

Credibility Test for Voter List

THERE has been an almost vicarious sensation-alism in ruling party circles over the news of some 83 persons registering as voters from Opposition Leader Begum Zia's Cantonment residence. Earlier the opposition had questioned the credibility of the draft electoral roll which showed an increase in the number of voters by 1 crore 47 lakh 73 thousand and 499 in a matter of two years since the last count in 1998.

As if in reaction to the opposition's stridency against the draft national electoral roll, the enthusiasts fell head over heels to highlight the unusual rise in the number of voters from Begum Zia's own household, said to be of the order of 50 in a few years' time. In fact they have formally raised their objections to it with the Election Commission.

Whilst the casual manner in which such an 'en masse' registration of voters took place at the opposition leader's house does reflect a certain perfunctory attitude on the part of EC, the onus ultimately falls on the opposition leader or BNP high-ups that they allowed such a thing to happen in the first place.

But this issue is only peripheral to the central question about the stupendous rise in the number of voters on the draft electoral roll. They are going to comprise 57 per cent of the population, a phenomenon that is without any precedent because proportion of voters has been at the most 51 per cent of the population so far in the history of voter list preparation in the country. We are not saying outright that this is a travesty of truth but what we are definitely suggesting is that the government ought to come out with a detailed explanation of the exceptional increase in the size of the electorate.

Yes, a higher level of democratic consciousness has driven people in a larger number to come forward and register their names as voters with multitudes of youngsters having reached the voting age; yet without being notional about it we should be coming out with the analysis of the phenomenon. And in this era of IT this is hardly a tall order. The EC must do this for the sake of nipping any question about voter list credibility in the bud.

Dastardly Killing

A ruling party stalwart of Khulna was gunned down in broad daylight on Friday. SMA Rob was on his way to a mosque for Juma prayers when a band of motorbike riding terrorists shot and killed him from point blank range and sped off unscathed. Rob's securityman was left critically wounded. We strongly condemn this dastardly attack and killing of an important regional leader of a political party and demand the arrest, trial and punishment of the murderers in accordance with the law of the land. We also offer our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

Reports indicate that this ugly incident may have had some relation with the murder in Jessore of Shamsur Rahman — investigation into which is in progress and police are understood to be in hot pursuit of suspected criminals. Rob's murder might have been designed by the crime syndicate to divert the focus from the inquiry pertaining to Shamsur Rahman murder case. It could be a clever ploy to derail the investigation.

The tall claims by the government about ridding the southwestern region of the country of terrorists have once again been proved to be a myth with the killing of Rob. The backlash of Rob's dastardly killing is bound to be widespread, not to mention the possibility that it could derail the process of bringing the culprits to justice. The ransacking of BNP offices at Khulna by the activists of the front organisations of Awami League without waiting to see the results of the investigations come out has been an utterly deplorable act. We condemn the murder as well as the reactions of the ruling party activists which can derail investigation leading to miscarriage of justice.

Resettle the Evictees

WHEN the government launched its infamous slum demolition drive on the pretext that the shanties provided safe haven for criminal and anti-social elements, this paper joined other members of the civil society in denouncing the move as a gross violation of human rights. A comprehensive relocation and rehabilitation programme for the slum-dwellers should have preceded the eviction campaign, we argued. Later, although a High Court ruling bridled the government from pursuing that line of action any further, it could not stop the damage done to some one lakh people of 19,432 families who stood evicted from the capital city's 44 slums.

The facts and figures on the demolition drive made public by a fact-finding committee on Friday conjured up the shameful episode perpetrated last year. However compelling the situation may have been, the slum eviction drive was reckless in nature, and was carried out in total disregard for both the Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Take one example: the slum-dwellers were given less than 24 hours to evacuate whereas Section 5 of Ordinance XXIV of 1970 requires 30 days of eviction notice. There are more. Police indiscriminately beat people, leaving many injured. Women, children and old people were not spared. Apart from the physical and economic damages — many lost their jobs and others suffered wage losses — the demolition drive left several people severely traumatised. Also, there hasn't been any concrete move to resettle the evicted.

Overall, the government stands guilty of violating human rights of a large body of people. Unfortunately, it does not appear penitent for what it has done to thousands of people. The home minister, at whose behest the whole operation had been carried out, didn't even bother to talk to the members of the two international human rights organisations on the report of fact-finding committee. We demand a complete status report from the government on what it has done so far and what it plans to do with the families it so cruelly evicted.

Kashmir: Scary Signals

India and Pakistan have fought conventional wars over Kashmir, when they did not possess nuclear weapons. With more than a billion population belonging to the most disadvantaged of the world, the destructive potential of a nuclear war is mind boggling. The only silver lining is that the great nuclear powers will not intervene before the subcontinent becomes a mass graveyard.

off. The violence and killing in Kashmir has resumed with all its fury.

This latest chain of events needs to be very carefully scrutinised. Indo-Pakistan relations have a tendency to degenerate into uncontrollable violence. The danger this time is that India is reluctant to sit with the latest military ruler of Pakistan Gen. Pervez Musharraf. India had hoped that it would strike a deal with the Mujahideen. On what was based this fond hope, it is difficult to understand. For it is well known that the Hizbul Mujahideen, and for that matter, virtually all guerrilla groups are dependent on Pakistan for the entire guerrilla operation, starting from recruitment, training, supply of weapons and funds. To expect to make a deal with the Hizbul Mujahideen while Pakistan remains a passive spectator is to be a dreamer to say the least.

Pakistan as usual seems hell

bent to involve a third party in the dispute. Knowing Indian sensitivity on the subject, the international community has preferred to stay on the sidelines. Even the sole superpower US has fought shy of getting directly involved in the dispute. President Bill

Clinton during his trip to the sub-continent earlier this year steered a very careful course on the subject. Indeed Pakistan was included in the itinerary after heavy pressure from various quarters including a few friends of Pakistan in Washington D.C.

The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman



The hit and run practiced by the guerrillas, using Pakistan-held Kashmir as a safe sanctuary, creates the danger of a spill over from the Indian side of Kashmir. Indian forces have so far refrained from hot pursuit and it is to be hoped that they would continue to exercise restraint.

If we analyse the events of the last half a century and more, we find that whereas India has devoted her energy to breaking away from poverty and fixed her sights on taking her rightful place in the comity of nations, Pakistan has followed a one-point agenda Kashmir. Indeed one is tempted to think that if there was no Kashmir Pakistan would be obliged to create one. For more than half a century Pakistan has continued a relentless campaign for Kashmir. From Sir Zafrullah Khan, the late Foreign Minister of Pakistan arguing the case before the Security Council in the late forties to this day, Pakistan has devoted all her energy in a single pursuit Kashmir.

The manner in which violence is escalating in Kashmir, it is a short step for India and Pakistan to start full scale warfare as it has happened in 1947 and 1965 and indirectly in 1971. In fact there is a real danger the two adversaries

stumble into warfare without actually wishing so. It would then be quite impossible to arrest the cycle of violence. The UN has proved quite powerless to play any meaningful role although the question of Kashmir lies squarely on the lap of the UN. The sole superpower US feels diffident to tackle the problem head on. Regional grouping like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) lies paralysed because India will not sit with the Pakistan military ruler.

In such a grim situation the big powers have an obvious responsibility, that is, stop the rot before it gets out of hand. India and Pakistan have fought conventional wars over Kashmir, when they did not possess nuclear weapons. With more than a billion population belonging to the most disadvantaged of the world, the destructive potential of a nuclear war is mind boggling. The only silver lining is that the great nuclear powers will not intervene before the subcontinent becomes a mass graveyard. Wisdom lies in bringing the two leaders together, however distasteful it may be. The alternative is too frightening to visualise.

Control of Dengue: Need for Long-term Measures

by Dr. Khalilur Rahman

We have evidence on the potential existence of dengue epidemic in our country. Now it is time to formulate appropriate policy and strategy based on this evidence with technical assistance and help from and collaboration with WHO and other bilateral and multilateral partners. Let us pull up our socks now, without further delay.

IT is indeed heartening to see all sections of the people regardless of their beliefs, ideals and positions, fighting this dengue menace. Our people and our leaders have again proved that they can work together for the well being of the people and of the country. The unfortunate part of our culture, however, is that we are always late to act and to react except when it comes to something personal. Despite evidence-based prediction, we have failed to prevent this menace. Now we have to work overtime.

The centralisation of the economy, administration and decision making authority etc., in the country has been making big cities, in particular, the capital Dhaka increasingly unhealthy. Unplanned and unauthorised urbanisation has further complicated the environment. A rapid rise in urban population is bringing ever greater number of people into contact with dengue vector, especially in areas that are favourable for mosquito breeding e.g., where household water storage is common and where solid waste disposal services are inadequate.

Brief Global Scenario

Dengue fever in its all forms is a mosquito-borne infection which in recent years has become a major international public health concern. It is mainly prevalent in tropical and sub-tropical regions around the world, predominately in urban and peri-urban areas. The global prevalence of dengue has grown dramatically in recent decades. The disease is now endemic in more than 100 countries in Africa, the Americas, the Eastern Mediterranean, South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. South-East Asia is one of the most seriously affected regions. Some 2500 million people two-fifths of the world's popu-

lation - are now at risk from dengue. According to WHO, currently there may be 50 million cases of dengue infection world-wide every year.

Against this backdrop, dengue was included in the disease portfolio of Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) in 1999. TDR is a UNDP/World Bank/WHO co-sponsored programme managed and executed by WHO. TDR places emphasis on working closely with disease control programmes both in WHO and in countries. Its research responds to the need of disease control. Its strategy for 2000-2005 incorporates training of individuals, scientists, establishment of independent research units and transfer of modern technology and methods in disease control. TDR's current strategy slates to give more attention to LDCs regarding long-term sustainability of efforts and institution strengthening in disease control and research. It would assist the developing endemic countries to undertake the research required for developing and implementing the new and improved disease control approaches.

What "We" Can Do?

We should go for both immediate and long-term measures for control of dengue. While we go for short-term measures in controlling the menace at the national level, we must look to long-term measures involving WHO and other bilateral and multilateral partners.

Short-term Measures

Government or municipal corporation cannot alone ensure healthy environment. As has been disseminated enough, control of a disease like dengue and other vector born diseases like malaria and others, depends largely on the city dwellers. In a country like ours, the *aedes aegypti*, the carrier of the vector breeds primarily in man-made containers like earthenware jars, metal drums and concrete cisterns used for domestic water storage, as well as discarded plastic food containers, used automobile tyres and other items that collect rainwater. As a city dweller, everybody has to perform his or her own duty to make the city clean and to facilitate and assist the municipal corporation to make a healthy city all. This does not, however, preclude the primary responsibility of the municipal corporation to keep the city clean and habitable.

Proper solid waste disposal and improved water storage practices should be encouraged through community-based programmes. Application of appropriate insecticides to larval habitats should be periodically carried out by the municipal authority. We should agree on top of everything that the main reason for outbreak of dengue is the poor vector control activities in the country. The importance of a well established disease surveillance system for the control of dengue and other diseases cannot be over-emphasised. The system must be sensitive and equipped

to provide early warning to indicate any out-break of diseases. It should also consist of aspects like clinical cases, laboratory services and entomology. We must also acknowledge that vector control measures cannot be managed only by health services. A close and strong inter-sectoral collaboration as well as active community and civil society organisations' involvement should be ensured in every control measure.

Long-term Measures

Certainly research and capacity-building — both institutional and human, should be part of any long-term measure against diseases like dengue. Resource mobilisation for such programme is an important element in its own right, in particular, in country like ours. We need to acknowledge that 'good health for all' is an essential foundation for social and economic development and to act accordingly to achieve this goal. The resource that is being spent now to control the menace, to treat infected people and spending in other related acts and consequences is certainly more than what we could have spent in its prevention by taking early precautionary and long-term measures. We also must not forget that *prevention is always better and cost-effective*. While we allocate some resource to dengue prevention programme (it may be from our own budget or from WHO country budget), we should look to relevant organisation and other bilateral and multilateral donors.

TDR is currently implement-

ing some programme on control of dengue in some countries in other region. This year's dengue outbreak may be an eye-opener to WHO to assist us and to undertake some programmes in control of dengue in this region too. It is time to approach the organisation. WB is already assisting in providing some kits for dengue treatment. As co-sponsors of TDR, WB, UNDP may also be approached for support. Representatives of the donor community based in Dhaka, should now be convinced that we need resources for this sector. It should be just a matter of how well we persuade them and make our case. In order to write an attractive proposal seeking funds (grant or soft loan), WHO country office should be consulted since they have the expertise or even WHO Regional Office may be contacted, if necessary. WHO may also be requested to mobilise resources for our programmes through its well-organised fund raising mechanism.

We may also propose to WHO that in view of repeated outbreaks of dengue in the country in last few years, our National Institute for Epidemiology (IEDCR) or other suitable institutes may be assisted for strengthening its capacity in research and in programme delivery for control of dengue under TDR programme. As an LDC, we are entitled to this assistance under the current TDR strategy (2000-2005).

The Health Minister may also wish to consider writing to Director-General and Regional

Director of WHO informing them of the situation and of the assistance we need now and in the future. The issue may also be raised at the forthcoming Regional Committee meeting of WHO to be held in New Delhi in early September 2000. Since dengue is also a public health problem in other countries of the region like India, Thailand, discussing the issue in the meeting would strengthen the regional programme on control of dengue. We may also spell out at the meeting our special needs that WHO may provide with, to combat the disease.

Until now, there is no vaccine available against dengue for wide-scale use. WHO has been supporting the efforts of the scientists of Mahidol University, Thailand to develop a vaccine. These scientists have been successful in developing a tetravalent vaccine considered to be safe and immunogenic. It would, however, be available for wide-scale use in a few years time after field trials. The IEDCR may be in touch with the Thai University and may explore the possibility of co-operation and collaboration with it in vaccine development or in any related research work.

Apart from efforts in vaccine development, IEDCR may also undertake research in vector biology and control and the design and management of dengue control programmes.

We have evidence on the potential existence of dengue epidemic in our country. Now it is time to formulate appropriate policy and strategy based on this evidence with technical assistance and help from and collaboration with WHO and other bilateral and multilateral partners. Let us pull up our socks now, without further delay.

The author is a Director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Views expressed in the article are entirely his own.

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.

Vanishing city parks

Sir, During the last few years, parks or open green spaces have been "disappearing" rapidly in our metropolises. Unlike other capital cities in the world, Dhaka, unfortunately has few city parks. Even the ones we have are not properly maintained and looked after. City parks are considered as the lungs of a city where people breathe fresh air, hang around in their spare time and go for recreation. As a result of high-rise buildings, construction of unauthorised shops and illegal occupation by *mastans*, these parks are disappearing fast. I would like to request our city father that different parks and open spaces like Farmgate, Ramna Park, Suhrawardy Uddayan, Osmani Uddayan and Gullistan (possibly Shahid Motiur Rahman Park), need to be maintained properly especially by ensuring daily cleaning by the sweepers. The sweepers hardly do their job and it appears that there is nobody to supervise these parks. I would especially like to draw attention to the park in Farmgate and Osmani Uddayan. In the Farmgate area, garbage is scattered everywhere; old tattered banners and festoons are hung on every side. The only fountain of the park is out of order. There is total lack of security in the evening since the park lights are not replaced on a regular basis. Similarly, the Osmani Uddayan is also in a pitiable condition. The Uddayan does not have proper benches and lights or any other facilities necessary for a park.

A portion of the Dhaka Central Jail may be converted into a park immediately, since there is a plan to shift the Central Jail outside the city. As mentioned earlier,

parks are 'lungs' of the city. Children need to play, citizens need to have a healthy and proper atmosphere for recreation and to spend spare time. I would therefore like to request the authority concerned to develop few new parks and maintain the existing green spaces.

Rafia Mariam Ahmad
Banglamarol, Dhaka

Terrorism everywhere

Sir, Terrorism is the main evil that has pushed the country to the mouth of destruction. The terrorists are moving through out the country raising their heads and there are a few to talk against them. As they seal the mouths by exhibiting weapons, many of those who spoke against them are now in dire straits. The killing of Shamsur Rahman, a journalist to the *Dainik Janakantha* at Jessore on 16 June is one of the glaring examples of it. Then again the terrorists murdered eight students of Chatra League in Chittagong on July 12. Besides, acid-throwing, rape, killings, snatching etc are rampant in the country. Where even the PM's security cannot be ensured then what is in store for the common people?

Tanjila Ferdous
Masumpur, Sirajganj

Shifting of the capital

Sir, The statement of the Army chief on the suggestion of a Japanese team of experts on town planning, as it appeared in the national dailies recently, is astonishing. He asserted that Dhaka

Cantonment cannot be shifted, instead the ministries and Dhaka University can be shifted.

More than fifty years back when the Cantonment was established, Dhaka was a provincial capital with one thirteenth of its present population. Great changes have taken place as time passed. Fullbaria Rail station, city bus stands, Airport at Tejgaon etc were shifted during the last decades. In the mean time the city has grown especially towards the north and the Cantonment has virtually bifurcated the sprawling city. The Cantonment is in fact an insurmountable barrier for the civilian transport system and free movement. Then why cannot it be shifted in the greater interest of the people?

It also does not stand to common sense that the seat of the government i.e. Secretariat and Dhaka University with all the huge establishments, people, nature of functions etc can be shifted out of Dhaka while the Cantonment with its limited objectives and a handful of people detached from the general mass cannot move to another place!

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Gloominess reigns

Sir, How much illegal arms are there in the country, and how is it secretly distributed among the underground groups? What is the total number of drug addicts in the country, and what is the quantum of the illegal drugs smuggled across the border? What are the statistics on toll collection, hijacking and mugging? How the graphs are changing?

How the government is tackling the situation? What is the overall picture? Is it not in public interest to reveal such information, to enable the public to gauge the magnitude of the problem facing the administration?

Such data should be available with the government, but these

are not being released in a systematic manner, nor presented in the JS for debate. The regime has to think about its PR image and try to win public confidence through information, not suppression. Lack of official information encourages wild speculation, although the print media spotlight the problems constantly. There is hardly any public participation in the government's efforts to eradicate or contain such evils in the society. Why this official shyness?

The official spokesperson should match the news and views in the press, to maintain credibility. Silence is suspicious, and it is a negative attitude, veering away from transparency. A well-informed public is an asset.

AMA
Dhaka

Roads in bad shape

Sir, Faridabad and Gandaria is well-known residential areas. But now a days most of the roads of this locality are in a real bad shape. Especially Hari Charan Roy Road, K B Road, Millbarack area, Postagola, I G Gate, Dinmanath Sen Road Distillery Road, S K Das Road and Rajani Chowdhury Road are in very poor shape. As a result, people living here have been suffering much. Due to the worsening condition of the roads, the area is lagging behind in the fields of trade, commerce, education and the people of these areas are deprived of the facilities of a city life. Moreover, for want of proper attention, the roads have developed potholes and cracks. For obviating the miseries and sufferings of the people we urge upon the authorities concerned to take necessary steps and repair the roads.

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Sanctions against Iraq

Sir, The sanctions against Iraq has had a devastating effect on

the people of Iraq.

Approximately a half a million children have died directly as a result of US and UK-backed economic sanctions imposed through the United Nations. Due to the sanctions Iraq's health system is in ruins. Its public health infrastructure is in complete shatters. Malnutrition is widespread among Iraqi children. The incomes of Iraqi households have declined sharply. Millions of people live in utter poverty because of the lull in economic activity. After tens years of sanctions, the economic, social, and physical condition of the civilian population in Iraq is quite desperate. Before the Gulf war, although a closed society under dictatorship, Iraq had made substantial progress in terms of human development and capabilities. The quality of life for the ordinary people in Iraq was higher than in many developing countries. But since the imposition of sanctions Iraq is among the worst off societies in the world, literally heading towards the stone age.

Is this what the international community wants? How long must the people of Iraq continue to suffer?

Under the sanctions regime, Iraq is not permitted to import basic medical goods, chemicals for water purification, or even pencils for its primary schools presumably because there is nothing in the world that does not have 'dual use' potential. There is absolutely no excuse for continuing the policy of sanctions that has led to millions of civilian deaths, the destruction of Iraqi society, and the consolidation of power by the regime. What is being done to Iraq is a form of collective punishment, completely in defiance of morality. Humanity must not permit the silent death of the people of Iraq. We have witnessed far too much needless death and destruction in Iraq.

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Police Brutality

Sir, Unwarranted use of force by the law enforcing authority has indeed made the democratic process impossible in this country. Who is to be blamed for it? When the BNP was in power, right from the days of late Zia-ur-Rahman, use of force in every opposition meet was common.

After the assassination of President Zia and during the election of Justice Sattar, Bangladesh witnessed colossal blood bath in every constituency. The very existence of opposition was conceived by the then government as destructive politics and at the same time hindrance to development in the country. This is the plea they gave to crush the opposition activities.

In spite of mistakes committed by political parties, the assertion of the DS editorial dated August 8, 2000 is absolutely correct and therefore moderation has to be exercised by the government of the day, otherwise democracy would be in danger.

At-Haj S.M. Khalid Chowdhury
Dhaka

The Most Powerful

Sir, The Asia Week in its current issue has listed the annual ranking of the 50 most powerful people in Asia. Among them North Korea's Kim Jong Il is at no. 5; Abdur Rahman Wahid is at no. 7; A.B. Vajpayee at no. 9; Mahatir Mohammad at no. 13; Azim Premji - the richest Muslim in India - at no. 15. Further, we have Gen. Pervez Musharraf at no. 25. And of all the people the Tamil Tiger chief is ranked at no. 48. Chandrika Kumaratunga and Xanana Gusman take the last two places. I personally am surprised because with a population of 130 million, no leader could make it to the list.

M.Ahmad
Uttara-Dhaka.