

## Municipal polls fall-out

*Questions that beg answer from the EC*

THERE 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 debarrred 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 'a 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*

THE 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.

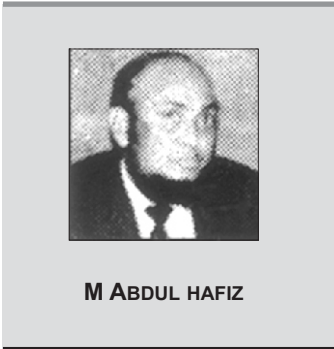
Our sports world is unfortunately more well known for political gaffes than sporting laurels. Our cricket is trundling along and after each defeat we remind ourselves that we are still young and will improve one day. Cricket players are the best paid ones in the country and in fact can count themselves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

NEARLY two months after the state's chief minister Narendra Modi, a former RSS 'pracharak' famously claimed to have brought the situation under control in 72 hours, India's worst communal violence in Gujarat since Mumbai riots in the wake of 1992 Babri mosque demolition continues to rage with varying intensity. A sullen majority is still pitted against a frightened minority sustaining a spectre of uncertainty. Fears, anxieties and insecurities are what stalk today Gujarat's once tranquil composite society. It is more than eight weeks since Gujarat began to burn in the fire of communal violence and yet its flames have not been doused. Although the Prime Minister has asked Narendra Modi that the violence has to stop, each day there are reports of more atrocities. Mr Modi however calls them only 'sporadic incidents'.

The chief minister's tall claims are belied by the poison spreading to areas till now untouched. Kutch, for example was kept quiet during the worst days by a strong and

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 condoned 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

Prize winner Arundhati 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 has 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 expulsive shouted at the judiciary. It is highly embarrassing for Vajpayee 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?

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIIS.

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?

to explain the inevitability of the violence Mr Narendra Modi shifted the onus of responsibility to the parliament which was then siezed 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 us saying.

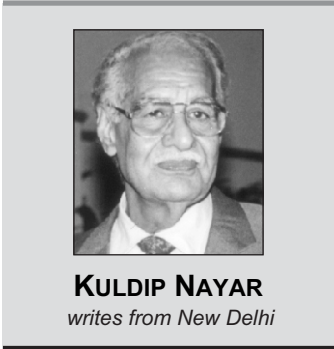
There are few takers either of Narendra's claims or logic except, of course, in his saffron fraternity. On the contrary not only had there no peace in the state for at least a full 600 hours after the mayhem began

'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 village 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 mobsie 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

# From Jinnah to Musharraf



KULDIP NAYAR

writes from New Delhi

IN a supplement on Pakistan, a Bangladesh daily carries a special message by President Pervez Musharraf. It says, among other things, that the Muslims in the subcontinent were "left with no choice except to demand independence not only from the yoke of colonialism but also from Hindu domination."

A learned Muslim and top Congress Party leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad then countered this argument which was used to articulate the demand for Pakistan more than six decades ago. He said: "It is a confession that Indian Muslims cannot hold their own in India as a whole and would be content to withdraw to a corner, specially reserved for them."

Musharraf forgets that Pakistan's founder Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, although an advocate of the two-nation theory, said in his first address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947: "We are all citizens and equal citizens of one state... I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal, and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political

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

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 to water it down subsequently by saying that it was a typing mistake that made 'state' into 'states'. Khaliqzaman, 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 Khaliqzaman (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,

million, that is, 56 per cent.

Surprisingly, the committee did not say a word on Kashmir, which led India and Pakistan to war subsequently. But the committee did suggest a central machinery "concerned with External Affairs, Defence, Communications, Customs and safeguards for minorities," something akin to the Cabinet Mission Plan.

There was not a word of regret in Musharraf's message over the killing of the Bangladesh 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

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 ladle 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.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## OPINION

## Danish accusation and foreign visitors

OMAR KHASRU

THE 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 doormat. 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 lid 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 discriminatingly 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

the popular demand of uprooting high level corruption, that over the years has given a black eye to this country. The greater control of and restrictions on the movement and activities of foreign diplomats, without evidence of impropriety, is uncalled for. It is not an expression of righteous indignation. It gives the clear impression of a spiteful retaliatory action to the allegations made by the Danish Undersecretary.

The recent spate of deportation of foreign nationals from the Zia International Airport because they failed to get visa from the country of origin smacks of paranoid nervous overreaction to the Far Eastern Economic Review article. The amount of hassle and harassment that one has to face at Bangladeshi embassies abroad are disgraceful and tedious. There has always been a provision for 45-day landing visa at Zia for foreign visitors and businesspeople. The change of policy procedure has not been disseminated abroad. In the meantime, if we summarily, suddenly and indiscriminately deport foreign nationals from the airport, it will have a detrimental and contradictory impact on concerted Bangladeshi effort to attract foreign investment, foreign aid and foreign tourists.

Let me end with another Hamlet quote, "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" The regime must deal with the allegation promptly, properly and honestly to reclaim the lost honour. Incensed, vindictive and impulsive reaction, and ill-advised and rash measures against foreign diplomats and foreign visitors are self-defeating and damaging for the country, with no possible upside.

## 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, Bangladesh citizenry from all spheres of life, and of course our government, have participated in their loudest tone in union 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 despicable 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 truth of the matter is that howsoever brave we be we can't afford to live in this present-day world outside its fold. And the fact is whatever efforts our government has made to safeguard the country's

image it has only plunged into showy spot of darkness to the outside world. Bangladesh's image has already touched rock-bottom with shameful headlines in world press one after another in recent times. First came the Transparency International report labelling Bangladesh as the most corrupt country. Then we made headlines again with unleashed atrocities against minorities during post-election period. The worst Human Rights Group report and the unspeakable law and order situation in the country to name a few more. It's hardly been any secret what kind of street support Osama and the Taliban had attracted during the America-lead Afghan war -- we will be naive if we think world hasn't observed us during those days. And the latest is the FEER piece and the Danish government's withdrawal of grants on graft charges. The way our democratic government has rejected these allegations by banning, challenging and serving show-cause notices without any look into them reflects absence of democratic norms and decorum in a supposedly democratic country.

With country's image touching the nadir in recent times, I think the recent FEER and Danish allegations could have been great opportunities to enhance our image on international scene had our government been judicious enough -- if we could address them in appropriate context by initiating proper investigations. Calling an investigation would immediately have given a credible democratic image to our country and if we could come clean after a thorough investigation, our image could improve to a great extent. Even if we couldn't come out totally clean, we could step up actions against those elements and/or corrupt authorities and that, in itself, could give a great leap in the government's image for showing sincerity to fight bad elements in the country. With top-ranking in corruption, donor countries are already reluctant to

throw aid into Bangladesh. America is already attaching condition of fighting corruption with any aid. And with the recent battering of our nation's democratic, secular and humanistic image, I should say these were two opportunities unknowingly given to our government which could cash-in on them to make some amends of its recent failures.

The irony of the matter is that our government is now planning to do away with Western aids and wish to focus on national resources and Asian aids like from Japan, China etc. The former is a good move but we have to realise that the benevolent Japanese government is already unwilling to deliver aids to our government because of misuse and mishandling. The reality is that doing away with foreign aid is just impossible in a country with unbridled corruption in every sphere, sparse talents and virtually no infrastructure and industrial development and government's optimism of continual supply of aid from Asian countries is just immature. If corruption, human rights violation and incidences of violence keep going on these neighbours can also choose to withdraw assistance. We must mind that Japan and China are strong allies in America's fight against terrorism and one must wonder how they are taking government's total reluctance to look into FEER allegations.

The fact of the matter is that it is not too late for our government to act and redeem some of our dusted image which is only good not only for the people but also for the government in a longer-term consideration. The innocent and peace-loving people of our country deserve a better image as a nation and don't definitely deserve those miseries which may befall us because of the failure of our government. We can only hope it will come out of the shell of its ego and false prestige and give a rethink to its actions regarding these controversies.