

## EC's Correct Move

We congratulate the EC for its bold, unambiguous and determined step in removing the returning officer of the Pabna-2 constituency. By taking this action the EC has met a major demand of the Opposition and cleared the way to holding a free and fair election. The EC's move followed from its own investigation which found the returning officer wanting. We hope similar steps shall be taken against the DIG, SP and other government officials involved if their role is also found to be questionable.

But we are still worried. Electoral rules seem to have been thrown to the four winds with vengeance in connection with this by-poll. Only two days are left of the final count-down, and the atmospherics have soured to breed a confrontational issue ominously ahead of election outcome which is already viewed with pre-mature suspicion by the opposition BNP accompanied by an equally presumptuous threat of a non-stop hartal. All this impels us to come out with comments three times over in these columns on the Pabna by-election within a space of four days since Friday.

In spite of the action the EC has already taken allegations are still coming thick and fast on at least two counts: ministers' on-spot campaigning, and the overshooting of campaign expenditure ceiling of Tk 3,00,000 per candidate.

The ministers' activism at the constituency has already drawn show cause notices to be served on them by the District Electoral Inquiry Committee. Some ministers seem undeterred by it as they have hit back on the campaign trail saying they were doing it in a personal capacity without making any use of the official paraphernalia. But their presence could influence the voters, a possibility which the ruling party had duly acknowledged at the Noakhali and Barisal by-elections where they made sure the ministers refrained from campaigning directly. Their deviation this time has caused the trouble.

Moreover, BNP's serious allegations about their leader Begum Zia being refused accommodation at the Dak Bungalow and her alternative residence getting forcibly occupied by ruling party 'terrorists' warrant an immediate probe followed by appropriate action.

The CEC has admitted that campaign expenditures have gone well beyond the Tk 3 lakh limit. What was his own machinery doing? We agree that a post-facto statement of accounts is meaningless, an investigative agency was needed as a watch-dog.

To ensure a peaceful and successful holding of the by-poll, we urge the EC to show the same boldness in handling every other delinquency and complaint thereof with equal firmness and speed.

## Literate Magura

Illiteracy has long been identified as Bangladesh's biggest bane. Successive governments since independence have pledged to rid the country of this curse, but without success. Various factors including poor utilisation of funds and failure to develop a cadre of dedicated, well-trained teachers have combined to thwart both primary school and adult literacy campaigns. But there is a piece of good news at last. The district of Magura has now been declared fully literate, following completion of the "Bikoshito Magura" programme under the government's Total Literacy Movement. According to government claims, 200,000 adults of the district were made literate over a period of a year and half.

However, past experiences suggest that success of Magura be evaluated carefully. First question that can be raised is whether all adults were covered under the programme. The second would be whether "literacy" means a mere ability to sign names, or functional literacy which enables people to read and write freely. Third is whether there is any follow up programme in place to retain the literacy. Without such follow-ups, newly-literate persons may soon relapse into illiteracy through lack of application. Finally, it needs to be asked whether primary school enrolment rate has reached 100 per cent in the district. Primary school enrolment is important because without it a new generation of illiterate persons would be created behind the facade of "illiteracy-free Magura".

Answers to these questions are vital, because without these, the true impact of the programme cannot be assessed. Without a proper assessment of the impact, the programme's success or failure cannot be reliably claimed either. It is important that the government has an independent review made of the programme in order to get a clear picture. This would enable the government to make necessary adjustments and replicate the programme in all other 63 districts of the country. If "Bikoshito Magura" can be replicated, with or without changes, then the curse of adult illiteracy can indeed be banished from the country.

## Restore the Glory

In Bangladesh many historical sites and establishments have been devoured by cruel erosion of river-banks, many have disintegrated by the impact of corrosive weather over a long period of time; those that survived the vagaries of nature have been targeted for human abuse. Already many such buildings of historical importance and witnesses of time and rich heritage have been vandalised. Against the first offender — the caprice of nature — we have very little protection to offer. That does not mean we are totally helpless either. We can, if we want to, maintain and preserve these by using the most modern tools and techniques through the hands of trained technicians and experts in the field of archaeology; and secondly but most importantly, give every imaginable protection to these mute witnesses of our past from the known and would be vandals and rogues who have taken a firm but unlawful grip on these sites.

The Daily Star story on the two Kataras at the old town yesterday speaks volumes about the negligence and inefficiency of the authority responsible for the maintenance and protection of the 17th century Mughal architectural monument. All declared historical sites of the country are protected by law but illegal grabbing of their properties goes unabated under the very nose of those who are duty-bound to save them. These guardians look like accomplices. How tragic!

People demand immediate stern action against the unlawful occupants of the premises of all historical buildings. Something of their former glory should be restored thereby instilling a sense of pride in the minds of the future generations.

THEY lost. They lost in Pokhara — especially badly at Khetolai, the village nearest to the nuclear test site. They lost in Chhattisgarh, despite announcement of separate statehood. They also lost in outer Delhi, where middle-caste farmers predominate.

The BJP lost everywhere in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. The party, on the upswing for 15 years, is suddenly looking battered and demoralised. It is at sixes and sevens. As its leaders blame one another for the defeat, it is heading for a deep crisis, and its coalition for serious trouble, of which Insurance Bill fiasco is only one sign.

So devastating has been the electoral setback to the BJP that numbers alone cannot capture its quality. The huge swing against the party amounts to a wave akin to 1977 or 1984.

The BJP's vote has eroded with unprecedented speed, bringing its lead in February from 330 (of the 620) assembly constituencies that went to the polls to a mere 162. In M.P., it lost its lead in almost half the 222 constituencies. In Rajasthan, it performed worse than the Congress did in 1977. In Delhi, it suffered its worst

humiliation since 1952.

M.P., Rajasthan and Delhi are important being among the few states that witness straight bipolar contests. The BJP's rout was total and generalised: there is not one region in any of the three states where it was not badly battered.

Three-fourths of BJP ministers lost in Rajasthan. The BJP totally fell in each of M.P.'s four regions. Delhi followed the same pattern. So it is logical to argue that the issues influencing the voter were not location-specific, but national in character.

The BJP's performance cannot be attributed to factionalism, incumbency, or poor campaigning. The party exerted itself with the efficiency typical of the *sangh parivar*. Mr Vajpayee even addressed street-corner meetings in Delhi. The election results bear witness to the atrophy of the BJP's strongest bases.

Take Malwa in M.P. The BJP entrenched itself here way back in the mid-sixties and defended itself through

## BJP's Devastating Defeat

# Hindutva's Forward March Halted?

Praful Bidwari writes from New Delhi

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numerous upsets in 1971, 1980, and 1984.

This time, its losses were spectacular. Two former chief ministers, including a front-runner for that post, were trounced. Mr Kailash Joshi lost in a seat that was his pocket-borough since 1962. The party suffered decisive reverses in other strongholds: Indore, Dhar, Ujjain and Mandasaur.

The BJP's defeat, then, was massive, comprehensive, staggering. It cannot be explained by marginal vote transfers, alienation of tiny numbers of electors belonging to specific castes, or high food prices — themselves an effect of speculation, hoarding and economic mismanagement. Such a massively negative vote can only be seen as punishment for mis-governance. This goes beyond anger at high onion prices and their strong identification with traders — the BJP's prime constituency. It is a general rejection of the BJP. The BJP has transited from expansion to decline.

Its social base is shrinking

rapidly, especially among the low-caste poor. Going by published surveys, there can be little doubt that the voter punished the BJP for three things: bad social and economic policies, adventurism on security issues; and sectarian stands on education and minority rights. The voter now sees the BJP as a party that makes tall claims about *sachita, suraksha, samarasta*, etc but does the opposite.

Its government is as unaccountable and venal as any other. BJP factionalism seems to be worse than the Congress'. The ugly truth about feuds between Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani was revealed by their own acolytes in the media (India Today, November 30). The BJP has further communalised society by attacking Christians, imposing Saraswati vandana, and changing the complexion of social science research institutions.

The Pokhara blasts have proved a costly misadventure which has reduced India's security and lowered her stature. The BJP's Kashmir policy is a

disaster; and its obsession with draconian means to establish order is deeply illiberal. On the sixth anniversary of the Babri demolition, the BJP appeared to be a party that is highly successful when pushing sectarian, divisive, jingoistic agendas, but a bad failure when it comes to healing or unifying.

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The alienation of non-*savarna* groups from the BJP is now real. Muslims, the urban poor and OBCs came out to vote against the BJP. This is extremely damaging. The BJP cannot win a majority as a Brahmin-Bania party — a stamp it increasingly attracts. The Hindutva party has now lost much of its shine. Its coalition, always opportunist, has become shakier. The Congress, by contrast, has made big gains by attracting some social groups it had alienated. Its best political bets lie right there.

leadership is in far better shape than before. Ms Sonia Gandhi conducted herself with dignity and imparted purpose to the party, which seems set to grow. However, the Congress's gains will prove temporary unless it rethinks its post-1991 policies, which led to its erosion in the first place.

To win back the minorities, most backward OBCs (MBCs), and other underprivileged groups, along with middle class layers, the Congress must reaffirm a commitment to secularism. Secondly, the Congress must avoid the temptation to pull down the BJP-led coalition by making messy, unstable and opportunist alliances.

An alternative alliance can legitimately take power only if it immediately calls for mid-term elections.

But an unprincipled coalition will discredit the Congress and facilitate the BJP's return. This does not mean that the Congress should refuse to confront the BJP on issues of communalism, economic policy and security. Just the contrary. It should join hands with the Left in preventing the BJP from further damaging our democratic institutions. Its best political bets lie right there.

## The Impeachment Circus in Washington

*Realising the inevitability of defeat in an impeachment vote in the House, some Republicans are breaking ranks with their party leadership and joining some Democrats in toying with the option of voting to censure Clinton rather than impeach him.*

issue.

Clinton and his camp cannot be absolved of the blame either. He, of course, got himself in this mess. His initial lack of candor about the Monica Lewinsky matter and his almost genetic propensity for stonewalling are, in a way, responsible for the painfully heightened level of partisanship seen today.

An example of his lack of candor and legal maneuvering bordering on obsession is the questionnaire that the House Judiciary Committee wanted Clinton and his lawyers to fill out. If the intent of the Judiciary Committee was to trick Clinton into admitting a violation of his constitutional duty and propel him toward impeachment, the tactic was too obvious to go unrecognised.

The eighty-one questions asked by the committee and answered by the president proved, unsurprisingly, once again that Clinton is the master of the parsed phrase and the strategically placed comma. If the committee wanted Clinton to hang himself, it's clear that they have to find a different hangman.

One need only read the very first question and answer to feel frustrated, both with Clinton and his spin doctors, and with the committee for asking questions so obviously designed to entrap Clinton that any layman could have detected the play.

Question: "Do you admit or deny that you are the chief law enforcement officer of the United States of America?"

Answer: "The president is frequently referred to as the chief law enforcement officer, although nothing in the Constitution specifically designates the president as such..."

Clinton clearly didn't want to answer that question with specificity and give Republicans any ammunition with which to

attack him on grounds of perjury in the Monica Lewinsky affair. So he resorted to words such as "frequently" (but not all the time) and "nothing in the Constitution" (specifically, that is) to help him dodge a rather poorly aimed bullet. Denying that he had done anything more than mislead the nation, Clinton offered no new information in his 24-page reply.

The Republican Chairman of the Judiciary Committee is trying to find a face-saving way of sending up articles of impeachment on Clinton to the full House of Representative so that they can be voted upon. But the political reality is that the Republicans do not have the votes necessary to win the impeachment. So, they wanted to extend the hearing to include Kathleen Willey, who accused Clinton of groping her. Next, the Republicans swerved again and decided to inquire about Clinton's 1996 presidential campaign funding. Specifically, they wanted to investigate allegations that money from Chinese and Indonesian investors were illegally funnelled into Clinton-Gore's campaign chest. This was an odd detour for a panel that had planned to complete its work by mid-December.

The problem was that two previous Congressional committees had spent months digging into the '96 campaign finance violation and found nothing. The Democrats cried foul and the committee degenerated into a bickering muddle.

Initially, the Republicans in the Committee were happy to focus on Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky and the issue of perjury. Then they wanted to extend the hearing to include Kathleen Willey, who accused Clinton of groping her. Next, the Republicans swerved again and decided to inquire about Clinton's 1996 presidential campaign funding. Specifically, they wanted to investigate allegations that money from Chinese and Indonesian investors were illegally funnelled into Clinton-Gore's campaign chest. This was an odd detour for a panel that had planned to complete its work by mid-December.

The Republicans are also acknowledging that it won't be politically helpful to try to avoid impeachment votes on the House floor. They had been

saying that the American public has no interest in the Monica Lewinsky affair and the November election results support their contention. They feel that this is a good time for the House Judiciary Committee to send the articles of impeachment to the full House for a vote. They are confident that they can prevail in the House vote and thereby drop the impeachment question once and for all. Moreover, the president is virtually certain to survive a trial in the US Senate regardless of how the House votes.

So it seems that both the Democrats and the Republicans would be better off, although for different reasons, to cut through the proceedings of the House Judiciary Committee and get on with the vote. Realising the inevitability of defeat in an impeachment vote in the House, some Republicans are breaking ranks with their party leadership and joining some Democrats in toying with the option of voting to censure Clinton rather than impeach him.

The question of impeachment has now come down to the issue of whether Clinton's acts are merely wrong or impeachable. Impeachment requires committing "high crimes or misdemeanors". No one condones Clinton for his adulterous behaviour. But the question is whether he has committed perjury, that is, lied under oath. During Clinton's testimony in the Paula Jones case he was asked about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. He denied

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**Connecting the Dots**  
Dr. A. R. Choudhury

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**Art Buchwald's COLUMN**

## For the Next 100 Years

**T**HE big news from the rat labs is that scientists are on the verge of the biggest breakthrough in the history of mankind. They are developing living cells that will replace sick ones in the body, which will guarantee longer lives for centuries to come.

What causes bad things to happen to good people is that diseased cells attack the good ones. So in the future, no one will know how long everyone on Earth will be on Social Security.

The fact that immortal cells are around the corner forces us to face up to some difficult decisions.

One is: If everyone is going to be alive, with whom do we want to spend our September golf years?

There are many people we would be just as happy to say goodbye to when they hit their seventies and eighties. The idea of sitting on a porch and listening for the 100th time to someone talking about his grandchildren's gerbils is more than many folks could bear.

Elgard, in our poker-playing crowd, said that no matter what cells are used, he never wants to live as long as his mother-in-law. He said his reason for this is that his mother-in-law has always said that no matter what age he reached, he would never amount to anything.

Elgard felt the same way about his relatives. "I don't think you should keep alive the people you can't stand right now."

It's a dicey decision and one the living will have to face up to. It's not a question of which person you keep alive, but what kind should stay here in the first place. The scientists predict that, like the atomic bomb, once the cells are developed we will have to use them.

My suggestion is that you make a list of all the people you are willing to spend your next 100 years with and decide if the cells are worth it. I believe the list will be a lot shorter than anyone thinks.

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## OPINION

### Adaptability in Politics

**Alif Zabr**

ing in the way. As the politicians are more exposed, and wield more open power and influence which is readily visible, quite a large percentage of others feel tempted to toe the line of the politicians. The result is too much politicalisation and too much compromise on long-term principles.

The politicians in the emerging countries are too much engaged in short-term goals. The first goal is internal stabilisation, to prepare a base or foundation from which to operate to render public services (without the latter the power base would erode).

The masses are economically and educationally heterogeneous, fickle-minded and undisciplined, and are engaged in the main activities of day to day living (struggle for survival). The expectations are high and the patience low, leading to problems in mobilising them for nation-building activities. That is one of the reasons why the student community is used as political activists. It mars their career and they