

## FOCUS

## For Free and Fair Elections

**A**LIM Mridha, an elderly politician, sits with some local people who came to persuade him to run for parliamentary polls next year.

The people mostly in their 20s and 30s assured Mridha, also a well-established businessman, of winning the race. Mridha will have to do nothing, except providing funds.

Although it seems to be premature to start campaigns right now, like these youngsters many people in rural areas have already started election activities.

Apparently, the authorities of Election Commission start election activities with announcement for submission of candidature.

There is nothing in the laws regarding "election period". As a result, the commission has virtually no control over the electoral behaviour of the political parties until their representatives come before it for submitting candidatures.

Laws permit the candidates to spend a limited amount not exceeding taka three lakh each candidate and impose penalty upon a candidate who spends more than the specified amount.

Many candidates explicitly spend more than the amount specified in the law. But the commission can hardly take any punitive measures against the violators, because it does not have any mechanism to bring the violators to the book.

If a candidate exceeds the limit he would undergo a punishment of two years imprisonment with fine. But in reality no body has so far been punished for exceeding

the expense limit," said a political analyst.

"Hardly any candidate can aspire to win the race unless his purse is bigger than the limit," said a study recently conducted by News Network, a national news feature agency.

According to the study, where elections are hardly contested, serious candidates have to spend much more money than the prescribed minimum limit. Even people in the Election Commission observe that many candidates filed false returns to keep their expenditure within the limit.

The Election Commission, the study said, does not have any scientific mechanism to assess personal as well as the real expenditure of a candidate. So, the Election Commission cannot be anything if a candidate lies when he submits his account of expenses.

News Network recently conducted the study to assess the real situation and tried to pin point how vulnerable the voters are in the face of growing influence of money in national elections.

Based on data and information from the election commission, various election observation bodies and NGOs, the study covers the whole range of basic issues and problems, especially in the field of election expense, the role of money and its impact on national elections, and makes

some recommendations for policy action.

Interviews with various political leaders, social workers and constitutional experts revealed that there are several candidates both in ruling and opposition parties who spend huge amount of money for election purposes. Both Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), at the time of selection of candidates, chose people who can lavishly spend money.

In metropolis areas, especially in Dhaka and the port city of Chittagong, both the parties launch high profile of electioneering to woo the voters throughout the length and breadth of the constituencies.

A lavish campaign was visible during the last electioneering, involving thousands of party flags, banner, colour posters and huge cut-outs and propaganda cassettes, to draw the attention of voters from both sides. Jeeps and cars storm into village through dusty roads blaring patriotic or party songs.

Various irregularities during election campaigns were also noticed across the country in the last (1996) parliamentary elections. There were banners, excessive use of microphones, graffiti, colourful billboards, vehicle processions and violation of other election rules.

Some 66 candidates, who failed in 1996 national elections, can be a voter under Bangladesh law," he added. The laws are soft

allegedly for resorting to irregularities and violation of election rules.

Of the cases, 33 were dismissed due to lack of proper initiatives and persuasions on behalf of the plaintiffs. Some 12 cases were settled by the election tribunal through arguments. The fate of remaining 21 cases still remained unsettled although the parliament is almost at the end of its tenure.

Electoral disputes regarding election irregularities are rarely disposed of during the lifetime of any parliament. Most of the cases in 1991, regarding irregularities in 1991 elections, still could not see the light of proper settlements.

Many able and skilled parliamentarians are well known that they would be quite able to continue their term if they try despite committing irregularities and filing of cases against them.

"Our legal system is an indirect encouragement for committing election related crimes. Our performance in this regard is most disappointing," said a former secretary of the Election Commission.

In many developing countries if a candidate exceeds the limit, he loses his seat in parliament, possibly be barred from seeking election for the next few years.

"But despite indulging in irregularities a convicted person can be a voter under Bangladesh law," he added. The laws are soft

and whatever laws are there, they are neither effective nor being enforced seriously.

The rapid growth in campaigning cost has also forced candidates to raise large sums of money in possible easiest way. Obviously, if big donors are available it is the most efficient way to collect large contributions.

The evil influence of black money has brought the whole election system to public ridicule and eroded public faith in the system.

"Company people are now also well aware how to contribute to the parties. If there is any bar, black money flows to party coffers," hinted an executive of a big corporate house.

In many developed countries, companies contributing to party funds have to disclose the fact in their accounts. In Germany, full disclosure required including the name and address of every donor whose contribution in a year exceeds DM 20,000.

In Bangladesh, the company law allows donations and contributions for business interest but there is no mention relating to political contributions.

Although the law underscores the need for disclosure of all donation above a specified figure but again there is not mention regarding the disclosure of donations received by a political party.

Under the existing law, it is illegal for a company to make political donations unless its

articles of association permit.

But in practice, the directors of a company arbitrarily decide how much to give a party-usually the ruling or the major opposition parties. Their decision is simply noted in the directors' report, which is usually passed on the node at the companies annual meeting.

The emergence of mastan as political as well as governance variable has also been accompanied by the growing presence of money become a factor in Bangladesh's politics.

Vote-buying is also a common practice in many Asian countries. Bangladesh political system is also not free from charges of corruption and vote-buying. People are familiar with this malpractice although no statistics are available about how much money is spent for every voter.

But like many other countries, for many people in Bangladesh, election means a chance to earn some money and watch free movies.

For the last several years, the trend in Bangladesh political culture has been changed to a great extent. Now it's not very uncommon to use muscle power to intimidate the voters to vote or not to vote for a particular candidate.

"Goons, guns and gold" have often largely shaped the behaviour of the voters nowadays. As a result, elections have been increasingly marred by violence and other ugly instances of gross abuse in several parts of the country.

## HAVE A NICE DAY

Dr. Rubaial Mursheed

All health information to keep you up to date



## Self-help

## How to use eye drops properly

1. Wash hands thoroughly before applying the drops.
2. If the medication is a suspension, shake it a few times.
3. Check that the end of the dropper is not chipped or cracked.
4. Sit with your head tilted backward or lie down.
5. With a finger, pull the lower lid of your eye down to form a pocket and look towards the ceiling.
6. Hold the dropper as close to the eye as possible, without touching it.
7. Squeeze one to two drops into the eye.
8. Blink several times. Close the eye (do not rub the eye) and wipe off any excess drops around the eye with a tissue.
9. If you feel a slight bitter taste in the throat, do not be alarmed, it is natural for the medicine to flow through the lacrimal duct into it (throat).

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## Fact and fiction

## Is it true?

Women are more likely than men to suffer from anaemia. True, so long as what we are talking about is the form of anaemia caused by iron deficiency. Women of child-bearing age lose blood each month at menstruation, and thus are more likely than men to be deficient in haemoglobin, the pigment in red blood cells that carries oxygen to every cell in the body.

## Did you know?

## Tonsils

Tonsils are useless organs that should always be surgically removed. Actually, in infancy, one's tonsils are very useful. They start out as protective filters that catch and hold bacteria, viruses and particles of airborne dust and dirt that might otherwise make an infant ill. By the time a child is three, however, the tonsils begin to shrink and lose their protective power. But they never disappear entirely unless they are surgically removed, and the small tonsils that remain may become infected if overwhelmed by pathogenic organisms. Before the introduction of antibiotics, infected tonsils were always taken out. Often, healthy tonsils were removed to prevent infection. According to the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons Complete Home Medical Guide, the modern rule of thumb is that any tonsils that cause three or more bouts of tonsillitis (infected tonsils) with high fever in one year should be removed (it is being practised now in our country).

Tomorrow: Know your medicines, and other tips.

of fact-finder's and in turn work as a pathfinder. With this change the civil society must put their trust on audit to help them know how the tax payer's money is utilized to ensure a safer and healthy environment for the generations to come.

absence of internal control mechanism, inadequate planning, inefficient supervision, unsuitable human resource mobilization have added to the problem.

Now the necessity of audit as an aid to management can be viewed in the global perspective.

The concept of performance audit or value for money audit has been developed during the last thirty years time. What do we mean by performance audit or value for money audit? Is it supervision of the activities of the executives? Or is it control on the activities of the policy makers? No it does not mean any of the two. It is a method to ascertain whether the economy has been attained, whether the action taken by the executive has been efficient and whether the purpose has been achieved effectively. To perform this new technique of audit a number of points need to be considered. The value for money starts with the mandate or legal authority with which can organization is established. Its objective and purpose gets the priority. Its organizational structure, manpower comes in the fore front. A preliminary survey is done and then on the basis of such items of priority are determined in the examination process of audit.

Audit considers the environment in which the entity operates, spending level and revenue, accountability arrangement, major risks areas etc. According to the importance of the issue the audit starts working. Or in other words the approach of performance audit is focused on items of priority. Issue based approach of such audit can safely respond to the concerns of parliamentarians about the inefficiency of the executive of the spending of the parliament? The reports are submitted to the speaker through the honourable president of the Republic with the approval of the honourable prime minister. These reports are discussed by the Public Accounts Committee. The principal Accounting officers are asked to reply to the objections and observations made by the auditor general. In appropriate cases recommendations are made to take corrective actions and recovery if the objections so demand. It is praiseworthy that innumerable meetings have so far been held with good many suggestions and the recovery and adjustments so far made due to these audit observation during 1997-1998 financial year which is quite commendable. In this sense the audit still remains true to its responsibility. Though the method of audit still remains traditional.

With this background it is quite appreciable that though the present audit practice is not sufficient enough to provide information about all the stages of administration, it cannot be ignored for what it is doing now.

But keeping in view the socio-economic perspective something more is needed to be added to the present day practice. The executives are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity of welcoming an agency which can help them in their pursuit to achieve more benefit out of their effort.

Results are becoming important. Audit can come as an aid to management.

The volume of transactions often may lead to a misconception that the money spent for development is being utilized for the purpose it has been allotted. Had that been the case over the years the country would have flowed in bread and butter. But this has not happened. One obvious reason is corruption. This practice of wrong doing along with lack of commitment has often resulted in failure of projects. Even the

flexibility to draw conclusions that can be more broadly based than those drawn from normal audit reports. This audit can help minimizing inefficient project implementation which continues to pose heavy burden on the economy in terms of cost overrun and delayed flow of benefit.

Interestingly the audit reports in the advanced countries, for instance Canada, where value for money audit is practiced unfailingly, regularly highlight the inadequacies of performances of government agencies. The report on matter of special importance-1999 revealed such suggestions as 'improving performance has become a pressing need for governments in the closing days of 20th century,' even in good times especially in good times it is important that we set affordable limits on spending and live within them', 'without better information on the results of the government programmes, Canadians cannot know what they get for the taxes they pay,' modernizing the public service is vital to modernizing government'. It is high time for us to accept those statements for these are equally applicable to us also. Of course 'good-time referred to may take some more time to come.

In the recently concluded international seminar on 'improving oversight functions: challenges in the new millennium' the Auditor General said that it was not shortage of resources rather misuse, wastage and corruption which were the principal bottlenecks towards optimization of resources.' In the conference one memorable comment of South Africa's former president Nelson Mandela was also cited. Public moneys are just that: money of the people to be used for the benefit of the people.

They are not moneys of any elected representative or government official. Abuse or misuse of this money is not only a crime; it is a betrayal of the hopes and aspiration of all our people, especially the poorest of the poor. All these sayings and examples are the reflections of the aspiration and expectation of the people of this country also.

Those who are engaged in the management also know the truth. But they need a way to get out of this problem. Audit with its modern approach can come up with the panacea to mitigate the wounds. It can provide the management information about deficiencies in planning, in execution, in determining whether objectives have been achieved, whether recasting of plans becomes a subject of priority, whether internal control system needs revamping. Audit with its modern methodology of determining criteria, benchmarking can highlight comparative position between and among institutions carrying the same type of work. By analyzing the man-hour used and the cost involved one can ascertain whether service is effectively delivered, be it a hospital or an educational institution. It can help prioritize the development projects and in this way can help creation of an accountable and transparent administration.

It is undeniable that it requires an attitudinal sea change. The executives may rise up with an attitude to accept audit as a 'friend' not 'foe'. The auditors also need to change their attitude from one of fault-finder's to that

A strange disease has made its mark. This disease emerged from the shadowy practice of using cattle and sheep remains as cheap protein supplement to cattle feed setting the stage for a deadly outbreak.

## by A S M Nurunnabi

**E**UROPE is swept by mad-cow disease. It is caused by a mysterious, incurable brain illness that has frightened Europeans and baffled medical researchers for the past 15 years.

The Europeans are overwhelmed by the latest wave of mad-cow fears. On the heels of a recent government report on what went wrong during that country's mad-cow epidemic of the 1980s and 90s, the European Union lately ordered a fresh round of tests for the disease in beef and dairy herds across the continent.

In Britain, where CJD (short for the disease named Creutzfeldt-Jacob) has killed more than 70 people so far, scientists have been warning that European governments have left the door open for another outbreak of the deadly bovine disease. No sooner had the EU decision been announced than cases of the cattle disease were reported in Germany and Spain, countries considered safe until now.

Meanwhile, the toll kept rising in France, where nearly 200 animal cases had been confirmed by the end of last month. As neighbouring countries frantically slapped bans on French beef, demand for the meat plunged at supermarkets and butcher shops across the continent, and farmers braced themselves for profitless times ahead.

The toll has now returned to Britain, where the illness first surfaced in 1985. Most medical researchers believe the disease was spread by commercial livestock feeds containing the ground-up remains of infected cows and other slaughterhouse refuse. For decades, beef and dairy farmers have routinely given their animals grain pellets laced with meat and bone meal (MBM). The British government banned the feeding of MBM to cattle in 1988. Rather than give up a lucrative product, however, the grain companies began exporting it to farmers on the continent. The cheap food supplement was supposed to be fed to pigs and chickens in France, not cattle, but experts said cases of MBM feeding to cattle occurred causing incidence of mad-cow disease in some cases. Late France finally issued an absolute ban on MBMs. Germany later followed suit.

What's worse is that no one

knows how much irreparable harm has already been done in Europe and Britain. Doctors say the human form of the disease can incubate for a decade or more before symptoms appear.

Risk seemed to prevail every

where. Spain had never reported

of the disease until last year.

It is not clear

whether the disease has spread

to other countries.

What is clear is that

the disease has spread

to other countries.

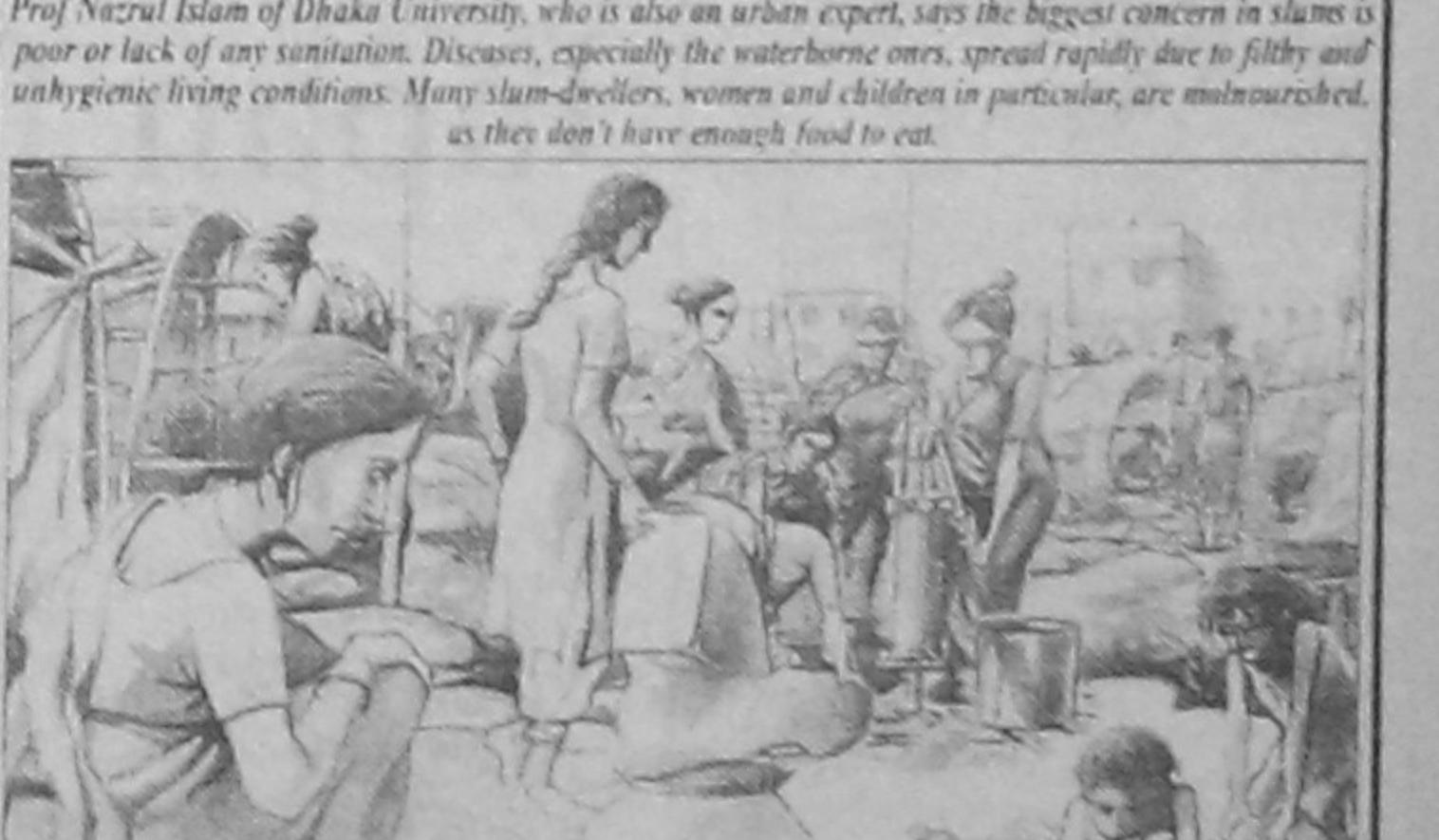
that. Such doubts haven't kept about half the EU's member states including Spain and several aspiring members from unilaterally imposing such restrictions.

Some countries can actually expect an eventual pay-off from Europe's crisis. In the short term, Brazilian agriculture officials say, mad-cow disease fears are likely to depress the global beef market. But they go on to predict their country's beef exports will rise to 770 metric tons next year more than double the figure for 1998. The agronomists insist that MBM feed has never been commonly used in Brazil or Argentina a big plus for beef lovers afraid of mad-cow disease. It may only cost a little.

Thus we find that a strange disease has made its mark. This disease emerged from the shadowy practice of using cattle and sheep remains as cheap protein supplement to cattle feed setting the stage for a deadly outbreak. The incidence of the disease dating from 1985 has so far affected the following countries in continental Europe: UK, Ireland, Netherlands, Germany, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Portugal and Spain. This gives an idea of the vast extent of the disease's dreadful reach.

Despite an increase in the availability of jobs in villages, thousands of rural poor migrate to the cities in search of work. The flow swells the slum population, which breeds diseases. Nagar Gobeshana Kendra (NGK), a non-governmental organization working in slums, says there are over 3,000 slums in Dhaka city, including 679 on government and 2328 on private lands. Slums have occupied over 1,038 acres of the city's land, where some 30 lakh persons or 22,900 families live deplorably, with 5 to 7 persons huddled in one room.

Prof. Nazul Islam of Dhaka University, who is also an urban expert, says the biggest concern in slums is poor or lack of any sanitation. Diseases, especially the waterborne ones, spread rapidly due to filthy and unhygienic living conditions. Many slum-dwellers, women and children in particular, are malnourished, as they don't have enough food to eat.



Married women, widows, women abandoned or divorced by their husbands are among the female tenement-dwellers. They are the most vulnerable to violence as sexual harassment. According to a survey undertaken by NGK many slum women relieve themselves in polythene bags inside their dwelling houses for lack of sanitary latrines, while most do it in drains, polluting the environment.

NGK have come forward in aid of these squatters. Action Aid is one of them. It has been working in the city's Tikkapara Slum since 1