

After Meherpur Polls, What?

WE are sorry, this is no laughing matter that the by-election to Meherpur-1 constituency took place entirely as a ruling party show, the opposition having wholly boycotted it.

As the first by-election ever to be boycotted by the opposition en bloc the Meherpur poll has set a record in the negative that cannot be trifled with.

This has been a tactical victory the opposition has been wanting to score over the ruling party by beating it in its own game.

We suggest that opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia's mass procession on Monday demanding smooth supply of water, electricity and gas evoked a large measure of public support.

Rajuk Needs Streamlining

RAJUK seems to have developed a habit of violating its own rules. Indiscriminate approval of building plans without provisions of parking and other facilities as required by law seems to have become the order of the day.

Unfortunately, much has been said about rectifying the situation but nothing done as yet. At the Rajuk end, there have been complaints about absence of adequate law, although the existing ones have hardly been enforced.

We have earlier extended our support to a Rajuk plea for an adequate legal framework. But, the way things are, it seems enactment of law by itself cannot be enough.

Explain Yourself, Please!

THE Health Minister has played on a pitifully discordant note in his valiant attempt to be in tune with the party orchestra that pompously professes equal treatment to offenders irrespective of party affiliations.

It was reported in a section of the press that these activists of the ruling party and their organs were implicated in 'false cases' and were advised by the Minister to surrender to the authorities in the presence of DC and SP, Khulna.

On Tuesday The Daily Star published a news item quoting an officer of the regional PID office at Khulna as saying that the Minister asked him to prepare a report for Radio and Television on the 'handover of sixteen persons of ruling party's Phul-tala unit who had been wanted in several cases'.

Now, do we have to understand that an officer of the government is contradicting a powerful Minister without any foundation? It appears that the Minister swallowed more than he could chew.

Gap between Expectations and Institutional Capacity

M. Rashiduzzaman writes from Glassboro, New Jersey, USA

The future caretaker government could benefit from the learning experiences (including the earlier mistakes) of the previous interim authorities, and by responding to the genuine input both from the winners and losers of the earlier elections.

DR. Kamal Hossain of Gono Forum recently warned that the future caretaker government would not be enough to assure a free and fair poll.

Those who thundered for it exaggerated the capacity of the interim authority to solve the intractable distrust between the government and opposition in Bangladesh.

Stipulated by the 13th amendment of the Bangladesh Constitution, the chief advisor (a retired Chief Justice) and 10 advisors would constitute the caretaker government.

Having seen the last two caretaker governments since 1991, can we say that the non-political interim authorities offer a more reliable and acceptable election results?

leader called it a "democratic triumph". But the "victory" had come after the 22-month inter-imasse, and widespread agitation, and for a period of time in 1996 there was a strident non-cooperation movement and violence.

Former Chief Justice Habibur Rahman assumed authority under the amended constitution, and his interim government was the second interim regime in five years (the first one came when General H.M. Ershad resigned).

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bridge the brawling politicians and accomplish a smooth transfer of power? Was the last non-partisan government accepted as fair and neutral? The answer will be a mixed bag including the reasonably peaceful power transfer after an election that was generally considered as fair although the BNP and some of the lesser parties questioned its assumed fairness.

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the goons who will steal the ballot boxes or staff them whenever they can, and intimidate their rivals whenever possible. Because both the people were already operating through the perceived "educated civil society" since most of them were formally educated, and more importantly, they had friends in the high places!

There was no perfect electoral process even in the solidly established representative democracies. The opposition parties, their cohorts and a section of frenzied vernacular press had overblown the Awami League allegation that the BNP had blatantly rigged the election in Magura.

start another violent movement. Sadly, Bangladesh politics is locked in a game of fit for fat, and the caretaker government is not a panacea in such a political landscape.

There was a lot of frustration that the caretaker government did not take any decisive steps against the politicized bureaucrats that openly defected to the opposition-sponsored agitation, and this question is expected to reappear in the future.

The gushing accusation of the Awarization of the police, local bureaucrats and the local leaders, recently elected in the opposition-boycotted local elections, would add even more headache to the prospective caretaker advisors and the election authority.

the present ruling party, and that allegation is likely to pick up momentum, as the election will be drawing nearer. As a source of mobilization outside the bureaucracy, the NGOs have a desirable role to play, but the voluntary bodies are expected to shun direct or indirect partisan politics.

The caretaker government's adhocism is its institutional malediction! It's an institution that can only work through mutual cooperation and mutual respect, a rare phenomenon in Bangladesh.

LETTER FROM EUROPE

The Moriscos Deportation and its Effects

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

Because of the disappearance of the Moriscos (who had to pay exorbitant taxes), government revenues took a sharp dive. Production in the silk industry (which depended on Morisco technicians) fell so heavily that in order to avoid a complete shutdown, the businessmen petitioned the king seeking permission to import silk from foreign countries ... Sugar and rice production fell in a significant manner ... In short, a general recession set in all over Spain as the economic and commercial activities decelerated.

ern states of the USA. It is worth mentioning here that the Moriscos and Jews, who had lived in Spain for centuries and for all intents and purposes considered themselves as Spaniards, were prohibited by law to emigrate to Spanish overseas territories.

Before we answer the other two questions it would be useful to find out who these Moriscos (affected by the expulsion orders) were and what sort of social and economic background they came from.

During the heyday of Muslim domination in Spain (the conquest started in 711), the new aristocracy, who usurped the land owned by the old Christian nobles, was composed of Spaniards of Arab and Berber descent.

The case of the Moriscos was unfortunately different. First of all, there was a gap of several centuries between these two events. Second, they were converted to Christianity by force and third, their ancestors had practised Islam, spoken Arabic for many more years and had completely identified themselves with the Hispano-Muslim culture.

The Christian nobles, after losing most of Spain to the Muslim invaders took refuge in

the mountains of extreme north (Asturias) and started organising resistance (the Reconquista) as early as the year 722 (the battle of Covadonga around which a lot of Christian myth has been created). As we have already seen the Reconquista was completed in 1492 with the conquest of Granada.

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After the promulgation of the Royal Decrees of 1609 and 1611 expelling all the Moriscos from Spain, most of them were literally driven to southern Spanish ports and herded into boats leaving for North Africa, which was going through a turbulent period at that time.

However, after these initial difficulties, thousands settled in Xauen, Fez, Sale etc, and eventually prospered in their respective trades.

Those who landed on the Algerian coast were not that lucky. Algeria, at that time nominally belonged to the Turkish empire, but in effect was under the control of the Janissary legions. Law and order situation was disastrous.

The most fortunate were those who went to Tunisia. The Turkish Governor Urtan drew up a comprehensive plan to settle them according to the trade or profession of the refugees. The craftsmen and small businessmen were given special subsidies to start their businesses at Ariana, Djedaida, Teburba, etc.

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countries on the other side of the Mediterranean.

Now what was the economic consequences of such massive expulsions of a significant percentage of the active population (workers, farmers, peasants, craftsmen, traders etc) on the economy of Spain? While assessing the overall consequences, one should also bear in mind that after 1492 hundreds of thousands of Jews, who for centuries had lived in Spain and dedicated themselves to business, finance and government bureaucracy were also expelled.

Since our objective is not to enter into unnecessary polemics over this discussion, let us merely state some facts and figures. First of all, no one knows the exact number of people who were killed and expelled as a result of these decrees. Depending on the concentration of the Moriscos and Mudejars in different areas, their percentage of the active population could vary between 10 per cent and 40 per cent (in Castile quite low while in Valencia and Granada very significant).

There was a significant fall in the volume of trade between Spain and its colonies in America. Internal trade and commerce were also affected adversely. Many villages became depopulated and some were completely abandoned.

There were some who crossed the Franco-Spanish border and tried to settle in France, but they had to endure same sufferings. No one wanted them there. Many died of sickness and malnutrition.

To the Editor...

Unfortunate developments at BUET

Sir, The members of the 61-Club are deeply concerned at the recent unfortunate developments in their dear alma mater, the BUET.

It is the responsibility of all, particularly the government, to uphold the dignity, honour and above all the academic authority of the teachers.

The law should be allowed to take its due course as it is normal in any civil society. Such undesirable and unsolicited incidents are bound to seriously undermine the congenial environment for higher education in the country which this institution has been upholding since its very inception.

The members of the 61-Club sincerely hope that all attempts shall be made by all quarters concerned to prevent such untoward happenings in future.

Engr. Abdur Rahim General Secretary, 61-Club

What's with BUET?

Sir, What's with BUET? Most renowned Engineering university of Bangladesh now hitting headlines with teachers going after students and students violating teachers. Time has come for a thorough investigation.

Unpleasant things are surfacing. The most prestigious academic institution has been infected with internal politics. If the conspiracy is true then BUET is in the hand of power hungry academicians and what can be worse than that?

Just when we are starting fresh after being exhausted by so many articles written for

and against admission issue on Architecture something even more excessive than any events in the history of BUET has come up.

Aleya Florida, USA

The TV crime

Sir, The box news of the DS on TV crime has drawn my attention. The trick that the gang used was nothing new. This type of trick was tried out in several times in several occasions on several items and not seizing TV alone.

We know that a group of organized criminals play role of police, custom inspector, Army personnel and many others... and befool the people. And we all know that all these do not happen in street alone, the 'play' take place inside home as well.

After knowing all this, how responsible was BTV in giving public announcement with half

of the information? Why didn't they also announce the roles, authority and structure of the team that they planned to send for checking license? Why are they telling us now that had this team been visiting and finding TV set without license, they would have not been in a position to seize? I think they wanted to favour the Team for finding 'easy' solution with the default owners.

This is completely unacceptable for sharing one bit of information by BTV, which has put all of us at risk of being cheated by an organized group. Who is responsible for these consequences? I feel BTV should hold partial responsibility and immediately give open announcement giving the complete description of the team and the work plan.

John Martin Dhaka