

Municipal polls fall-out

Questions that beg answer from the EC

HERE were a few given factors to the just-completed city corporation polls. With the Awami League as the principal opposition party boycotting them, three things could be expected. One, a general lack of interest in the party's vote bank working out to a drastic under-cutting of the turn-out rate. Two, all the three mayoral posts going uncontested by any AL-sponsored candidates public disinterest was certain to be the hall-mark of the entire process. Three, the results overwhelmingly being foregone conclusions, many voters felt disoriented to what was merely going through the motions rather than competitive elections.

The camouflaged presence of AL sympathisers as some ward commissioner candidates could hardly make any difference. But there, the turn-out was higher, implying that even in so-called partyless local government elections participation of all major parties is indispensable for making such polls meaningful.

Another important factor that predisposed the polls to a low voter turn-out was the sound and fury signifying nothing insofar as weeding out known-criminals from the list of candidates went. Neither at the point of their entry into the race could they be debarred nor as they campaigned were they arrested.

Why are we re-stating the obvious? This is to only highlight the fact that while poor voter turn-out was universally acknowledged, the process of vote counting and announcement of results has given rise to a number of questions that shouldn't be skirted. Quite fundamentally, since the voter participation in the polls has been all-time low, why did it take so long to count the ballots, announce the results and determine the turn-out rate? Secondly, whereas until 2 am on 26 April the EC announced votes bagged by candidates to show their standings which reflected a 20-22 per cent turn-out it ceased to do so later in the morning without offering any explanation. Then on, the EC gave out the names of commissioners-elect in all the three cities without indicating the number of votes bagged by each one of them. Why this inconsistency in the pattern of announcements? Furthermore, why was there such a difference in the versions of Election Commissioner Munsef Ali and EC Secretary S M Zakaria about voter turn-out, the former expressing disappointment over it while the latter speaking of 'high rate'?

Overall, the absence of CEC and the intermittent presence of election commissioners during the two-day exercise in compilation and announcement of the results left the EC Secretary virtually in charge. This rakes up some curiosity, and even perhaps misgivings.

All these questions do beg authentic and satisfactory answers from the Election Commission to set the records straight, so that the public can have an unwavering trust in the future electoral processes.

The FIFA Cup is royally received

We need sporting victories to band-aid our life

HE way Bangladesh responded to the arrival of the FIFA Cup was spectacular. It was almost as if the Cup had come home to the winners and wasn't just a promo visitor to many lands before it went home to its rightful owner after the competition. If nothing else, it shows how hungry we are for victories and accolades. In a country where despair always seems on the verge of winning, the sports ground has become a metaphor for life and all that one expects from it. It's the stadium which must substitute for what remains missing in life.

A massive rally attended by no less a person than the PM was held followed by processions carrying the cup that was sponsored by various companies like any other sports event. A commemorative match was held between Mohd. SC and Abahani in which the players of the golden pond took to the ground and fought it out like fresh warriors. Other suitable events were planned and executed proving that the moment was for celebration and we are hungry for a cup, even a visiting one. Sports can give so much.

Our sports world is unfortunately more well known for political gaffes than sporting laurels. Our cricket is trundling along and after each defeat we remind ourselves that we are still young and will improve one day. Cricket players are the best paid ones in the country and in fact can count themselves as commercial successes in Bangladesh by any standard though a win remains elusive. ICC laurels are a remote memory and test status decorative till we have broken with the bad patch.

As for soccer, our once "national sport", the least said the better. This is partly because the state sponsorship has fallen and cricket draws away a lot of money and there is a higher degree of professional performance that we can't hope to deliver in the green. We also don't even have proper playing grounds.

All we are looking for is some concrete hope, some assurance of not having lost it all. Such sports victories provide the illusion that can keep us going. Perhaps that's why, our pockets may not be able to afford it but our soul demands them and one hopes the authorities will deliver and keep that sagging spirit alive.

Vive le Cup. It holds all the meanings of our life.

Gujarat cauldron still bubbling



M ABDUL HAFIZ

determined district administration. Vivek Srivastava, Kutch's young superintendent of police had controlled the situation by arresting VHP and Shiv Sena activists who were inciting trouble and thus preempted further damage. Srivastava was 'rewarded' for doing his job by a transfer order. As soon as Srivastava was transferred Kutch went up in flames. The link is too obvious to be missed.

than the continuing violence in Gujarat today, then it must be the inverted logic that is trotted by various Sangh factions to justify it. From being sanctified as a 'natural and spontaneous reaction' to Godhra incident to being condemned as a 'legitimate expression of majority anger' one bizarre rationalisation follows another grotesque one. Having, on an earlier occasion, taken recourse to Newton's third law

there was also no serious intent on the part of Modi government to provide succour to the victims of the violence. This is not an assessment either by hostile media or secularist critic. This is the finding of an on-the-spot investigation conducted by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) led by its chairman Justice J S Verma who blamed Modi government for its 'inaction' and 'inefficiency' in 'anticipating' and

witnessed such an organised operation on such a colossal scale with a distinct intention of weeding out the religious minority through the crudest means. The process is at work even now in Gujarat where targeted attacks against Muslim minority continue although mass attacks may have slowed down.

The communal riots are not new to India and its people lived through them without the society collapsing

PERSPECTIVES

Notwithstanding the current spell of saffron onslaught the resistance to it is no less stiff. The umpteen words of concerns and condemnations coming even from the country's Hindu majority over BJP's antics are pointers. There is no dearth of the voices of conscience in India -- the land of Asoka, Akbar and Mahatma Gandhi. But when will they overtake the charade of hatred still sweeping Gujarat and put down the communal fire still burning the state?

In most other places of Gujarat the will and conscience of Srivastava were conspicuously lacking. More than ever before the police have come under heavy criticism for their complicity in the massacre. There are credible reports of policemen standing by and watching as VHP goons burn, loot and kill and there are visuals of some police actively participating in the mayhem. BJP ministers planted themselves in police control rooms, directing mobs where to attack. The widow of Ehsan Jafri, a former MP who was burnt alive outside his home said how her husband made over 200 calls for help to top police officials and politicians, all in vain.

If there is anything more horrific

to explain the inevitability of the violence Mr Narendra Modi shifted the onus of responsibility to the parliament which was then seized with intense debate on Gujarat. Mr Modi brazenly attributed the continuing incidences of lawlessness and mob violence in his state to "irresponsible statements" made by the opposition leaders on Gujarat situation. "One statement is made in Delhi and one incident of violence is reported somewhere in Gujarat," he is quoted as saying.

There are few takers either of Narendra's claims or logic except, of course, in his saffron fraternity. On the contrary not only had there no peace in the state for at least a full 600 hours after the mayhem began

'controlling' the violence.

The results were obvious. The tyrannical and partisan treatment of the helpless minority which covered as many as 40 cities and 2000 villages in India's only saffron-ruled major state saw nearly 1000 dead majority of whom were Muslims. Throwing at least 10,000 Muslims out of work, the violence rendered overnight an estimated 2,50,000 of them destitute. In Surat and Ahmedabad over 60 factories owned by Muslims have been completely gutted. In other cities all big and small commercial establishments belonging to minority have been looted. The losses incurred amount to estimated Rs 4000 crores. Never before has India

or the nation disintegrating. But what has happened in Gujarat is ominous in its intensity and sheer magnitude. If the estimates of the mobs in the FIRs registered are totalled some 12 lakh citizens including the women participated in the orgy of destruction and murder. The Hindu youth seemed to be looking for a Prabhakaran (LTTE leader) of their own. Even VHP's ebullient General Secretary (International) Pravin Togadia sees something menacing in the explosion created by his organisation. "The heat generated by Hindus is too much for a person like me steeped in the RSS culture of discipline and decorum", he said. Witnessing the programme pursued in Gujarat and elsewhere the Booker

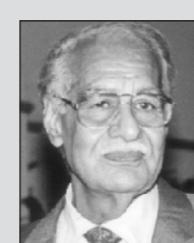
Prize winner Arundhuti Roy said: "It must be terrifying to be a Muslim in this country today."

When last month the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Shava, the decision-making body of the RSS passed a resolution that "their (Muslims') real safety lies in the good will of the majority" it was the background of the genocide in Gujarat. It was a provocative resolution essentially telling some 120 million people, the country's largest minority group to behave or to face the consequences. It was a slap even to the majority community whose goodwill for the minorities had always been honoured tradition in India. The resolution in itself also constitutes a challenge to the rule of law in the country as it is to the minorities. It is a frontal insult to the government both at the centre and the state, a slur on the face of Indian constitution and an expletive shouted at the judiciary. It is highly embarrassing for Vajpeyi dispensation which banned SIMI with exceptional alacrity but looks the other way in the face of this RSS belligerence.

Notwithstanding the current spell of saffron onslaught the resistance to it is no less stiff. The umpteen words of concerns and condemnations coming even from the country's Hindu majority over BJP's antics are pointers. There is no dearth of the voices of conscience in India -- the land of Asoka, Akbar and Mahatma Gandhi. But when will they overtake the charade of hatred still sweeping Gujarat and put down the communal fire still burning the state?

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From Jinnah to Musharraf

KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

sense as citizens of the state."

Justice Mohammad Munir, former Chief Justice of Pakistan, in his book *From Jinnah to Zia*, specially referred to the speech to argue that "the pattern of government which the Quaid-e-Azam had in mind was a secular, democratic government." Even otherwise, there is not a shred of evidence to support the thesis that he wanted a theocratic state.

the Muslim-majority states fulfilled his demand for Pakistan but he accepted "a Union of India" administering the three subjects.

The Congress party, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel, favoured a loose grouping to enable one state to leave a particular group and join any of the three proposed. The Congress only accepted the central structure.

Jinnah did not agree to the state

"Mr Jinnah ruled that the word states was a misprint. How can a chairman disregard the phraseology of the written constitution and base his ruling on his own unrecorded memory?"

It is, however, significant that the word states continued to appear even in subsequent editions of the Muslim League's constitution, which were printed under the supervision of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan,

Baluchistan, NWFP and Punjab, together with Delhi after amalgamation with Punjab); the other in northeast (Assam and Bengal excluding the districts of Bankura and Mindapur together with the district of Purnea from Bihar). It was estimated at that time that the Muslims in the northwestern state would be 20 out of 32 million, that is 63 per cent of the population and in the northeastern state 31 out of 57

ahead and take the initiative in healing the wounds of partition. One basic step is to stop militants in Pakistan going across the border and killing the innocent. This is fouling the atmosphere between India and Pakistan. He is quite right when he says in a newspaper interview that "it is the elder brother (India) who has to show magnanimity." Magnanimity does not come from a smaller partner. But if cross border terrorism continues, how can any government at New Delhi show "magnanimity"?

Recalling the Pakistan resolution or talking of "Hindu domination" does not serve any purpose at this time. Nothing could be more futile than an argument now about who was responsible for the partition of the subcontinent. Such an exercise can only be an academic discussion. But it is clear that the differences between Hindus and Muslims had become so acute by the beginning of the forties that something like partition had become inevitable.

For those who still regret the division, I can only say that the British could have probably kept the subcontinent united if they had been willing to lade out more power in 1942 when Sir Stafford Cripps tried to reconcile the aspirations of the people of India with his limited brief.

The Congress party could also have done it if it had accepted in 1946 the Cabinet Mission proposals of a centre with limited powers and the grouping of states. But the ifs of history are only footnotes, not history itself.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Nothing could be more futile than an argument now about who was responsible for the partition of the subcontinent. Such an exercise can only be an academic discussion. But it is clear that the differences between Hindus and Muslims had become so acute by the beginning of the forties that something like partition had become inevitable.

For Musharraf to rake up the past at a time when the minorities in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are feeling insecure serves no purpose except to rekindle suspicion and bias. It is not correct to say that the partition of the subcontinent took place to end the "domination of Hindus."

The fact is that some Muslim majority provinces did not want to live with the rest of India. They separated and constituted themselves into a new country, Pakistan.

In the same way, 30 years ago the Muslim majority of East Pakistan seceded from the Muslim majority of Pakistan and became the sovereign country of Bangladesh.

On the other hand, it is unfair to say that Jinnah was solely responsible for partition. He did agree to the Cabinet Mission Plan, which at the top had a common structure to deal with the three subjects of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications. No doubt, the firm grouping of

leaving option to leave one group and joining another. The entire scheme fell through.

The Lahore resolution, demanding the formation of Pakistan, said: "The areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the North Western and Eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent shall be autonomous and sovereign."

The word used was states, that is, the possibility of Bangladesh was envisaged when the resolution was adopted in March 1940. Jinnah tried water it down subsequently by saying that it was a typing mistake that made 'state' into 'states'.

Khaliquzzaman, UP Muslim League leader who seconded the Pakistan resolution, took the responsibility of adding 's' without any intention.

However, Ismail Khan, an Indian Muslim leader, said in a letter to Khaliquzzaman (October 20, 1953) that what astounded him was that

Jinnah's lieutenant.

When I asked Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then Pakistan's President after the liberation of Bangladesh, during an interview on March 5, 1972, at Rawalpindi to comment on the 'misprint' story, he laughingly said: "Quite a costly misprint; I must be careful about my stenographer." He told me that before the creation of Bangladesh, Bengali leaders raised this point. "But the creation of Pakistan was the result of a total settlement with the British; what the resolution said was not very material," he added.

It appears that the idea of creating two Muslim states was there when the Pakistan demand was first put forward. In the Archives in London, there is a report on the findings of a Muslim League committee constituted to implement the principle of the Lahore resolution.

The committee had recommended the formation of two Muslim states: one in the northwest (Sind, Baluchistan, NWFP and Punjab, together with Delhi after amalgamation with Punjab); the other in northeast (Assam and Bengal excluding the districts of Bankura and Mindapur together with the district of Purnea from Bihar).

There was not a word of regret in

Musharraf's message over the killing of the Bangladeshi intellectuals almost on the eve of the surrender by Pakistan at Dhaka. I recall that he lost his cool when a Bangladeshi journalist asked him at a seminar in Islamabad to say "sorry" for what the military had done in Bangladesh. The killings shall rankle in the mind of Bangladeshis. Musharraf would

have condoned a big wrong if he had apologised for the misdeeds of the Pakistan army at that time. In fact, Musharraf should look

Danish accusation and foreign visitors

OMAR KHAN

HE recent imbroglio between Danish Government and Shipping Minister over the issue of possible corruption or an intent to commit graft on the part of the latter is an embarrassing, disconcerting and disturbing incident. This, coming soon after the Far Eastern Economic Review article, labeling this country as a cocoon of communal terror, has an especially deleterious impact. The image and reputation of this country in the international arena may have hit rock bottom and may assume the figurative form of an international doomsday. Apparently, the incident was reported with relevant documents to the official bigwigs a couple of months ago by the Danish authorities. Our government sat on this significant file, probably hoping and wishing that the delaying tactics will make the problem go away. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was reportedly livid when she learned of the trick of concealed file and summoned Ministers, advisors and bureaucrats for explanation, deliberations, and discussions as well as to figure out necessary response and a course of action.

The traditional *modus operandi* of successive regimes, facing an acute crisis, has either been to hold frequent repeated and extended high level meetings, or to form an inquiry commission, the report of majority of which never sees the light of day. The idea usually is to obfuscate and let the issue fizzle out. There seems to have been no exception so far with the current Denmark-Shipping Ministry commotion. When immediate, decisive and resolute action is needed to restore a semblance of national pride and prestige, the

thing just drags on interminably.

The famous line in Shakespeare's Hamlet, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" is neither appropriate nor does it accurately depict the modern day Denmark. Danes are a gentle, low key, placid, peaceful people. The days of Shakespearean intrigue and conspiracy among the royalty have given way to a constitutional monarchy, similar to that in England. According to UN statistics, Denmark contributes the highest proportion of GDP as foreign assistance to needy nations. The monetary aid that Bangladesh has received over the years has been quite substantial. Denmark assists discriminately and quietly without loud drumbeat. One can only imagine the extent of frustration, exasperation and outrage that the Danish Government must have felt to make the case of a Bangladeshi Minister's alleged attempted graft public, an unconventional diplomatic practice to say the least, and withdraw the aid.

The government has to take the allegations seriously and must, for the sake of decency, truth and dignity, dig up the pertinent facts urgently and unerringly. In the meantime, the Minister in question should at least be sent to an extended hiatus until the matter is resolved and he is exonerated to remove the dark clouds of suspicion and recrimination. A scintilla of evidence and implication of wrongdoing must necessarily lead to summary dismissal and other stern actions. It just cannot be a long drawn out, jigsaw puzzle, muddled process. That would reinforce the notion of Bangladesh as the most corrupt country in the world, ranked and labeled last year by Transparency International (TI).

The regime must live up to its pledge and

OPINION

FEER and Danish allegations: Opportunities lost!

ALAMGIR HUSSAIN

writes from Singapore

MUCH has been said, too many invectives have been hurled, unlimited anger has been expressed and protests have been lodged in regard to the recent FEER piece 'Cocoon of Terror' about Bangladesh. In this bullying war of words, Bangladeshi citizenry from all spheres of life, and of course our government, have participated in their loudest tone in unison to safeguard the image of our much-loved country. Of course, certain political outfits have come out in support of FEER which is just because of their vested and despotic political interest. I don't wish to discount those few voices who have expressed concern and sought an appropriate look into the allegations. The truth is we didn't stop short of taking FEER to court for defamation which has generally been appreciated to be the best effort to withhold the secular and moderate image of our country.

By the time the heat of the above controversy had hardly subsided, our beloved country once again ran into another scandal of being accused by the Danish government of attempts for corruption by the incumbent shipping minister, first one of its nature. And our responsible government once again came out to protect the image of the country by challenging the Danish government to prove their allegation, served letter of protest (show-cause notice?). Certain members of the public also came in support of the government and even advocated to chuck the Danes out of the country and advising the government to do away with foreign aids.

Well done. We have shown amazing bravery. But the