

# FOCUS

## The US Presidential Election: Is it Too Close to Call?

by Tashfeen Hussain

WE are almost there on November 7 the citizens of USA will once again exercise their most fundamental right the right to choose a new President. What will decide the fate of this race is a range of issues that the Americans are facing today.

Let's first see the States where these two candidates have firm control. Traditionally, the Republicans have enjoyed popular support in the conservative Southern and Western States. The majority people in the South despise the liberal attitude of the Democrats, and conservative rhetoric regarding family and religious values, which are often propagated by the Republicans, appeal to them. After all, the conservative Southern Baptists are the largest religious group in the USA. Governor Bush is no different; however he has put a new twist to it, compassionate conservatism; yes, that's what he calls himself, and believes that this new identity appeals to not only traditional conservatives or Republican loyalists, but also to moderates and centrists. Certainly, his tactic is directed to seduce those undecided voters, who are often more likely to vote for someone who is not on either extremes of traditional American Liberal or Conservative ideas.

According to polls, his victory is safe in almost all the Southern States except in Florida and Tennessee. Tennessee, of course, is Gore's home-State; therefore, a Bush victory is highly unlikely there. Florida's population is more diverse than other Southern States, and Democrats are the traditional favourites to the racial minorities. For example, the biggest city of Florida is Miami, where the majority is the Cuban Americans. Although they are staunch Catholics and religious conservatives, when it comes to voting, they often vote for the Democrats since that is the party, which has historical ties with minorities, and is more likely to work with minority issues. But, we should not forget that Florida's Governor is Bush's younger brother who has definitely put a spirited fight for Bush. Gore seems to be putting a good battle in the State of Georgia; however, trailing closely doesn't help Gore unless he can win it. Nevertheless, South, over all is pretty secure for Bush.

The western rugged states like Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Montana and Idaho should also lean towards Bush, as people in those States like the anti big government rhetoric of the Republicans. They often fantasize about their history wild-west, and feel endangered by the Democrats, who are often associated with bigger government, regulation regarding usage and possession of guns, and higher taxes. They generally sense that Democrats are out there to take away their fundamental rights of freedom and pursuit of happiness. Frequently, that fundamental right means to be able to discriminate against

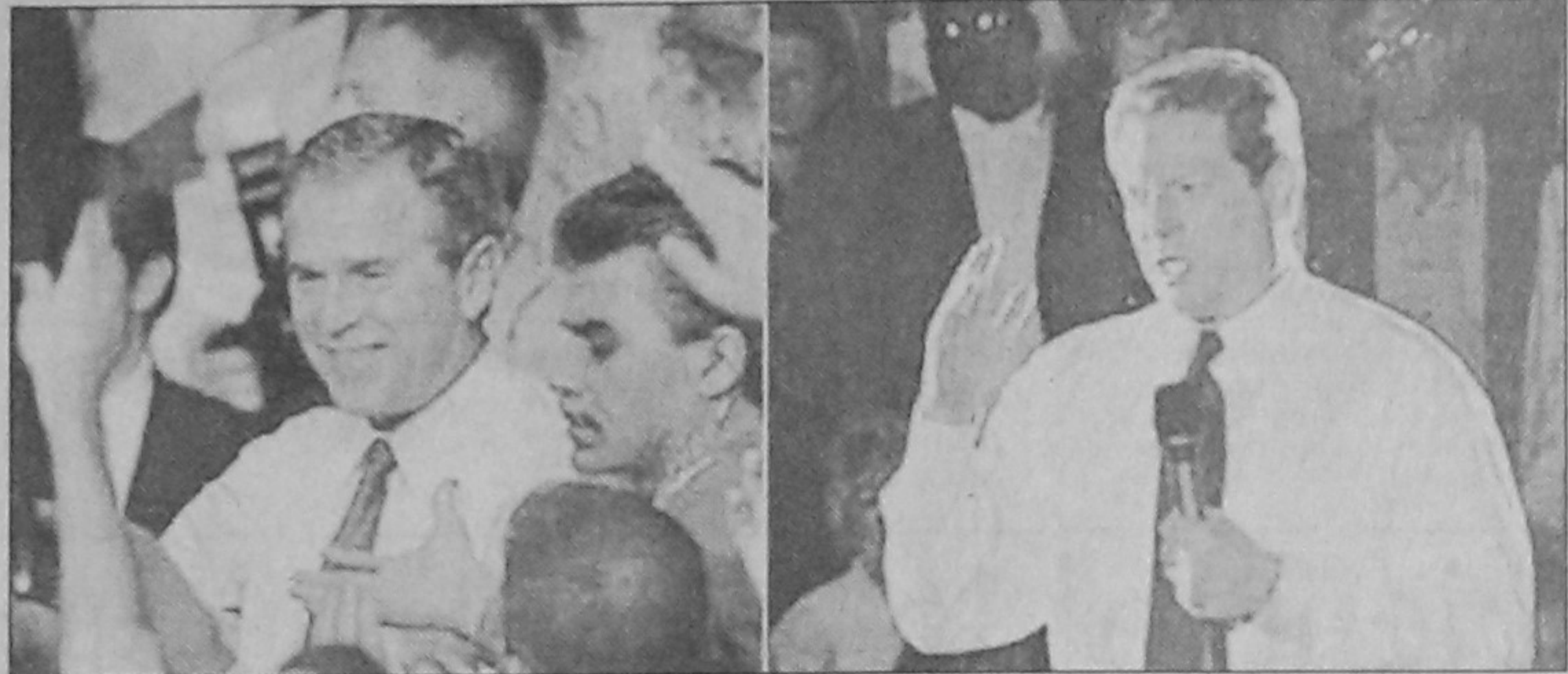
racial minorities. The number of right-wing militia groups existing and operating is highest in these states. President Clinton, over last eight years could do little to make his Party popular, as again and again they have sent rightwing Republicans in the Congress and Senate. For example, one Wyoming House of Representatives member once called White men as 'racially endangered species', and convincingly won the election based on that propaganda although she lacked experience in public administration. Clinton, in his landslide victory in 1996, didn't win a single State in this Western frontier. Therefore, although by their standard Bush is very liberal, they will still vote for Bush, as he will be regarded as the lesser of the evils. At least, Republicans hardly possess any prominent minority in their Party. Among more than 30 African-American (Black) House of Representatives members, only one belongs to the

State for Gore. Two years ago, California chose a democratic Governor, who has keenly helped Gore's cause during the tough months of campaigning. State of Washington is likely to vote for Gore, so as Oregon, where the same trend follows educated, liberal urban class.

What's left then? It is the mid-Western States, who are often quieter, but hold the key to win the election. Mid-Western States like Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, Iowa, Illinois, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Indiana can be called swing States. No one is guaranteeing a victory in any state for any of the candidates. Not surprisingly, both Bush and Gore have focused their last minute campaign on the mid-Western states. If electoral votes are pin-pointed as that is what will matter in the evening of November 7, Bush can go to sleep on the 6th safely thinking he has at least 200 to 210 electoral votes in his pocket. Gore should be

for Gore, as both the current Senators from North Dakota are from the Democratic Party, and it is highly unlikely that Bush campaign can cause a major upset there. However, Indiana should go for Bush, as this is the most conservative State in the mid-West. And, although they chose a Democrat Mayor for Indianapolis recently, the rest of the State is not likely to follow suit. At the end, Indiana geographically is the closest to the Southern States.

No matter how close the predictions are, in the mid-West, except for the State of Minnesota, no one is guaranteeing a victory in any state for any of the candidates. Not surprisingly, both Bush and Gore have focused their last minute campaign on the mid-Western states. If electoral votes are pin-pointed as that is what will matter in the evening of November 7, Bush can go to sleep on the 6th safely thinking he has at least 200 to 210 electoral votes in his pocket. Gore should be



The campaigning contenders: Bush (left) and Gore (right).

Republican Party, and he too is from the State of Georgia, and not from the Western States.

For Gore, the East Coast and West Coast look pretty safe. Democrats, traditionally never loose States like Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Delaware, Connecticut or New York. People in the East Coast come from diverse ethnic background, are highly educated, and liberal in their ideas. They abhor the South, and generally conceive South as backward and fanatic. Only New Hampshire, where majority of the population are working class, can possess a formidable threat to Gore, as factory workers in recent years can be regarded as the angry 'Jo' of US, who don't like the idea called globalization, and certainly don't want to see more and more foreigners coming over from different parts of the world and taking over their jobs. Immigration is a painful issue for them, the very idea that is highly advocated by most Democrats. However, Republicans usually have reservations when it comes to immigration as Bush has pointed out, it should be tightened and controlled. In the West Coast, Gore looks to be cruising in the State of California, which has the highest number of electoral votes, 54 that is. This is a must win

US hated Clinton's scandals, and teased Gore regarding his alleged involvement in raising campaign funds illegally. However, those have damaged Gore's image, but did not destroy it. Opinion polls show that, Gore can feel safe only in Minnesota. Wisconsin has a strong Republican Governor, who will be doing his level best to win it for Bush; good news for Gore is that opinion polls suggest that he be more likely than Bush to take Wisconsin. The key to win Wisconsin lies in winning the precincts in Milwaukee (biggest city) and Madison (State capital). Milwaukee has a considerable number of Black population, and Madison should go for Gore, because of the liberal outlook of University of Wisconsin.

In the last Senate election held in 1998, the Republican candidate defeated the only Black Senator comprehensively in the state of Illinois; hence, that was quite a hiccup for the Democrats. But, if Republicans are counting on that Senate election result, they will make a huge mistake as the Black Senator lost due to charges of inefficiency and corruption; Gore, was never a part of it. Gore should win against all odds as Illinois has a considerable number of minority voters. North Dakota should also be safe

pretty close too somewhere between 190-200 will be his counting. In order to win the White House and Presidency, a candidate must win 270 electoral votes. Except for Minnesota and Indiana, the mid-Western States possess 90 electoral votes (Wisconsin-11, Illinois-22, Ohio-21, Michigan-18, Iowa-7, North Dakota-3, South Dakota-3 and Nebraska-5). These are the States that will decide the fate of the two Presidential candidates. Whoever will win the majority in these States will surely win the Presidency with some upsets here and there in the rest of the country that will be cancelled out in favour of both the candidates.

The economy is doing very well. When it comes to November 7, voters in these key states will make their choices based on some key domestic issues except for the state of the economy budget surplus, tax cuts, medicare, education, social security, character and charisma. Sadly for Bush, most of these issues traditionally favour the Democrats. Democrats are more vocal when it comes to public spending on those counts. Character matters; however, Bush can't outplay Gore in that, as unlike Clinton Gore has been able to maintain a clean record in that arena. Only Bush's tax cut plan

## Having a Heart Attack and a Pleasant Surprise Too

by Wahiduddin Mahmud

THIS is a very personal account of how I coped with a mild heart attack, but I have decided to share my experience because there are some issues of public interest involved here. It started with the classic physical symptoms as described in popular health literature: a chest pain that is difficult to ignore because it does not go away and radiates to the neck, shoulder and the right arm. In my case, however, the pain was not excruciating and there was no breathlessness as usually occurs in the case of a more serious attack. Nevertheless, I was aware of the grave risks involved and the fact that patients who receive early treatment have the best chances of making a full recovery.

The reason I stayed home a whole day before seeking medical help was that I was not sure where to go. I knew the general rule that in case of a suspected heart problem, one should go to a big hospital that has all the emergency facilities. At the same time, I was all too aware of the quality of treatment provided in our public hospitals, and the risks to an emergency patient, particularly if he is not introduced as someone 'deserving' special attention. However, when I did at last arrive at the emergency room of the NICVD adjacent to the Suhrawardy Hospital, the doctors did recognise me and behaved courteously. They took my ECG and then I was examined by the doctors on duty at the cardiac care unit upstairs, which I climbed on foot.

The doctors there prescribed some medicine and advised me to go home and come back for another examination after three days. They did of course mention that they were taking some risks in letting me go home, since my ECG showed some irregularities (which, as I came to know later, were very extensive enough to suspect that an attack was on). I would still like to believe that the doctors there acted in good faith; they probably were not able to assess the seriousness of the irregularities of my ECG or thought that there were even more serious patients who deserved priority in receiving intensive care at the Hospital. It might as well be that they genuinely thought that I had a better chance of survival at home than in the Hospital! In a way, I tend to feel sympathy for them; they may be helpless in a system that is utterly dysfunctional.

After coming home, my wife started calling friends to decide the next course of action. She was not obviously satisfied with what was going on. After all, hospitals are not supposed to take risks with suspected heart attack patients. It was already 10 p.m. A friend rang up the cardiac care unit of the Sikder Medical College Hospital and could easily reach a consultant cardiologist. He said that he was on duty all night and advised that we should come to the Hospital. On arrival, I was immediately wheel-chaired to the CCU where the cardiologist was waiting for me. From then on, things moved fast as in any emergency care unit of a standard Western hospital. (In this respect, I gained first-hand knowledge at least on two occasions, when my wife had to undergo major emergency surgery while we were at Cambridge and Harvard Universities, respectively.) My ECG and the heart monitor were still showing some irregularities, and a blood test indicated elevated heart enzymes, confirming that an attack did have taken place. The echocardiogram however showed that there was no visible damage to the heart so that the heart function would probably

return to normal (as was indeed confirmed later by further tests). Thus, within 10 minutes, my diagnosis was done, I was reassured that the attack had been in all probability a mild one, and more important, I was already being administered intravenously the drugs that are essential for the stabilisation of my heart condition. My condition did in fact stabilise in the next six hours as shown by both the monitor and the ECG.

All my life, I have had a fear of hospitals. Now, not only I suddenly found myself lying in a hospital bed, but also I was told that I have had a heart attack (something that I always had thought happens only to others, not to oneself). But, strangely, I did not panic; in fact, I felt calm and reassured. I had read enough medical literature to know the

Bangladeshis and Indians who have previously worked in hospitals in developed countries, while almost the entire nursing staff has been recruited from Kerala.

The high standards of the nursing service in this cardiac care unit make one realise that this is one aspect in which our medical system is lacking most. These nurses have had general university education besides being trained in nursing, they mostly come from very respectable families, and they have chosen the nursing career out of professional interest. They are a cheerful, dedicated and highly professional bunch of young ladies and represent a cultural heritage that is perhaps unique to Kerala.

Can a specialised hospital unit maintain such standards, provide affordable medical care and still remain profitable? It can, but only if the returns from initial investments and depreciation costs of machinery are discounted to some extent. In other words, at the current rates of charges, which are comparable to those of private clinics in Dhaka, there is an element of subsidy on a 'full costs' basis. The hospital has had offers of partnership with foreign hospital chains, but has not agreed so far mainly because of the apprehension that the patients would be charged at higher rates. My own view is that foreign collaboration will help both transfer of technology and maintain management standards. Private philanthropy can take the form of an endowment fund from which assistance can be provided to deserving patients on an ability-to-pay basis. Some private hospitals in the US have this system.

I have heard that there is considerable opposition from our medical profession about hiring doctors and nurses from abroad or about setting up of joint venture hospitals...The greatest benefit will be however in creating healthy competition and establishing good standards and norms in the provision of hospital care. But, I suspect, that is where the root cause of the opposition lies...The people will obviously start demanding those minimum standards of hospital care that are recognised across the civilised world.

unpredictability and risks involved in such a situation. Yet, how could I feel a sense of pleasant surprise, too? I felt good that my wife and the friend accompanying her could go home, reassured about my condition and about the fact that I would be properly looked after. I also knew that a specialist cardiologist backed by an entire team of doctors and nurses and equipped with life-saving devices would be monitoring my progress throughout the night. And this is no episode from the series Chicago Hope, all this was happening in Dhaka!

In the next few days when I was recuperating, I came to know a lot about this cardiac unit, which has been specially created within the round-the-clock provision of emergency care, the feature that struck me most, is made possible by the fact that all the staff, including consultant surgeons and physicians, are employed 'full-time' and are therefore always available by rotation. The relatives of patients do not have to go after them, seek them out and beg them to come and examine the patient. In return, the staff has to be of course paid enough remuneration according to their respective qualifications and expertise. The consultant cardiologists and surgeons are a mix of highly-qualified

I have heard that there is considerable opposition from our medical profession about hiring doctors and nurses from abroad or about setting up of joint venture hospitals. I am not aware of the arguments for such a position, if there are any. I can, on the other hand, see the simple economic logic why such hospitals should be encouraged to grow. The foreign exchange spent by Bangladeshis seeking medical treatment in India, Thailand and Singapore is the largest and fastest-growing component of the non-merchandise current account transactions of our balance of payments. Saving even a part of this expenditure will greatly help our external balance, even after netting out the repatriated salaries of physicians hired from abroad.

The greatest benefit will be however in creating healthy competition and establishing good standards and norms in the provision of hospital care. But, I suspect, that is where the root cause of the opposition lies. It is one thing for people to watch Chicago Hope on TV and take it as part of a make-believe world, it is altogether another thing for them to realize that such medical care can actually be offered right here in Bangladesh. The people will obviously start demanding those minimum standards of hospital care that are recognised across the civilised world.

The other part of the pleasant surprise is to know that there are so many caring people around us, even at a time when life is becoming increasingly stressful and mechanical. One's friends, relatives and well-wishers represent a vast reservoir of goodwill, which one is not always aware of, but can draw strength from at times like this. This gives you a new resolve and a fresh perspective about life.

The author is Professor of Economics, Dhaka University.

## Philippine's President in Political Storm

PHILIPPINE'S most popular President Joseph Estrada appears to be at the centre of a political storm. The opposition alleges that he should resign because he accepted bribes from an illegal gambling racket. They rest their case on the admission of a governor of a province Mr. Luis Singson who came forward with a statement that he gave about US\$8 million (200 million pesos) to the President in illegal gambling payoff. Mr. Singson was once a close friend of President Estrada and a governor for 22 years.

It is alleged that Mr. Estrada after becoming the President of the country snubbed the governor but granted him a licence for a new, legal and competing gambling game. The allegation of corruption against the President is nothing new. There were earlier allegations that the President was not above board.



President Joseph Estrada

President denies the allegations totally. He maintains that he is innocent and is a victim of political vendetta of the political opposition because of his popu-

There is a speculation that the President might call another election to get over the trouble. The President also finds that the opposition is not united in its goals. Many opposition leaders do not wish to see the Vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to be installed as the President. Another group wants an early election.

by Harun ur Rashid

the truth? It is reported that 60 per cent of the Filipino people say that they believe the allegation of corruption against the President. Important figures of moral authority, Cardinal Jaime Sin of the Catholic Church and former President Ms. Corason Aquino have called the President to resign. Cardinal Sin said: "President has lost moral ascendancy to govern. He must relinquish his office and turn it over to his constitutional successor." That suc-

cessor, Vice-President Ms. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has declared political war against the President by resigning from the Cabinet and leading an opposition push to remove the President through impeachment.

The political heat has started to build. Street protests have begun. The opposition has initiated the impeachment process but the parliamentary numbers to defeat the impeachment motion are with the President. Some analysts say that the number is not solid and could crumble as popular anger rises. The parliamentary procedure of impeachment will take months, at least 18 months.

The political storm has adversely affected the economy of the country and the exchange rate of the local currency (peso) has plunged against the US dollar. Economic pressure is bearing down the President and the Manila stock market is at a punishing low level.

In order to stabilise the currency, the Central Bank has raised interest rates by 4 per cent. It is reported that this effort has failed to hold the currency and if it is sustained, many economists believe that the country could be in recession. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned that it will be forced to abandon its support for the government. The government is proposing an excessive budget deficit and the IMF could withhold a scheduled US\$300 million loan.

There is a speculation that the President might call another election to get over the trouble. The President also finds that the opposition is not united in its goals. Many opposition leaders do not wish to see the Vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to be installed as the President. Another group wants an early election.

Given the situation, it is best that the political turmoil be settled soon in the interest of the country. A Filipino President is elected for six years and President Estrada has four years to go. If the country remains unstable for another four years, there is a view that the damage of the country could be disastrous.

The writer, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN.

**TOM & JERRY**  
By Hanna-Barbera

DID MICHELANGELO EVER WORK FOR HANNA BARBERA?

AS YOU KNOW, HOWLER MONKEYS COME FROM THE AMAZON REGION OF SOUTH AMERICA.

AND STATION 5 IN RIO DE JANEIRO HAS JUST REPORTED A LEAD FROM HERE ON AN OLD ENEMY OF OURS!

YOU MAY RECALL HIS NAME - DOCTOR CAT!

FOR SOMETHING FAR MORE URGENT, DOO - BUT THERE MAY JUST POSSIBLY BE A CONNECTION.

IM BEING TAKEN OFF THE CHAO ASSASSINATION?

1949

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
Office of the Executive Engineer  
Local Government Engineering Directorate  
Narsingdi

Memo No. LGED/EE-Nar/V-01/2000/3073 Dated: 23-10-2000

### Tender Notice

No. 10/2000-2001

Tenders in Bangladesh Form No. 2911 under sealed cover are hereby invited from LGED's current year renewed contractors and this directorate's different projects pre-qualified contractors/contractors' firms for implementation of work of the undermentioned scheme under Agriculture Diversification & Intensification Project during 2000-2001 financial year. Detailed specification and other terms & conditions can be seen at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason.

- Tender document to be purchased from
  - Office of the Divisional Commissioner, Dhaka.
  - Project Director, Agriculture Diversification & Intensification Project, LGED Bhaban, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.
  - Executive Engineer, LGED, Dhaka/Narayanganj/Manikganj/Munshiganj/Gazipur/Narsingdi.
  - All Upazila Engineers' offices of this district.
- Tender document to be submitted at
- Last date of purchasing tender document 21-11-2000 upto office hours
- Date of submitting tender document 22-11-2000 upto 1.00 pm.
- Date of opening tender document 22-11-2000 at 1.30 pm.
- Date & time of lottery 30-11-2000

Serial No.	Code No.	Name of work	Estimated cost	Price of schedule	Earnest money	Time limit for work	class of contractor
1	ADIP-10/1	Construction of single vent cum-regulator on Charirishajpur-Jamalpur Embankment in Barachapa Union of Monohardi upazila.	14,77,998/=	750/=	At the rate 2.50% of quoted amount	60 days	Special 'A' & B class

DFP-26043-26/10  
G-1953

**Mir Ilias Morshed**  
Executive Engineer