

Vote for the best amongst those standing

An election reduced of importance

CITY Corporation elections are being held today but although it's full of energy, it's not filled with significance. It has a great sense of a spectacle and the keenness is more about the happenings around the election rather than the outcome that is already known. In the past these elections had stood tall next to that of the national elections.

Of the many reasons which has robbed the polls of significance is the absence of the main Opposition party, the Awami League. Its boycott has cost the elections of a representational nature and denied the people of their right to a wide range of choices. The tragedy is that the Awami League didn't even bother to explain to the voters why they were boycotting. Staying away from the elections is perceived to yield greater political harvests than participating and this defines our political process soundly. We regret that the former ruling party should have chosen this line of action and criticise it for weakening this important exercise in democracy.

The other factor that has dampened the significance of the polls is the entry of mastans in the ward level elections. At no time in the past have so many identified or listed criminals participated in a single series of elections. This is a veritable celebration of immunity, legal, political and social. Not only are national level criminals involved but many who are well known at the neighbourhood level for their criminal activities are part of this election. The inability of the authorities including the Election Commission to do anything about the matter has led to the decline of the status of the election billing it as a campaign where criminals can run free.

What, however, surprises is the motivation behind the BNP's decision to nominate, support and in the last instance, not actively opposing known criminals. They had no opposition in the polls and didn't really have to ensure a victory. Wasn't this a good time to nominate a few good people who otherwise stay away from elections of the ward variety?

The fact that Sadek Hossain Khoka is standing in the elections is good news as he is known to have democratic impulses and is popular. He has also declared that he will try to establish real "City Government" which has been the demand of the people of Dhaka for long and that is good news. In this contestless election, he seems one of those definite winners Dhakaites will greet with enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, all voters should look at the positive side and vote for the better candidates however remote their chances to win may look like at the moment. They are encouraged to vote for women as till-date no woman *santrash*i in the election has been identified. So vote for the best and hope for the best, too.

Lok Sabha debate on communal violence

Confidence-building in majority-minority relationship awaited

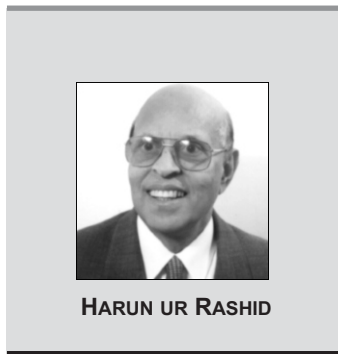
AS wranglings raged across the Indian polity over how best to deal with the political fall-out of the communal riots that broke out in Gujarat towards the end of February, violence still erupts in the bedevilled Indian state. Only on Sunday and Monday 18 people lost their lives and more than a hundred were injured in spite of defence minister George Fernandes being on hand. The most pressing agenda that remained unaddressed in the political whirlwind has to do with relief operations at the camps where a few hundred affected Muslim families are sheltered.

Set against this backdrop, we welcome Indian Deputy Speaker Sayed's ruling for a parliamentary debate on communal violence in Gujarat. The motion moved by the Opposition and adopted for discussion reads: "The House expresses its grave concern over the failure of the administration in ensuring the security of minority community in various parts of the country, including Gujarat, and urges upon the government to take effective steps to restore confidence in them." Among the confidence building measures ought to be providing relief to the affected, fixation of responsibility for the riots and avoidance of their recurrence in future. For a week the BJP had opposed any discussion under rule 184 which has been invoked by the speaker to allow the debate, because it could entail a censure motion on the government.

The NDA allies of BJP like the Telegu Desham Party, Trinomial Congress, Janata Dal (United) and Janasakti have already demanded removal of chief minister Narendra Modi for his failure to control violence in Gujarat. Yet BJP, the leading partner in the coalition, has given Modi a clean chit. It also held on to the view without any success in the end though, that law and order being a state affair, even riots could not be a subject matter for debate in the central parliament.

The very fact that a threadbare discussion on the inter-communal situation is getting underway in the Lok Sabha will go down well with the minority community as something instilling confidence in the system. But essentially the administrative failure to prevent the large scale riots will have to be gone into and deterrent measures put in place to avert them in future. India cannot allow its secular balance to be in jeopardy

Globalisaton: Challenges for Bangladesh



THE word 'Globalisation' generally means increased economic integration through trade and investment.. This is a process requiring the integration of national economies and some say that in that process the "loss of nationality" of enterprises and products occurs. Since the Uruguay Round of World Trade negotiations which ended in 1993, the markets for most goods have been integrated with the exception of oil and agricultural products. However although financial flows have become totally global, labour markets have not seen the same fate. Rather labour is not free to move and in fact confronting great barriers through stringent immigration laws in industrialised countries.

Although wealth is being accumulated as never before, it has marginalised many developing countries and increased inequality between rich and poor nations. Procedures linking trade with employment is hardly successful in

developing countries. When developing countries with fragile institutional architectures attempt to deregulate economies, the vulnerable section of community may be hurt leading to social instability. This is a 'Catch 22' situation.

Rich countries continue to impose trade barriers on exports from developing countries which cost dearly in terms of income. The World Bank estimates that protection in rich countries costs developing countries more than US\$100

nations. The protests occurred on 20 April in Washington.

In its path breaking 2002 study '*Globalisation, Growth and Poverty*', the World Bank said : " Between countries globalisation is now mostly reducing inequality. About three billion people live in new globalising developing countries. During the 1990s, this group grew at 5 per cent per capita compared with 2 per cent for the rich countries. The number of extreme poor (living on less than a dollar a day) in the new

been marginalised or not because of globalisation. The recent report of the World Bank on Bangladesh makes an interesting reading.

In its analysis, the World Bank divided developing nations according to whether they increased or decreased trade relative to income in the post-1980 period. The good news for Bangladesh is that it has been identified by the Bank among the 24 new globalisers together with Malaysia, China and India. These nations were increasingly defined

restrictions on imports and strict control measures. State-led import substitution industrialisation was the basic tenet of the national development strategy. Bangladesh had one of the most regulated economies outside the communist block.

Bangladesh embarked on an economic liberalisation reform process from 1979 to 1990. Simplification of tariffs began in 1986. The third period 1990-2001 has been characterised by greater openness of the economy through accelerated

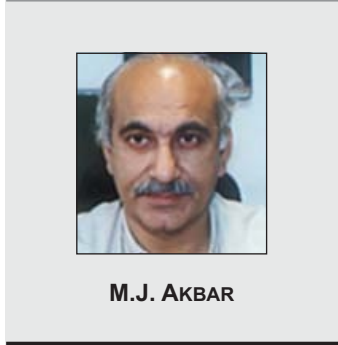
product (GDP). A growth of cycle has been registered in the economy. GDP has increased about 4.5 per cent much faster than population growth. This has contributed to improving per capita income. Bangladesh has been going through a stage which may be described as 'economic take-off'. It appears that open economy is better than closed economy and that globalisation has helped Bangladesh to accelerate its economic growth.

However there are challenges ahead for Bangladesh. First the economic base is narrow and 93 per cent of exports is on a few low valued added products. Second, the ready made garment exports which constitute 68 per cent of total exports have to face stiff competition when the quota system is abolished in 2004. Third, bureaucratic red-tapism and unskilled labour with poor knowledge of English language are often seen as hurdles to foreign investment. Finally, political conflicts on a national scale often with *hartals* may give a wrong signal to the much-needed foreign investment.

There is another aspect which needs to be taken care of in the days of globalisation. Economic and social inefficiency need to go hand in hand. Government should give higher priority to both economic and social issues because social well being contributes to greater economic growth.

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

A long day's journey into the night



GOVERNMENTS seem to prefer the death of thousand cuts. Perhaps this is because, being small, the cuts have the illusory feel of a minor problem. But the profusion can add up to a paralysing weakness, inflicting its daily quota of damage and disfiguration.

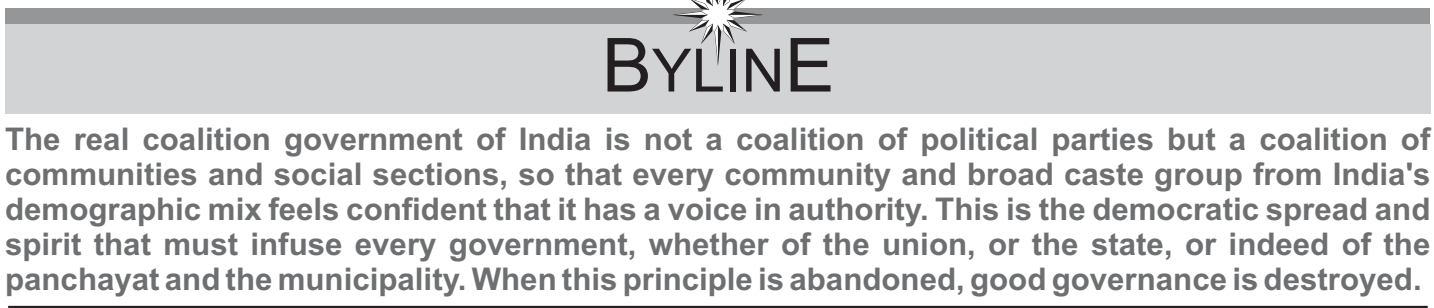
Most of these cuts are self-inflicted. So many occur because the surgeon sent to heal holds his scalpel with a wavering hand. There is further illusion when these nicks do not make the front page. Vijay Kumar Malhotra would probably be less injurious to the health of the BJP if he were given a promotion, to the job he really wants, that of a Cabinet minister. Instead as spokesman he often parlays a logic that could be dismissed as ludicrous were it not offensive. The other day he offered the thesis that anyone who questioned Narendra Modi's partisan thirst was talking the language of the Muslim League. Chandra Babu Naidu and Jayalalitha will be surprised to learn that they have become honorary members of the Muslim League.

On another recent inside page the far more careful home minister, Mr L.K. Advani noted that law and order had returned to Gujarat. He must have been briefed by a very special intelligence agency. The same day's front pages of all newspapers carried stories of four more killed, and heaven knows how many more injured. It does not matter to which community the dead belonged; four more Indians had joined a terrible death list.

What bleeds each time from these nicks is credibility. Credibility is finite resource.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee believes that he has been ill-used by the media, and that criticism of his speech in Goa is "baseless and misinformed". Since that speech has been so controversial it is only fair to allow the Prime Minister his response, in detail. He insists that "my remarks, taken in their totality, contain nothing that is either against Islam or against Muslims".

He explains: "I had drawn attention to two contradictory streams in Islam. I had said, 'Islam has two



The real coalition government of India is not a coalition of political parties but a coalition of communities and social sections, so that every community and broad caste group from India's demographic mix feels confident that it has a voice in authority. This is the democratic spread and spirit that must infuse every government, whether of the union, or the state, or indeed of the panchayat and the municipality. When this principle is abandoned, good governance is destroyed.

forms. One is that which tolerates others, which teaches its adherents to follow the path of Truth, which preaches compassion and sensitivity. But these days, militancy in the name of Islam leaves no room for tolerance. It has raised the slogan of jihad. It is dreaming of recasting the entire world in its mould". In pointing to these divergent facets of Islam, I have not said anything new or different from what numerous perceptive observers, including many devout and concerned Muslims around the world, have already said."

No one would deny that there are Muslim fundamentalists who have misinterpreted Islam, and even misused it to spread their havoc; this column has repeatedly attacked elements who preach divisive hatred particularly in our country. But it is the totality of the speech that raises questions. Prime Minister, does the carnage let loose after the shameful incidents of Godhra deserve just one throw-away sentence in your long discourse? Just one line, and this is it: "*Baad ki ghatnaein nindaniya theen, lekin aag lagai kiske? Aag phaili kaise?*" To translate: "The incidents (after Godhra) deserve condemnation, but who lit the fire? How did the fire spread?"

Even your one-line reference was not without a qualification. You condemned and rightly so all those who lit the fire, extending your condemnation across the borders. But you forgot to answer your own second question: How did the fire spread? You should have answered that question. Those who were burnt and raped and killed by this fire – did they not deserve a Prime Minister's sympathy, a word from his heart? Those who have gone to investigate what happened have broken down publicly at press conferences, unable to stop their tears at such inhumanity. Could the Prime Minister not find a single word from his rich reserves of vocabulary and rhetoric for the child who died in flames?

Mr Vajpayee must appreciate one thing: if Indians are critical of his speech it is only because they expect more from him. Any other BJP leader could have said what he said and there would not be a mur-

mur in response.

But we may be missing the real point in this debate. Any leader of a political party has the right to say whatever speech his ideology persuades him to articulate. One does not have to agree with what he says. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is a communist. It is not necessary to agree or disagree with what he says on economics or God at his party plenum. But when Mr Bhattacharjee enters Writers Building in Calcutta and becomes chief minister of the state, then every action and view of his is accountable. He is duty-bound to ensure peace in West Bengal, to treat every citizen as an equal, whether communist or not, Hindu or Muslim, Bengali or non-Bengali.

The same rule of accountability applies to the chief minister of Gujarat. And to the Prime Minister of India. Mr Vajpayee is not the Prime Minister of the BJP, he is the Prime Minister of India.

The Prime Minister, his party the BJP and his coalition the NDA, must ask themselves just one question: can Narendra Modi govern Gujarat any longer?

Modi may be capable now of winning the next election (a capability that might however waver with time). But is he capable of ensuring the first fundamental right of every citizen: peace? Can there be normalcy in Gujarat as long as he is there? Can the vigilantes he let loose ever be brought under control by his administration? Does he even want to? Or will we continue to be haunted by stories such as that of the lawyer Veersinh Rathod, who saved 25 Muslim families in Naroda on 28 February and is now fearful of his own? Veersinh Rathod is the Indian that the Prime Minister applauded in his speech in Goa, who represents the values that are synonymous with our country. But today Mr Rathod is a frightened man in a state ruled by the BJP and Narendra Modi. He has no faith in the police's ability to protect him, because he saw what the police did and knows what they can do again. Those vigilantes still have Narendra Modi's protection. And under that protection they have launched a phase of apartheid in Gujarat, a combination of economic war and social hatred against Muslims. This

is less dramatic than rape and massacre, but it is more insidious.

Is this the governance that the Prime Minister or the NDA want in Gujarat or any part of India?

The real coalition government of India is not a coalition of political parties but a coalition of communities and social sections, so that every community and broad caste group from India's demographic mix

feels confident that it has a voice in authority. This is the democratic spread and spirit that must infuse every government, whether of the union, or the state, or indeed of the panchayat and the municipality. When this principle is abandoned, good governance is destroyed.

A George Fernandes cannot restore the confidence of the brutalised; he is at best a four-day visitor.

OPINION

Whither water sharing?

MOHAMMAD MUJIBUR RAHMAN

THE basis of determining the quantum of water under 1996 agreement was inflatory, unrealistic and misleading, and detrimental to the interests of Bangladesh. This was obviously done to give an impression that Bangladesh would get a minimum 35,000 cusecs of water during the leanest period but in fact it was less than half of it. The then water resources minister Abdur Razzak said in the parliament that during March 11-20, 1997, we received as low as 16,528 cusecs of water!

Now, the water supply at Hardinge Bridge this year is far from satisfactory. According to a news item, "Thousands of farmers under GK Project can't cultivate Aus paddy" appearing in a local daily last month (March 23, 2002), most canals of GK Project have already dried up due to weak flow of water in the Ganges, causing great frustration among thousands of farmers who are foreseeing a bleak prospect of Aus cultivation this year.

Although the authorities started dredging the intake channel and pump areas of the project three months back, the chances of getting water from the Ganges are slim. Official sources said pump machines of the project were scheduled to have been put into operation from middle of last month for preparing seedbeds for the Aus season, but the authorities failed to do so due to uncertainty of getting due share of the Ganges water. In the Irri-boro season, only a few farmers

could cultivate paddy with water from deep and shallow tube-wells.

Even though Bangladesh signed a long-term historic water sharing treaty with India in 1996, Bangladesh rarely received its due share. "Meetings between officials of the two countries are regularly held in every dry season, but of no avail," said an official wishing anonymity.

The farmers of the region hardly got water in dry season and a vast area in the vicinity of the Padma from Harding Bridge to Goalunda has turned into virtual desert.

The water flows in the Ganges started to fall drastically in dry season following construction of the Farakka Barrage by India on the river. As a result, the GK project has virtually remained shelved following implementation of its first two phases. A project official said they needed at least a 15-foot high water flow in the river to keep three big and 12 small pumps of the project operative, but water in the river was now flowing far below the required level, badly hampering irrigation.

An official at the Kushtia Water Development Board office said there was little chance that they would be able to run the pumps of the project this year unless the water level in the river went up. He said the average water flow in the river was 62,000 cusecs until India started to unilaterally withdraw water from the Ganges. "Now the average flow stands at 18,000 to 20,000 cusecs," he said.

All these imbroglios could be averted if suggestions like those follow are paid heed to:

1) The quantum of water to be shared by India and Bangladesh should be based on 75 percent availability of water calculated from recorded flows of the Ganges at Farakka from 1972 to 1995.

2) Bangladesh should get a minimum of 35,000 cusecs water during the leanest period.

3) In the event of a lower availability provision to be made to protect at least 80 percent of 35,000 cusecs i.e. 28,000 cusecs as the minimum share of Bangladesh during the leanest period.

4) Further, if during a particular ten-day period the Ganges flow at Farakka comes down to such a level that the share of Bangladesh is lower than 80 percent of the quantity shown in article 11 of the 1996 agreement, the release of water to Bangladesh during the ten-day period should not fall below 80 percent of the quantity."

Lastly as India is increasingly withdrawing waters from the upstream region of the Ganges, the availability of water at Farakka for allocation between Bangladesh and India as per 1996 water agreement will be less and less in future. To solve the problem, the total quantum of waters of the Ganges and its tributaries should be calculated from 1972-2001 and so distributed between Bangladesh and India that Bangladesh is assured of a minimum 35,000 cusecs of water in the leanest period every year.

Mohammad Mujibur Rahman is a retired Collector of Customs.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

DCC election

The city corporation elections are an embarrassment and an insult to Bangladesh. State Sponsored murderers, rapists and extortionists will be elected to run our major cities. Among other things Dhaka will get a new mayor who has been conspicuous only in his silence regarding the aforementioned gentlemen sponsored by his party.

The papers are usually full of platitudes for the martyrs of 21st Feb., '71, the Jail Killings and we are incessantly commemorating the mutiny that gave us President Zia, the movement against Ershad, Janatar Mancha etc. etc etc.

And then our democratically elected government goes ahead and nominates criminals of the worst sort to run our cities. My disgust and revulsion towards BNP, the Cabinet, the PM, the PM-in-waiting and the rest of that lot is complete.

April 25 is an exercise abusing of democracy. BNP will be putting into place its cadres who in the coming months will be our neighbourhood extortionists, rapists and murderers. These same people will be the instruments for BNP to terrorise AL whenever Sheikh Hasina decides to launch another movement (probably after her shopping trip to London).

My single request would be for anyone who believes in this country to boycott the elections. Only traitors will cast their votes in this farcical exercise of legitimising the plunder and humiliation of our society.

MA
Dhaka

"MIGs and helicopters"

Mr. Biggles has finally made his point that we don't need an Air Force.

Air Force was a part of US Army

and British Army during the World War I. But later British Government and US Government realised that Air Force should be under different authority.

SAMs cannot be an alternative of Air Force. Saddam Hossen lost the war with his SAM units and that is a fact. Taliban lost the war with their SAM units. Now Mr. Biggles propose other countries to have SAM units instead of Air Forces!

Sabri Samie
Great Britain

Shihab murder: A review

So horrific, so tragic is the death of Shihab Ahmed -- a 13-year-old schoolboy! It is rather a sequel not a separate incident in our society where everyone's life is at stake, where criminals seek and get shelter under the umbrella of the politicians, where the police harass the

innocent instead of arresting the accused.

Shihab was murdered, as the abductors confess, he recognised one of them. As the murderers are all teenagers who remained rather indifferent after committing the crime, the question arises who or what poisoned the mind of these teenage killers? They grew up within the same social conditions that many other children shared. But every one of them did not turn into murderers.

Procrastination in legal judgement, dishonesty in police department and the way the top criminals manage to escape their trial certainly has some negative impacts on the youths and they are inspired to commit horrible crimes.

We strongly demand immediate trial of the culprits who killed Shihab and urge the politicians and the leaders to play their part in restoring law and order and make the society

worth living.
M. Mustafizur Rahman
Dhaka

Does the US really believe in democracy?

Though apparently USA is a country that is working for human rights, freedom and democracy, does it practise what it preaches?

In 1990 when the military junta of Burma (Myanmar) ignored and rejected the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and arrested its leader Su Kyi, the USA strongly criticised the military junta. Afterwards USA continued to uphold the struggle for democracy in Burma and demanded release of Suu Kyi.

But when the Israeli troops are killing hundreds of unarmed Palestinians with machineguns, tanks, bulldozers and helicopter gunships

(made in USA), we are surprised to see that the same upholder of human rights, democracy and freedom-- USA is supporting the Israeli government and ignoring the plight of the Palestinians.

OH Kabir
Wari, Dhaka

Save Arafat, save Palestine

The world is witnessing one of the most tragic and horrifying incidents in the history. Israel, backed by the US, is continuing their aggression on the Palestinians.

Every conscious human being should raise their voice against such barbarism. International organisations such as UNO, OIC etc should come forward to save Palestine and the leader Yasser Arafat's life. Otherwise the poor Palestinians struggle would continue.

Dr Sultan Ahmed

Dhaka Israel must stop its aggressions

What Ariel Sharon is doing to the Palestinians is appalling and we are stunned. It is hard to believe that such crime against humanity could be possible. In the name of fighting terrorism, Israel is terrorising the entire region and America is asking the Palestinians to stop violence! A cruel joke indeed!

We urge the Muslim countries and all the people with conscience to come forward and do something to stop this inhuman act against humanity. We pray to the Almighty to save the Palestinians and allow them to have a land of their own so that they may live in peace and happiness.

Nur Jahan

Chittagong Sunbeams vs. South Breeze

This is in reply to Purna Hassan's letter (April 23) regarding the Subeams vs. South Breeze score in the fist half.

I really don't think children should be made to feel such things to be that important. It's parental pressure and misplaced school pride that puts pressure on children at a very young age to think that winning is everything. Just take a look at the US to see what happens when parents and coaches start pushing kids to think that these games are important. It was only a little while ago that one man killed another in a fight over a hockey match their children were playing.

By the way, Purna, Sunbeams was going to win anyway.

Tintin
Dhaka