**DHAKA TUESDAY OCTOBER 2, 2001** 

## At midnight, Election 2001 looks well held

Political parties will have to continue the task which voters have completed

S the counting goes on in the national parliamentary elections for 2001, there is guarded optimism in the air that Bangladesh may have had an election, which shows signs of hard won political maturity. The polls have been much more peaceful than expected. Nearly 150 centres have been suspended due to disturbances but that is still less than 1 percent of the total 30,000 voting centres, a far lesser number than what was expected to fall to violence. Given the run up to the polls, this is another evidence of an emerging political culture of vote as a vehicle for change.

In many ways, this has been a watershed election. The parties took much greater cognizance of the voters than ever before. Door to door campaigning signified that reaching the voters directly had become a major necessity of the political parties for effective presentation of their political credentials. This indicated a shift in the political environment. The voters profile was as strong as that of the politicians.

The Election Commission, and especially the CEC, deserve congratulations for completing what has obviously been an incredible task. Not only has it ensured that the voting process is safe but it paid special attention to the voting rights of the minorities and women. We also think that the caretaker government has performed an onerous task in holding the election so

The presence of law enforcement agencies was a positive step and the election observers weren't a disruptive presence, as some had feared. All in all it has been a very good elections with splashes of excellence. Most if not all doubts were laid to rest and the voters have had their day at last. In the next few days, the enormity of the success will be better spelt out.

But a good election is not a pre-condition for better governing. People have spoken but we are yet to know what they said but we insist that all must accept that verdict. Unless the political parties accept whatever verdict is finally heard, promise to make the Sangsad successful through participation in it and religiously avoids hartals as a political weapon, all this voting and the attendant exercises will be in vain. Elections belong to the people and so does the management of governance. That is a message that all but specially the political parties must hear today.

### Aid for the Afghans

Getting it to the needy is the big task

massive international effort is underway to reach relief material into Afghanistan and its peripheries where refugees fleeing the threat of an impending US attack are trying to converge on. The World Food Programme sent a convoy of supplies to Kabul day before vesterday, the first one since the terrorist attacks on America. The ICRC has also dispatched a truck-load of medical supplies to the Afghan capital. These convoys are basically testing waters with the Taleban regime to see if more could be moved into the country without being scowled at by the Taleban in a war-like situation. Reaching succour to people gone nomadic in search of water and food following three years of drought is posing a difficult challenge.

But it is in neighbouring Pakistan where one sees the supplies building up rapidly. It is estimated that in the event of any US strike in Afghanistan one million refugees are likely to cross into Pakistan. The aid workers are desperately looking for suitable sites in the border region of Baluchistan and Northwest Frontier Province to shelter them. Only two refugee camps dating back to the era of soviet occupation of Afghanistan have met the criterion of the aid agencies. The UNHCR has sent in a consignment of plastic sheeting to provide shelter for 50,000 refugees. Apart from shelter and food, the Afghans need potable water, medicines, and above all, a hygienic way of life.

In all, it is a monumental humanitarian challenge facing the UN today, so that its 584 million dollar appeal to the international community sounds a touch inadequate for

# Development agenda for new government

ESPITE many inconveniences, the people of Bangladesh finally have been able to caste their votes. I am not yet in a position to speak on the quality of this voting. Neither I am going to anticipate which party is aging to be the winner. Whichever party wins, hopefully others should have the democratic guts to accept the result. Unlike earlier two elections this one was marred by unnecessary violence during campaigns. It was indeed unfortunate. This does not mach the deeper urge among the ordinary people of Bangladesh for a healthy democracy.

Given this limitation. I must congratulate both the major Leaders for heightening the competitive spirit in electioneering. Both covered nearly two hundred out of there hundred constituencies and worked day and night, attracting thousands of voters. They not only promised what would be delivered to the nation if elected but also took great pains in making themselves accountable to the voters about their failures. All this have helped strengthen the ground for democratic polity. There was, however, difference in their emphases. This was not unexpected either. Law and order was projected as the number one issue in this election. While AL leaders explained in great lengths how far they could and could not

contain violence and terrorism, the Four-Party combine made this their favourite point of attack on their opponent. Most other issues got overshadowed by this. Even then a few developmental issues have come out quite clearly and they

deserve to be highlighted now. Whichever party/ alliance wins this election, they will have to make

government, hopefully, will stick to their pledges and give top most priority to poverty eradication. Best option would be to go for a national commission for poverty eradication involving both primary and secondary stakeholders. This commission should be soliciting opinions of the poor, the development activists engaged in poverty eradication, the

government should get further

The next priority agenda should focus an IT. The IT strategy must include e-governance. ecommerce, e-education. For that matter it must be very specific about how quickly we must get access to undersea fibre optic cable network, how soon we would be able to

We also expect the new government to embark upon actions promoting safe environment for all of us. In particular, we want quick transformation of our petrol/ diesel driven vehicles into CNG-run ones, introduction of greater number of public transport. initiation of monorail, waterways and launching of the

attention of the new government I am sure the freedom loving

people of Bangladesh will not be disappointed by whichever party forms the government. The nation as a whole should take pride in being able to cross another hurdle for democratic governance. Whatever might have been the pains, the nation should look forward to building a prosperous Bangladesh. Ours is a nascent democracy. We all therefore, must work hard to strengthen this evolving democratic system of ours. The peace loving people of Bangladesh want to see the parliament as the focal point of our national aspiration and development. We do not want our honourable members of the parliament to spend most of their time in the streets and agitating. Instead we want them in the parliament developing desirable policies for sustainable development for the nation. I have great confidence in the democratic heritage of Bangladesh. I am sure we will not be disappointed by our elected representatives. The new government should be able to work hand in hand with the civil society and the private sector for improving the standard of living of all of our people, particularly the disadvantaged groups. The inner strength of the Bangladesh society and economy should be the best

Atiur Rahman is an economist working with BIDS.

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development. The new government should not be oblivious of this precious social capital.

improvement of law and order as the number one agenda of governance. The new government will have to find new ways to tackle violence. Notwithstanding global imperative for tackling terrorism, the local economy and society deserve better law and order as well. Poorer law and order can affect both domestic and foreign investment. Higher level of violence can disturb social tranquility, which in turn can shy away investment. The breakdown in law and order affects the poor more than their wealthy counterparts. So I will expect the new government to take adequate lessons from the immediate past and concentrate on the issue of law and order more seriously for the sake of maintaining social peace and subsequently for ensuring

sustainable development. As promised by both parties during the campaign, the new civil society involved in social engineering, the politicians, the private sector, the government officials and as well as donors in designing a time-bound action plan for reducing the number of the poor into half of today's stock by, say, another five years. At the same time the 'tomorrow's poor should be discouraged to slide down the poverty ladder. The action plan should have a number of doable strategies including resource mobilization and prioritizing expenditures. Both ncome and human poverty should get priority thrust by this action plan. As expected, education and health should get maximum support Simultaneously, the hardcore poor who have been by-passed by conventional poverty alleviation programmes should get priority attention of the new government The safetynet programmes already bolstered by the immediate past develop our national broad-band internet grid, how effectively we would be developing our IT infrastructure so that most of our schools, colleges and universities can have free access to internet. how quickly all of our banks and enterprises can be on-line. For that matter, we expect new government to come up with concrete budgetary allocations for developing IT infrastructure and time-bound effort at passing of IT-friendly cyber laws for financial transactions

The next agenda should be focused on effective local government. The promise for decentralization made by almost all parties during the campaign must be translated into action by launching of upazila and zila governments immediately. This requires immediate declaration of election dates for these two tiers of local government along with concomitant fiscal mental actions are needed to save our future citizens from immediate dangers of asthma, cancer and lung diseases. At the same time we expect our new government to become gender-sensitive and transparent. The new government is

expected to continue its support for

agriculture, particularly for non-crop

environment courts. All this environ-

farming and many other diversified activities. The employment creation for the unemployed should as well be on the top of their heads and Other promises of establishing a commission/council for eradication of corruption from public life, the installation of the office of the

Ombudsman and taking measures

for amending the constitution for

direct election to at least sixty

women should as well get priority

reserved parliamentary seats for

of this precious social capital.

# Democracy and eighth Parliament in Bangladesh



HARUN UR RASHID S expected, on 1st October, the voters in Bangladesh have duly exercised their constitutional rights to elect the eighth Parliament. The Election Commission under a non-party caretaker government has taken all

possible actions within their powers

to ensure that the poll is free, fair

and peaceful About 300,000 local observers spread over the country to monitor the polling booths, 67,000 military and para-military troops were deployed to maintain law and order, about 300 foreign observers from many countries including Canada, Japan, Nigeria, Pakistan, the US and a European Union delegation have come to observe the election process in the country.

The campaign strategy in the election appeared to be that each party had the virtue of being the only available to bring peace, progress and prosperity within a democratic framework in the country. Strategist framed a pitch to the softly committed and unaligned voters who largely decide the outcome of elections. Critics indicate that many of the party platforms are found vague and not specific in their programmes to eliminate poverty, the number one issue in the country.

Democracy is a generic term Forms of democracy may vary from country to country because democratic traditions are created in the light of history, national character. the state of economic development and the diversity or homogeneity of the population. Democracy is not an immutable concept. The bottomline of democracy lies in the political institutions being really "representative of the entire people" of the country as John Stuart Mill viewed it

Democracy is the rule of the majority where the minority has the right to criticise the party in power. However tyrannical majority and recalcitrant minority, according to Sir Ivor Jennings, are the enemies which destroy democracy.

When we think of democracy we are reminded of the oft-quoted lines of Abraham Lincoln that democracy is for the people, by the people and

of the people. When we think of good governance, we remember what Lord Acton said: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." These quotations have become so commonplace that one tends to ignore their real import on the ground

Democracy is not a form of government. It could be parliamentary or presidential system. Bangladesh tried both the systems since 1971. Did it bring genuine democracy in the country? The answer will

sion are perhaps three hundred miles distant from those who hear the arguments?"

Representative government seems to be going through a metamorphosis where periodic elections are held to demonstrate that democracy has been in place. It must be borne in mind that elections are a means to gain an end and not the end itself. To discharge public duties for the welfare of the people is the goal of the elected members

The question that arises is: why

decisions and the MPs abide by

When Parliament cannot fully discharge its role, it has a negative effect on the people. Democracy survives by the faith of the people in the system. Once the faith is shattered, it is difficult to restore it. Democracy can only succeed if it is operated with social awareness and sense of involvement at the grass-

Another handicap of democracy is that the political parties seem to

I would argue that there are many demonstrable signs of good governance to be palpably perceived in the community. Here in my view there could be a list of tests of good governance.

The basic needs of life, such as clothing, safe water, housing, heathcare, education and availability of energy, must reach out to the poor. It is an important commitment of any government to ensure that the poor enjoy the barest acceptable stan-

respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed." Good governance is tested as to whether any person has been deprived of life or personal liberty except in accordance with valid law. Access to justice for any person is an important right and constitutes

be a democracy in which fundamen-

tal human rights and freedoms and

one aspect of good governance. The poor must not be denied justice because of high costs for judicial remedies. The machinery of justice should be available to every person at an affordable cost in every corner of the country. Lastly the executive should be

accountable to the parliament and people. This means that every decision or action of the government should be transparent (except national security matters) and should be tested from the point of view of relevance and cost effectiveness. The use and abuse of executive power destroys the elements of good governance. Furthermore abuse is often involved when there is corruption or nepotism behind a

The civil society has a big role to play in ensuring good governance. The civil society has become the "third wave" of democratic transition. The role of civil society is gradually increasing because it occupies a space between the individuals and the state. The intensity of the civil society emanates from the disenchantment with the government as an agent of social and economic welfare and the existence of a highly ostentatious life-style of a few 'nouveau riche' vis a vis the poorest section in the community. The civil society provides reservoirs of resistance to arbitrary and tyrannical action. The civil society supports progress towards greater social and eco-

nomic equality.

Democracy and elections are the two sides of the same coin. It is hoped that the newly elected eighth parliament will be able to usher in a new era in Bangladesh politics. However to achieve this goal, the politicians and people need selfdiscipline, political ethics and strong will. In my view it is not the government which should play its part only. The people must share their part as well. The Constitution in Article 21.1 stipulates that " it is the duty of every citizen (italics mine) to observe the constitution and the laws, to maintain discipline, to perform public duties and to protect public property." Do we abide by this constitutional obligation? Let us ponder over this before we point fingers at

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

# BOTTOM LINE

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vary from person to person. Democracy is a set of values and a way of life. Tolerance and compromise are two essential attributes of democ-

Democracy is not merely a matter of words, such as sovereignty of people, inalienable rights, equality of opportunity for all citizens, freedom of expression or speech or separation of powers but the manner in which these noble concepts are translated into action.

A Constitution is an evolving document. Bangladesh Constitution of 1972 is one of the best documents wherein all noble ideas and rights are incorporated, despite the fact that it has been amended 13 times as of 1997. Many of them were adopted during the period of extra-constitutional regimes. Have the amendments removed the infirmities that the founding fathers could not anticipate? The answer is difficult to sav.

Bangladesh reverted back to parliamentary system of government since early 90s where the Prime Minister is the chief executive. Bangladesh constitution ensures that the three organs of the state -- executive, legislative and judiciary -- function according to aws and there are checks and balances on each organ so that they keep functioning within their limits set out by the constitution.

One could argue that Parliament appeared to have lost its representative character. It has not been playing its role as envisaged by Edmund Burke, Burke's address to the electors of Bristol in 1774 is still relevant to this day. He said: "What sort of reason is that, in which the determination precedes the discussion; in which one set of men deliberate and another decide; and where those who form the concluis parliamentary democracy not working? First, parliamentary system

appears to be misnomer today. The parliamentary system of government had been termed by British MF Tony Benn in 1980 as a "Prime Ministerial government." The vastly growing powers of the executive branch of the state have diminished the functions of the legislative branch of the state -- Parliament.

Second, party defections have played a debilitating role in the parliamentary system. Many of the legislative members have scant regard to the ideals and objectives of the party. There is a view that simply leader-based groups and when the leader disappears or discredited, the party is either dismantled or split into different factions. Party membership, partyfunds and party-accounts are ofter not subject to scrupulous scrutiny or accountability nor are they transpar-

Third, hardly internal criticisms are to the liking of the party leaders because of "party discipline". In the absence of any meaningful interna democracy within the party, the socalled "survival" politics seems to have become the end-game of many of the members of the parlia-

Fourth, high cost of elections appears to discourage many people to get involved in politics. "Big money" has an adverse impact or healthy political environment. The professional class cannot afford to . spend that kind of "big money" and they seem to avoid in contesting the parliamentary elections.

Finally, the members of parliament do not seem to be empowered to take major policy decisions. It is the party stalwarts who make the

have tendency to look to the seats of power as the be-all and end-all of political activity. Once they get into power they tend to forget the elec-

tion promises. Illiteracy, ignorance and poverty constitute threats to democracy. Democracy cannot thrive in communities on the verge of destitution. Therefore the social and economic disparities in the communities pose serious threat to stability which in turn gives rise to law and order

Democracy has to be inclusive and participatory in character. Democracy will survive if the local institutions are given the necessary society is established with minimal social and economic disparities. Democracy is inter-linked with good governance. The 18th century poet Alexander Pope wrote:

"About forms of government let fools contest; the government best adminis-

tered is the best." The poet captured the essence

of good governance in this famous Bangladesh Constitution pro-

vides the structures of good governance. The fundamental principles of state policy enumerated in Part II of the Constitution lav the foundation of a strong and vibrant welfare state on the basis of equitable social and economic development.

What are the major elements of good governance? Indian leader Karan Singh once said that one way to judge good governance was whether a young lady would be able to walk alone after dark from one end of the city to the other without being harassed or molested. What he meant was that the existence of security of a person in all situations was one of the crucial tests of good dards of life. Administration should be at the door of the people, even in remote

areas. Simplification of administrative procedures must receive due attention. The rules and procedures exist for the benefit of the people and not the other way round. It is an important test of good

governance whether a person obtains his or her due from the administration without being subject to corrupt use or abuse of the machinery. The administration should be clean, transparent and readily responsive to the needs of the people in time. The existence of a vibrant media

is a sign of good governance. It is the eyes and ears of the community. The media is like a mirror where the government can see its performance being evaluated or measured. However there is one caveat about it. The media should maintain higher professional standards and objectivity.

A sound economic policy is a part of good governance. In simple terms it means the maximum utilisation of material and human resources in the country. Furthermore the wealth of the nation is distributed in such a way that social justice is met through wide and equitable taxation base. I am tempted to quote Alexis de Tocqueville in this regard: "In the US, nothing struck me more forcibly than the general equality of condition among the people.... This equality of condition is the fundamental fact from which all others

seem to be derived. The fundamental human rights in all its dimensions must be enjoyed by all persons--citizens and noncitizens. Bangladesh Constitution in its Article 11 makes it very clear when it says that "the Republic shall

EDITOR T

others.

### **PHOTORIAL**

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned



### **Democracy and development**

Elections are progression of the process -- the democratic process. No doubt about it. But how much have we progressed ourselves over the decade of parliamentary democracy, crossing two such progression stages, is a point to ponder. They are our citizens of tomorrow. Could we ensure education, health care, shelter for majority of them? Yet another such stage we crossed yesterday. Can we ensure all this for them now? Let's vow. Let our politicians vow it with us in democracy.

#### USA at war: preconditions

President Bush of the United States of America has declared a self-imposed "war" on itself, and is threatening the rest of the world with pre-conditions, including declaring other independent nations as enemies of the USA, in case of noncooperation

Would America agree to such preconditions coming from another nation? The Americans better explain to the rest of the world how thėy are morally justified in taking such unilateral action, to avoid misunderstanding and encourage cooperation without compromisi with sovereignty **A** Husnain

Welcome back Tipu and frustration caused by unending violence and consequent strike in the DU and the appalling demonstration of weapons and black money, there is one good news for simple people like us. Tipu, the brave journalist returned home last month after his 4-month stay in Bangkok for special treatment of the

fatal injuries inflicted on him by the political terrorists and miscreants. Before he left for Bangkok, he lay in the hospital bed --Êhis bones almost crushed due to merciless beating by former Awami League MP Joynal Hazari and his henchmen. His fault was that he had taken the curtains off Hazari's misdoings and disclosed his illegal activities His intrepidity was met with the utmost form of violence. He was abducted and beaten up. None said a word against those who committed that brutal crime, nor emerged "Tipu" who could write against the injustice towards Tipu for just telling the truth. One good measure taken up was the accumulation of funds conducted jointly by The Daily Star and the Prothom Alc for proper treatment of his shattered

The citizens of this country showed their support towards an honest person by fully co-operating with those who raised funds for Tipu What a shame it was when the Prime Minister kept absolutely mum about the whole incident and did not take any action. Was it because Mr Hazari was an MP of then ruling party?

Nonetheless, I guess I am too

young and an amateur to make any sort of comment on the activities of our patriotic politicians.

I am grateful to God that Tipu is finally well (though his treatment is not fully complete as yet) and soon he will be fighting with his pen. What has pleased me more is his selfconfidence and determination to fight the forces of evil. He has not backed out fearing the repetition of assaults by powerful political leaders. His poise and self-reliance should be an ideal example to all to speak the truth without any fear. Of course, very few of us would like to be in his position with our limbs crushed and our families constantly threatened by the political leaders to keep absolutely quiet. That is perhaps why Tipus emerge as one in a thousand or million.

As an ordinary citizen of the country I cannot do much. I cannot run in the elections, get a seat in the parliament and 'promise' my people of a better living. All I can do is pray that Tipus emerge in greater numbers and show men like Hazari that no matter how powerful they are, the truth will come out in front of the eyes of the common people. The léadliest of weapons cannot stop an honest person with a powerful

Musarrat Jahan Siddigi

#### The price of innocence

endorse the DS Lawdesk comnentary (September 16). We all have to ponder over the price of innocence, recorded in history time and again; the incidents scattered all over the globe at different times, for centuries

There are lessons to learn. First reflection, then firm retribution. For remedy and cure, use of authorised force should be minimum, to create an enabling atmosphere for change of heart. The root must be clear to the defendants before attacking the nethod. The concept of freedom operates on both sides of the coin.

The aggrieved people of the United States of America have to review carefully their image about Islam, the Muslim majority countries, and the Islamic way of daily, ordinary normal life, in sharp con trast to acts of violence by terrorist groups. The latter have become a enace to the American wav of life.

There are misunderstandings due to severe information gaps at

different levels. The government's PR role in the affected country has also to be reviewed. In the global village, the zones of aggressive confrontations have to be disman-

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

#### Reverse brain-drain The world has changed prosperity

in the west and in the industrialized countries are no longer inviting. The anti-Muslim wave will last for quite a while, affecting those seeking jobs abroad under hostile environments; and those who are now anxious for the reverse brain-drain to start. Human migration patterns would be reflected in new economic trends. We all must be prepared for change, at more frequent intervals.

The changing and volatile situation has to be carefully monitored by the authorities in Dhaka, for longterm reappraisal, as about a million Bangladeshis work abroad. The grass is no longer greener

on the other side. Let us hope feelings of human brotherhood would gain the upper hand sooner than **A** Mawaz