures can be taken in confidence, our economy's performance in terms of GDP growth rates could be termed as comfortable. On that score, a little better governance, law and order situation and monitoring of the development projects can shore the economy at 7 per cent for the ongoing fiscal year.

The most important thing to note is that correct statistics are needed for correct plans and policies. It is very urgent that the base-year adjustment is made for the most recent periods and all data be revised taking these revisions into consideration. What BBS needs to do more is to come up with a revised time series data for all the sectors so that all the government agencies can use them instantly without any reservation. For that to happen, BBS should be provided with more financial and manpower resources. If there is any need at all, we wish BBS success in its bold and new venture.

## Growing Problems in Janata Dal and Future of Gujral

by Zaglul A Chowdhury

*The main strength of the UF government in the midst of so many problems is the image of the prime minister and apathy of the Indian electorate to see fresh polls so early when elections are held for five years.*

in the wake of orchestrated demands for the resignation of the scandal-tainted leader and finally landed in jail but not before making his wife the new chief minister to step into his shoes.) But a new problem has cropped up and this has been bothering the prime minister even before dust raised by Laloo Yadav episode could settle down. And paradoxically, the new problem centres around the new president of the Janata Dal — Sharad Yadav, who succeeded the controversial Laloo Yadav.

While Laloo was alleged to have made millions of dollars out of the much-talked-about "fodder scam" in his Bihar state in collusion with other politicians and a section of the high officials, Sharad Yadav is now figuring in discussions about his involvement in the "Hawala Case" in which many important Indian politicians were accused to have taken money from

businessmen Jain brothers as kickbacks at different stages. Sharad Yadav, however, has denied the allegations that he was in the pay-roll of the Jain brothers but the accusations that have come to the fore are embarrassing the government and, more particularly, the prime minister who cannot remain undisturbed when such things are being told about his own party chief.

The coalition partners of the

UF government also seem to be

taking the matter with a pinch

of salt and the leftists — the CPI

and the CPM — have already ex-

pressed themselves in favour of

Sharad Yadav resigning the

post of the Janata Dal presi-

dency till he is cleared of the

accusations. They say it is im-

portant because the head of the

key constituent of the ruling

coalition will live up to reputa-

tion only if he resigns and

paves the way for impartial in-

vestigations into the allegations. The matter, coming close on the heels of the Laloo Yadav issue, is a kind of bolt from the blue for prime minister Gujral who speaks of transparency and probity in public life.

Inder Kumar Gujral took

over as the prime minister of

the second UF government,

having served as the external

affairs minister in the earlier

UF government that collapsed in

the wake of the withdrawal

of support by main backer

Congress. His is the third gov-

ernment since the last general

elections in India early last

year failed to produce any deci-

sive outcome and the first gov-

ernment formed by the largest

parliamentary group in the

Lok Sabha — the BJP — lasted

only a few days as it failed to

must the necessary support

for the survival of the govern-

ment. The Congress as the sec-

ond largest party did not make

any serious bid at that time to

form the new government since

it was conscious that the elec-

torate had rejected it in the

polls held a few months ago and

it would be folly to try to rega-

in power through coalition or

other means when it had lost

power in the polls. In the situa-

tion, the obvious choice was a

third force since no other major

party enjoyed substantial seats

in the lower house of parlia-

ment and only coming together

by several parties or groups

could have made it possible to

form a new government. The

secular, centrist and the leftists

aligned together and Karnataka

chief minister HD Deve Gowda

was chosen as the prime minis-

ter of the United Front govern-

ment since he belonged to the

Janata Dal which was the

driving force behind the coalition.

He was seen as a dark horse

for the premiership with little

experience in the federal poli-

cies of India but Gowda fared

quite well given the conditions

of the coalition and bickering

in his own party. But his prob-

lem came from Sitaram Keshi,

the president of main backer

Congress, who was not