

# Preparation of Electoral Rolls : An Overview

by Tarikul Ghani

*In many democracies in Asia the electoral rolls have been computerized and entered in the database. There are definite advantages of doing this: For instance, updating becomes easier and less costly — all one had to do is to exclude the dead and include the new voters attaining the voting age. Then it does not require to prepare a new voters' list every five or ten years.*

ELECTION systems require criteria and mechanism for identifying eligible voters and preventing ineligible persons from voting. The mechanism is also used to guarantee the "one person one vote" principle by preventing people from voting more than once or from voting in wrong location.

An accurate voters' list or the electoral roll is the basic document on the basis of which vote is taken by the Presiding Officer at the polling booth. Therefore, fair election largely depends on the accuracy of the electoral rolls. In the absence of accurate electoral rolls, holding of fair elections is not possible.

It is indeed difficult to have hundred per cent accurate voters' list but election administrators strive to make the electoral rolls cent percent accurate. There is no recognized or acceptable level of errors in case of a voters' list because a small error, say three per cent, may make a difference in the overall outcome of a constituency as well as a nationwide election. While under-voters may creep into the electoral roll it is unpalatable to disenfranchise any bona fide voter just by exclusion of his/her name from there.

The Bangladesh Election Commission has introduced a new system of individual registration instead of the old system of family based registration. The merits of the new system notwithstanding, the registration form is unnecessarily made complicated asking for eleven different information of every voter. Out of eleven only five different information are eventually used by the Commission in preparing the voters' list and voter's identity cards. Some of the information (column 7,8) sought from the voter are embarrassing to them and information sought under column 11 giving the voter a choice to vote at different places in different elections (national and local body) is misleading. Current electoral rolls ordinance do not permit a voter to enroll in different electoral areas. In other words, only the information sought in question No. 1,2,3,5 and 6 should be kept deleting the others.

Some would argue about making multi-purpose voter's identity card and database which may serve the purpose of a national identity card also. Here, it is pertinent to point out that it is not the job of the EC to produce or develop database for any national identity card — it is probably the job of the Home Ministry. Having to handle the extra load of information would entail the risk (and reality) of increased errors in collecting, collating and entering the enormous amount of information in the database. Why should the EC take such responsibilities when it has not been able to streamline the basic voter information necessary for developing an accurate or near accurate or an acceptable electoral roll and producing and disseminating voter identity cards?

In the past, attempts at making voters list have almost always preceded an election and the EC and its large number of enumerators worked under pressure to complete the list within the short deadline. This has hampered the process of making an accurate voters' list. For the future, the EC should not relate the preparation of the electoral rolls with any election work plan and time schedule to complete the rolls.

In many democracies in Asia the electoral rolls have been computerized and entered in the database. There are definite advantages of doing this: For instance, updating becomes easier and less costly — all one had to do is to exclude the dead and include the new voters attaining the voting age. Then it does not require to prepare a new voters' list every five or ten years.

mission in the cell having knowledge of the mechanism involved in the preparation of electoral rolls, method of contacting voters, difficulties inherent in the contact by the registration staff and the ways and means that may provide solution to any problem associated with taking of photographs of the voters and preparation or distribution of identity cards among the voters.

Generally, the EC ought to have its own permanent personnel who would specialize in election related jobs and remain to serve the EC while top executives (Secretary, Additional Secretary, etc.) may be brought in from the civil bureaucracy. The EC should also hire consultants to work for the voters' list project from amongst former/reformed officers of the EC who have handled these issues and problems before — experience has no substitute.

An important issue is to extend the franchise to the expatriate Bangladeshis. Many of them are registered in current voters list but the facility of postal ballot is not extended to them which has deprived them of their right to vote. Expatriate Bangladeshis for all their contributions and inherent, inalienable right ought to be registered as voters and allowed to cast their votes. Relevant laws need to be amended for the purpose. Recently, the Philippines are in the process of extending their overseas citizens the right to vote in national elections. The process of public consultation is one exercise that can be undertaken by the EC about the ways and means of preparing an accurate and acceptable voters' list. Public consultation through seminars, workshops and soliciting public opinion will make electors feel involved in the process. Political parties, civic organizations, NGOs and professional groups can be involved in such public consultations. This exercise will also lessen the responsibility of failures and inadequacies from the shoulders of the authorities while reducing such possibilities because of broad involvement of the public.

In addition to public consultations, the registration period offers an excellent opportunity to involve the people in the electoral process as volunteers with specific responsibilities. These responsibilities may include initiating voter education campaign encouraging the population to register as voters, monitoring the conduct of the government officials and political parties, and implementing a system to process complaints regarding preparation of the voters' list.

The probable problems may include:

a) procedures that cause reasonable difficulty for certain sectors to register or obtain identification card necessary for voting, including: limiting hours or days for registration; placing registration sites in inconvenient locations; or subjecting registrants to unfairly burdensome procedures such as presenting multiple identification documents, photographs, making multiple visits to registration sites etc.;

b) inappropriate conduct of registration officials, committed either intentionally or accidentally, including: intimidating registrants; rejecting or deleting eligible voters; accepting ineligible registrants; fraudulently altering the list; failing to distribute voter identity cards; etc.;

c) inaccurate lists, such as lists that include the names of individuals who have died or have left the constituency, fictitious individuals, or registrants who are listed more than once or are otherwise ineligible; that fail to include the names of eligible individuals who have properly applied to register; or that make it difficult or impractical to locate them on the lists; and

d) failure to assure transparency in the registration process, as evidenced by restrictive regulations or recalcitrant officials who prevent monitors from analyzing the process in a timely manner.

There are good reasons to open the voter registration process for public scrutiny by civic groups and Election Monitoring Organizations (EMOs). In addition to causing problems on the election day, inaccurate voters' list may also adversely affect other aspects of the election process. For example, constituency boundaries and seats assigned to each district/division are determined by census/voter registration information. The location of polling stations are also determined by information collected during voter registration process. These factors may influence the outcome of an election.

Following are some suggested techniques the EC may allow EMOs to apply to evaluate the registration process:

1. Encourage and allow volunteers to monitor the registration process throughout the country, particularly in areas where there are high probability of problems such as Haima thana and Keraniganj;

2. Verify the accuracy of the information on the voters' lists (e.g. by selecting statistically significant samples of the names and then determining, through interviews or other research, if the information is correct);

3. Compare voters' list from previous elections with the current list to identify statistical anomalies (e.g. extreme changes in the number of registrants in a region);

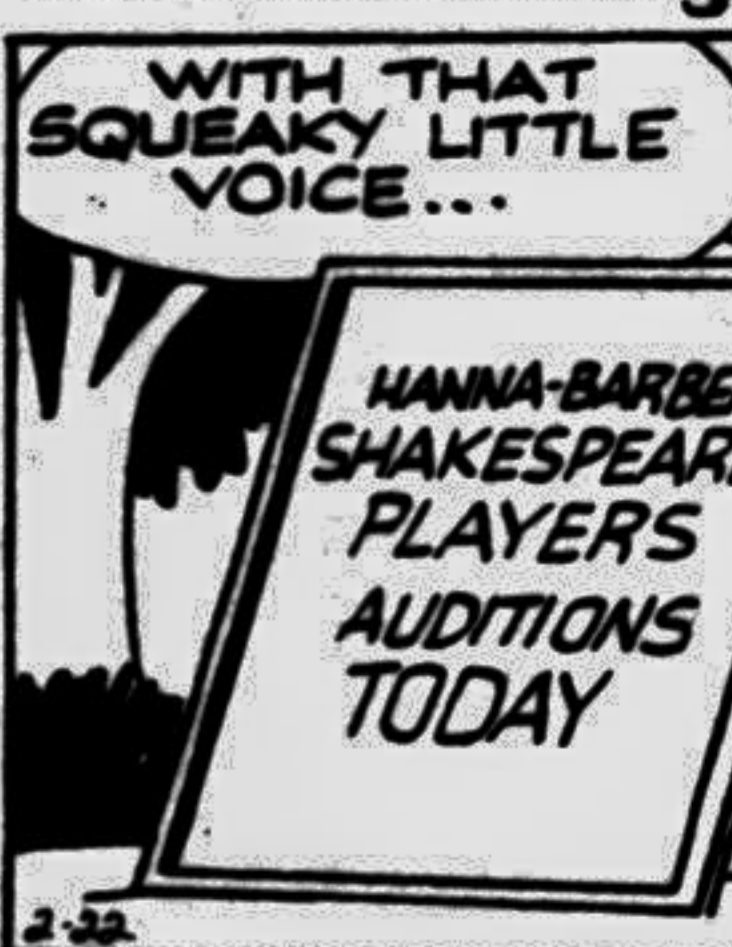
4. Review the list, visually or by computer, to determine duplicate registrations and the registration of ineligible voters; and

5. Provide civic education and training to conduct the aforementioned techniques.

The first, second and fifth techniques require considerable time and personnel, but they also afford the best opportunity to detect flaws in the registration process. The third and fourth techniques can be accomplished at the central or district headquarters, without deploying any personnel to the field.

The writer is Member-Secretary, FEMA

## Tom and Jerry



IAN FLEMING'S James Bond



DRAWN BY JOHN MCCLUSKY

BOND ENTERS THE PROTECTIVE AIR LOCK LEADING TO THE BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH AREA...

DISPENSARY—LAST DOOR ON YOUR LEFT!

By Hanna-Barbera

Continued from yesterday

Following are the excerpts of PW-22 sepoy Habilder (ret'd) Abdul Aziz by Adv TM Akbar, defence counsel for Lt Col (LPR) Muhuddin:

Q: Did you give any statement to CID?

A: Yes.

Q: Was the statement read before you and did you sign it?

A: It was read before me, but I didn't sign it.

Q: Did you meet PW-21 Khaleque?

A: Yes, I met him on Monday at the verandah of the court.

Q: Where did you report when you came to Dhaka to make your statement before the court?

A: At the CID office.

Q: Does the night programme of Artillery take place outside the cantonment?

A: No.

Q: Was the Artillery firing range was situated inside the cantonment?

A: I can't remember.

Q: How long did you hear the sounds of firing?

A: Five to six minutes.

Q: Did you get your food ready when you went back to the barrack after your duty?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you go to the armoury to deposit your arms before that?

Q: Yes.

Q: Was it necessary to take the ammunition for the arms?

A: I don't know.

Q: You carry out all the orders given you from August 14 night upto August 15 afternoon?

A: Yes.

Q: You were standing in front of the main gate of Bangabandhu's residence at about 7 to 7:15 am.

A: No.

Q: Did you carry out the orders or refused to do so on that day?

A: I carried out the orders.

Q: Did you fire anyone while walking on the Road-32 on that day?

A: No.

PW-23

Following are the excerpts of PW-23 Risaldar (ret'd) Abdul Halim Mollah by Adv TM Akbar, defence counsel for Lt Col (LPR) Muhuddin:

Q: How many soldiers were there at your B Squadron in August, 1975?

A: I can't recall.

Q: Records are kept if anyone takes charge in absence of others.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you say when did Major Feroz joined your squadron and how long he remained there?

A: I don't remember.

Q: How long were you in the service?

A: Till 1983.

Q: Do you know that Major Feroz finally became brigadier?

A: Yes.

Q: Every tank has its number.

A: Yes.

Q: Tank garages are kept under lock and key.

A: The frontside of a tank garage remains open.

Q: Guards are there for the garages.

A: Yes.

Q: What is the location of the signal gate?

A: About five to six hundred km south from the Tank garage.

Q: Did the tanks go out through the signal gate on that night?

A: I can't say.

Q: But, one will have to go through the signal gate if he wants to go towards south.

A: There is another gate.

Q: Did you ever take part in any tank exercise during your service life?

A: Yes, when I was in Pakistan and in August 1975 morning.

Q: The CO of the regiment is under the Army Headquarters.

A: Yes.

Q: A commissioned officer should be in a tank if it comes out of the cantonment.

A: It depends on the CO. If he wishes he can deputize a junior officer (JCO) as well.

Earlier, the state defence counsels for the absconding accused cross-examined the PW-23.

Further texts of cross examination will be published as and when received.

— UNB

## BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

### Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of Twenty-second and Twenty-third Prosecution Witnesses

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## Metropolitan

### Weather

#### Dry weather likely

Light to moderate rain or thundershower accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions and the region of Comilla in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Met Office says weather may remain mainly dry elsewhere across the country with partly cloudy sky.

Day temperature is likely to remain nearly unchanged throughout the country.

Country's highest temperature 33.4 degree Celsius was recorded at Jessore and Satkhira and the lowest 20.2 degrees at Srimangal.

The sun sets today at 5:31 pm and rises tomorrow at 5:57 am.

Maximum and minimum temperatures and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

Dhaka	32.1	21.4	69	75
Chittagong	32.6	23.4	80	73
Rajshahi	32.0	21.7	76	77
Khulna	32.8	22.8	70	83
Barisal	31.5	22.0	75	84
Sylhet	31.4	21.6	77	78
Cox's Bazar	32.0	23.5	74	70

#### New BSS board of directors

The government yesterday reconstituted the board of directors of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) for a three year term under the BSS ordinance, reports BSS.

Dr A M S Arefin Siddiqui, associate professor of Mass Communication and Journalism Department of Dhaka University has been made chairman of the board.

The directors are: Bazlur Rahman, executive editor of the Sangbad, Kazi Shahed Ahmed, editor of the Aker Kagoj, Moazzem Hossain, editor of The Financial Express, M A Malek, editor of the Chittagong-based Daily Azadi, Humayun Kabir Balu, editor of the Khulna-based daily Janmabumi, Hamiduzzaman, chief reporter of the BSS.

Managing Director and Chief Editor of BSS, joint secretary (press), ministry of information and joint secretaries of the ministries of finance and the post and telecommunications will be ex-officio directors of the board.

#### Charity concert for cancer research held

An exciting charity concert to raise funds for cancer research was held at the auditorium of National Museum yesterday evening, reports UNB.

The concert, participated by leading performers of the country, highlighted the incredible story of Terry Fox, a Canadian who had inspired millions around the world to keep fighting against cancer.

The Terry Fox Story, composed by the DG of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Azad Rahman, who is also a renowned artist, was a highlight of the evening.

It was followed by the well-known dance drama, 'Nakshi Kanthar Moathi' performed by top artistes Shamim Ara Nipa and Sohail Rahman together with the Academy's renowned performance.

The concert is part of a month-long drive which will culminate in the Terry Fox Run on October 31.

#### 3 minor girls released from safe custody

By Court Correspondent

Three minor girls got released from the safe custody of Dhaka Central Jail and reunited with their families Tuesday at the initiative of the Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK).

A highly placed source in the Ministry of Home Affairs said Tuesday that a total of about 50 females were in the safe custody of the Central Jail for several months. Some of them were kept there even for years together, he added.

Metropolitan Magistrate, Shawkat Nabi ordered release of the three girls on three petitions moved on behalf of the guardians of Hashi Khushi, 8, Fatema, 12, and Rina, 12.

Hashi, a maid fled her employer's house in June last fearing torture. She was arrested by Ramna police and forwarded to court.

Ordering safe custody for the girl, the court also asked police to trace her guardian.

Hashi, who hails from Gazipur, was in safe custody for about four months, as police on several occasions reported that her guardians could not be traced.

ASK traced Hashi's guardians when it came to know about the incident. They met Hashi at the Central Jail and filed a petition in court for her custody on behalf of her father. On her release Tuesday Hashi was handed over to her father Khurshed Alam.

Similar was the case with Rina who hails from Sirajganj. Her father was also traced by ASK and on her release from the safe custody, she was handed over to him.

The case of Fatema, who hails from Narsingdi, was however, different. She lost her way to Kapashia and was arrested by Matijheel police in July last and the court placed her in safe custody. At the initiative of ASK, she got released and was handed over to her sister.

The petitions from the ASK on behalf of the girls were moved by advocates Ila Chanda, M Asaduzzaman and Abu Obaidur Rahman.



Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia yesterday visited the Biswa Ijtema site hit by a tornado recently.

— Star photo

#### Khaleda visits Biswa Ijtema ground at Tongi

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday visited the Biswa Ijtema ground at Tongi where at least 19 people were killed and a thousand others injured in a tornado, reports UNB.

On her arrival at the Ijtema ground in the afternoon, Begum Zia was received by "Jinnah" of Biswa Ijtema committee Abdul Qudus and Haji Abdul Patih.

Abdul Qudus told Begum Zia how the deadly tornado struck the devotees when they were in a prayer session and that of a horrible scene on Sunday evening.

Later, Begum Zia visited the 50-bed Tongi Hospital where at least