

## Intimidation at the Cox's Bazar polls

*EC caught napping, local administration in disarray*

CHAOS and mismanagement characterised the municipal polls held in Cox's Bazar on Saturday. Every don't in the manual was allowed to be played out with the Election Commission settling in a by-stander's role and the local administration buckling under the pressure of incidents before they threw in the towel.

The samples of disorder and anarchy were hardly the run-of-the-mill variety: in some constituencies gun shots were heard, bombs blasted, ballot papers got snatched away, voters and candidates were obstructed on their way to the booths, polling agents had to be withdrawn and even boycotts were announced by some voters and contestants.

Supporters of the ruling four-party alliance candidate for the commissioner's post Rafiqul Huda Chowdhury spiriting away ballot papers, seal and pad from one centre for more than two thousand voters, the administration had to stop the voting.

The atmosphere until the evening of Friday, the day before the polls was congenial but suddenly thereafter the outlook changed with *santrashis* barging in to move into action. Before voting began, the Ghonarpara centre in particular became the scene of apparently orchestrated violence. Terrorists allegedly dismantled the election camp of a candidate and threatened minority community voters not to hazard out of home; cocktails were hurled to intimidate them, which even wrought partial damage to a temple.

One chairman candidate Rashidul Islam, son of Gonoforum central committee leader Advocate Zahurul Islam complained of police and ruling alliance supporters obstructing his entry to the polling centre whereupon he withdrew his agents from it.

FEMA has reported on intimidation of minority community voters near one centre and a sprinkling of false votes in almost all the constituencies. Journalists did not receive cooperation of the local administrators.

All these are serious allegations and must therefore be gone into and taken guard against for the future. But in the meanwhile it will be necessary to fix responsibility for the law and order related laxity, especially in relation to the minority community.

The buck must stop with the EC. If such a small poll is mismanaged, what fate awaits bigger elections in the country? The Election Commission as the constitutional body entrusted with the task of carrying forward the electoral process must be able to generate public confidence in its conduct of the whole affair.

To that end, the government and the ruling party should act as one to cooperate with the EC.

## Taming the truck and bus drivers

*Haphazard parking causes most of the traffic jams*

THE issue is comparatively small but has grave consequences. Already the city roads are bursting at the seams because of too many vehicles trying to use the limited space available for traffic. The various types of vehicles-truck, buses (of many types), private cars, rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, tempos, taxis, vans, push carts, etc- that ply on our roads already make for a chaos in our road traffic. On top of that if we add the problems of bus drivers stopping anywhere they wish, especially at the intersections (see front page photograph in yesterday's issue), then we have the makings of a serious traffic problem that need to be addressed immediately.

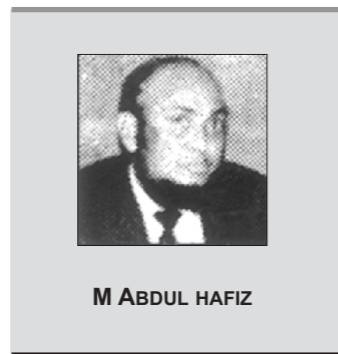
The buses will invariably stop at the road intersections to discharge and take new passengers clogging traffic. In addition to traffic chaos such loading and unloading of passengers expose the latter to the risk of serious accidents and the possibility of being run over by a speeding car which is using the adjacent lane.

The designated bus stops which in many cases are well marked and have all the facilities of protection from rain and sitting arrangements for a limited number of passengers, have mostly been rented out to vendors of various kinds and turned into mini-shopping stands, and in some cases, even into tea stalls.

Our suggestions are the following. 1. Retrieve all the already constructed bus stands, clean them up and restore their original function. In places where there are no constructed bus stands, make them. If there are no spaces available to construct full-fledged bus stops then just mark out the designated places. 2. Make sure that all bus stops are away from intersections. This is a must. 3. After accomplishing the first two we must train the bus drivers and motivate them to stop only at the designated bus stops and then of course punish them if they do not. Disciplining the bus drivers will solve big problems that affect our traffic.

What is however most disturbing is the confession of an official that 90 per cent bus driver's licences are false and contain misinformation about the bearer. How can a government, that expects to be respected, live with such a situation? It can be easily imagined how many crores of takas must have changed hands to bring such a situation to pass. As soon as possible, all drivers must be given genuine licences, which will have to be renewed periodically. Anyone with a fake licence should be given a jail term. If the drivers feel that those who give fake documents are more powerful than the police or BRTA then why should they obey the law. We urge the government to urgently address the problem of fake licences for bus and truck drivers and then adopt the above steps suggested to improve the city traffic.

# What's wrong behind Europe's right?



M ABDUL HAFIZ

SELDOM has there been so animated a debate over the rise of political right in Europe as it has now been raging in Europe itself since the French Presidential election in which Le Pen, France's ultra-right candidate polled record six million votes. Even though many still liken the phenomenon to just a historical blip there was visible alarm across the continent. France which was in the forefront to condemn Joerg Haider's rise in Austria only years before was particularly shocked and shamed and rose in massive protest virtually paralysing the country. The commotion generated was however in sharp contrast to what followed when within less than a decade of the capitalism's 'irreversible' triumph in 1989 the member states of the European Union (EU) turned their back to a long spell of rightwing politics patronising economic globalisation and new-liberal projects in Europe and their governments turned left one after another without causing a stir in European politics.

A few years back the ascent of Joerg Haider, widely dubbed as neo-nazi and racist to Austria's coalition government also participated by his Freedom Party, sparked a similar alarm in EU which was created, in part, to put an end to right wing nationalism that conjured up the spectre of instability and social unrest which had characterised Europe between the two world wars. It was such politics which whipped

up ultra nationalism and xenophobia and bred hatred among the nations. It was not thus surprising that Haider's rise to power provoked sharp reaction from the EU and triggered the country's worst diplomatic crisis since World War II putting Austria on a collision course with its partners and the United States. Before the Austrian chapter is closed with the ominous rise of far right in several other European countries the threats posed by the phenomenon are revived.

Europe, of course, has always been as much the cradle of barbarism as civilization, of racism and ethnic cleansing as well as Renaissance and democracy. The racism and fascism are also part of its history and therefore always incipient also in the present. In a vacuum of positive values they can always be whipped up by ultraright populist leaders like slain Dutch advocate of discrimination, Pim Fortuyn. His country, Holland's problems arose not so much from hostility of immi-

grants but 'from the collision between the pluralist tradition and the ways, real or imagined, of the country's Muslim residents. Fortuyn flamboyantly dramatised the encounter between the sexual and social freedom in the West and Islamic beliefs. Also otherwise, over the years the spikes in the seismicographic record of far right activity in postwar Europe and the overlapping ups and downs in the treatment of immigrants have been numerous indeed.

The anxiety now sweeping across Europe over far right is not totally unfounded. The racist parties of extreme right are already in the government in Austria, Denmark and Italy. They are resurgent in France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway and Belgium. These are however not without reasons. The main cause is, of course, attributed to the feeble state of the left. Even the European social democracy especially its labour variant has by now come to occupy

dominated by the contest between left and right and as such offered a sense of choice. That choice is no more there. For example what if the political market place that replaces it is more or less the same, that a range of products which are indistinguishable and palpably unable to offer any alternative to the status quo -- there will be no fundamental critique of the society and no different vision of the future? Historically, this is what the left offered: its very organisational basis -- the labour movement was rooted in principles which, if not always inimical to capitalism, certainly offered radically different values. The new Labour is however a different story.

Then comes the decay of democracy as a whole. The aspiration of, and ethical claim for, democracy has so far been a vehicle for representing the wishes of the entire people. However, the democracy is not as yet a target for frontal assault from fascism as it was in 1930s, but it is definitely subjected to corrosion detached -- dangerously so -- from the society it purports to represent. As a matter of fact, modern European democracy far from being enfeebled by Left/Right arguments -- as apprehended by many -- depended on it for its efficacy. Bereft of that polarity, politics has now become bold, impoverished and increasingly dominated by the market.

The most extreme form of this degeneration can be found in Italy where the trends that are apparent also elsewhere can be found in extremes. The market and democracy have become dangerously intertwined with Berlusconi, both prime minister and media mogul.

The formal trappings of the democracy remain in place but it has been largely stripped off its substance. The Italian regime is a new kind of populism which combines the tribal racism now on rise throughout the continent, European's traditional fascism, authoritarian and unscrupulous corporate power.

Another factor contributing towards the growth of new racism is the relationship between traditional European racism and the rise of migration. In a continent steeped in racist tradition like those of anti-Semitic, anti-Gypsy etc, the latent prejudice towards even more visible and even more distinctive minorities namely those of different colours and different cultures who come from outside of Europe, cannot be underestimated. And a moment of engagement with these new minorities occurs when Europe is suffering from profound loss of roots and identity. In last 30 years west European nations have become increasingly interwoven and more and more indistinguishable from each other.

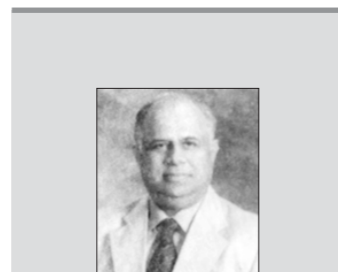
The next important factor is the US and the dangerous turn the global politics has taken since September 11. The war against terrorism has, from the outset, worn a distinctly racist colouration, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab. The western collusion in subsequent brutal Israeli aggression -- all in the name of ethnicity and race -- has only served to reinforce this. Le Pen in France and the rise of racism across Europe is no transient phenomenon. It may be the harbinger of a new and alarming configuration in European politics intimately linked to global changes. Racism is part of mainstream political, discourse in many European societies. If 1989 heralded sweeping changes in politics, the rise of racism will do likewise. It is all happening with frightening speed. Europe seems to be sliding into a new abyss. The only remaining hope is the enlightenment which first dawned on Europe in modern times and is still most sought after in Europe.

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

## PERSPECTIVES

**Racism is part of mainstream political discourse in many European societies. If 1989 heralded sweeping changes in politics, the rise of racism will do likewise. It is all happening with frightening speed. Europe seems to be sliding into a new abyss. The only remaining hope is the enlightenment which first dawned on Europe in modern times and is still most sought after in Europe.**

# Playing nuclear chicken



IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

THE President's swift decision to go with the Coalition against terrorism, and thus against the Taliban in Afghanistan, gave the world (and many of our countrymen) a wrong perception that under pressure he was a push-over. Bureaucrats have it right when they caution new entrants from taking decisions expeditiously. You will be called "hasty", they say, delay the decision-making, be "deliberate". Pervez Musharraf was right in opposing terrorism emanating from Pakistan's backyard and he was not going to allow hell to freeze over before taking a decision. The vast middle ground among the intelligentsia and the masses supported him then, and still supports him on this issue. The President gauged the west's mood after 9/11 very correctly and he confounded friend and foe alike by being decisive for Pakistan's sake at a moment of world truth. The religious parties took to the streets and even though the country waited with bated breath the fanatical lot failed to excite the masses, who while plainly

aggrieved at the abandonment of the Taliban to their fate, knew that the President had done right. A sustained Indian media and diplomatic campaign thereafter has successfully blurred "freedom fighters" from "terrorists". One can only imagine to what lengths India would have gone to if Pervez Musharraf had delayed even by a few days. Putting it bluntly, we can resist and even counter an Indian offensive, would we have been able to simultaneously resist concentrated US and allied airpower? And

ership in the same breath about the consequences of such a refusal. Realizing that the west was enamoured, however fleetingly, of Musharraf, the Indians changed their strategy but bided their time before putting their next play into operation. Looking back at the Dec 13 attack on Indian Parliament dispassionately and the "evidence" being put on the back-burner for all purposes, one comes to believe that it was a stage-managed drama to provide an excuse to bully Pakistan. Moving its entire war machine to the

costly for Indian aircraft to circumvent Pakistani territory and they have 20 times more flights every week. As for the grand gesture of the Indian Navy returning to port, what a coincidence that with the monsoon season imminent the Indian Ocean makes for very sea-sick sailors in the months of June and July. Indian Armed Forces are very much on the borders without any signs of any reduction in either their strength or their offensive posture. The steps taken do not represent de-escalation by any measure, they

immaturely in brandishing our nuclear weapons, one may well ask her, who and when? The Indians conveniently forget that it is their own surmise that Pakistan conventional forces will be forced to fall back on the tactical nuclear option when faced with being overwhelmed. Pakistan does not subscribe to this theory, this can only be tested on the battleground.

After the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the Pakistan-India nuclear confrontation is the closest to a nuclear catastrophe that the world has ever faced. The question arises, what has brought us to this flashpoint? If the world agrees with India that they had a valid reason to play nuclear brinkmanship and bring the world so perilously close to a holocaust because of these "terror" attacks, is there not a case to address the core issue of Kashmir that these attacks are the cause of? You may block the LOC, you may put the world's most sophisticated sensors, you may monitor from satellites, the indigenous revolt within Kashmir will continue to fester, as night turns to day and day turns to night, these will go on and on. History is replete with numerous instances of successful indigenous uprisings against repression. What then? With India having no one but to blame themselves, Pakistan will again become a convenient scapegoat. Sooner rather than later, the Indians will force us into another round of playing nuclear chicken.

are simply propaganda points the Indians wanted to score with the world. Already they have used nuclear blackmail to good effect to get significant concessions from the west. In the process they have inadvertently brought international focus on Kashmir and this won't go away easily even though their surrogates within the Pakistani media are all for Pakistan forgetting Kashmir. Pakistan did not play the nuclear card, the Indians did and it has significantly backfired on them. In a blatant piece of misinformation the Indian spokesperson Ms Rao has been putting out that we have acted

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

## AS I SEE IT

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to what purpose?

The illusion that the President was a pushover was reinforced by a rare combination of the liberal Press on the left and the conservatives on the right. Hemmed in by catcalls of a sellout, he got us the best deal he could under the circumstances. What is now clear is that he was buying time for Pakistan, and that he did at great personal cost. Musharraf is a person who wants to be liked, he put his own popularity on the line. Some of our pseudo-intellectuals went to town in print on why our leadership lacked the necessary spine to stand up to the US, they failed to inform their read-

Pakistan borders, India threatened Pakistan with extinction unless Pakistan complied with India's demands. When Pakistan refused to roll over and play dead, their bluff was called. With the brief Gujarat hiatus over, the Jammu incident became the new reason for India's threats to go to war. India continued whipping up war hysteria within India. Having failed to cow down Pakistan, the Indians proceeded to involve the world by building up a nuclear war scare internationally, using the west to put pressure on Pakistan.

While Pervez Musharraf was playing "Johnny Cool", a perception

the British came first with Chris Patten (of Hong Kong fame), and then Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary. Both were more loyal than the king, parroting the Indian line without batting an eyelash but they did not manage to browbeat Musharraf either. Richard Armitage, the US Under Secretary of State, was more even-handed and things started to move. Now that US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has come and gone, the ice seems to be melting. Very generously India has "allowed" overflights of Pakistan aircraft and recalled the Indian fleet back to port. They failed to mention that it is many times more

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## Lest we forget

# Ambassador Humayun Kabir: Close to the grassroots

RUHUL AMIN MAZUMDAR

TODAY is the first death anniversary of Ambassador Humayun Kabir who passed away at Chittagong Medical College Hospital on 17th June, 2001. Suddenly he ran high temperature in Bandarban, where he was staying all by himself. It was first suspected to be viral fever. He was then sent to Cox's Bazar for better treatment. His condition however deteriorated fast and he wanted to be removed to Dhaka. The Birman captain refused to fly him from Cox's Bazar to Dhaka as his condition was critical. He was then rushed to Chittagong and at the time of his admission into CMC hospital he registered himself as Humayun Kabir, village Darga Mahal, district Bagerhat. To obtain special care and attention he could have given a long list of important positions he occupied during a career of more than forty years. But he deliberately refrained from disclosing his identity. He was content to be an ordinary citizen of the country which he loved so intensely. He never felt that he was a VIP.

After retirement in December 1996, Ambassador Kabir made a conscious decision to return home, poverty, pollution and dirty politics notwithstanding. He genuinely wanted to serve the deprived people. If he wanted he could have stayed back and settle either in USA or elsewhere but he preferred to be back in the familiar surroundings which attracted him most. Having

spent the best part of his life outside the country he used to tell me that his soul always stayed back where he was born. If he wished he could have procured for himself a lucrative job of prestige and perks; alternatively, he could have jumped into the bandwagon of a political party. No, he was not cut out for this. Instead he preferred to be with the downtrodden and the underprivileged. He chose for his area of operation a remote place in Bandarban where the tribal people needed basic amenities of life like home, health and education -- poverty alleviation in real sense. It is unfortunate that he could not live long enough to see his mission fulfilled.

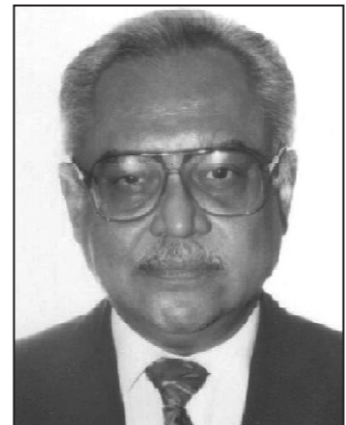
Humayun Kabir was a many splendored personality. His historic meetings with Imam Khomeini when he was Bangladesh Ambassador in Iran, with Butros Butros Ghali the UN Secretary General and with President Clinton when he presented his credentials are legends. Newspapers carried interesting stories about these events. His position brought him into close contact with internationally important personalities -- politicians, diplomats and intellectuals. But his love and affection for people who were not necessarily up in the ladder of the society gave him the spice of life. Although at ease with the world leaders with whom he often came in contact he was more comfortable in the company of a classmate from his school life in Nilphamary or a personal assistant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or a Bangladeshi taxi driver in New

York. He was very fond of his friends. His warm Bangladeshi hospitality is something no one can forget. There is a long list of people in this country who enjoyed his generous care in places like Harare, Madrid, New York and Washington.

Many important people consoled his death. Many others attended his *janaja* and *qulqhwani*. Some of our common friends wrote reminiscences which were published in dailies of Dhaka. The best tribute however was paid to him by an octogenarian farmer who came all the way from a village in Kaliakari. Missing the burial in Bangladeshi graveyard by a few minutes this old man started crying like a child. He was no relation of Humayun Kabir. He got the news about his burial through a newspaper that morning. In connection with some Swarnirwar work, he told me later on, Mr. Kabir stayed with his family for a week. To him Mr. Kabir was no less than an angel. Even after the burial was over he stayed on, wept and prayed for him. Condolence messages from politically important people are certainly no match to the prayers of this man.

Humayun Kabir had many achievements to his credit. He was a brilliant student (first class first in his BA exam) and a popular student leader (General Secretary of SM Hall Students Union). He was possibly the only Ambassador of this country who successively and successfully held two most important positions, Permanent Representative to the United Nations and Ambassador in Washington. He was a great organizer. In 1972 the

country became independent with virtually no Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There was no office, no manpower and no foreign policy guidelines. Flood of visitors was wanting to visit Bangladesh. Diplomatic missions had to be set up in



Late Ambassador Humayun Kabir

countries which recognized Bangladesh. Mr. Farook A. Choudhury and Mr. Kabir set up a one room foreign office in Bangabhaban. They started issuing visas to incoming journalists and establishing contacts with governments all over the world. The ministry of Foreign Affairs was started literally from scratch. This was a Herculean job, no doubt. Working day in and day out Messrs. Choudhury and Kabir performed miracles.

I did not call Humayun Kabir by

his nick name or his family name. I called him 'Excellency' long before he became a full fledged Ambassador. Nothing in his life happened during the last forty plus years of our friendship which he did not share with me. I knew so much about him that he jokingly used to call me his biographer. Like many other friends I miss him every moment. I think he died too soon. He could have contributed a lot to the society if he lived for another 10-15 years.

Humayun Kabir had an instinct to take care of small things which many others would overlook as unimportant. On 10 January, 1972 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned from Pakistan via London and New Delhi. From the airport he was taken to Ramna Race Course ( Suhrawardy Uddyan) where the largest ever reception was waiting for him. Finally he landed at the Dhanmohi residence. From nowhere Humayun appeared in the scene and handed over to Bangabandhu his suitcases and few other precious small things. As a mark of appreciation Bangabandhu patted Humayun on the back and said "Aren't you one of our boys? Who else could do it?" If Humayun did not take care of the baggage at the airport where everybody was rushing mad to have a glimpse of the leader, this nation would have lost some valuable 'things to remember'.

Humayun Kabir was an eloquent speaker. He was the most stylish debater during his student life. Nobody knows how many first prizes he won in his life. When

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came to visit Bangladesh in 1973 a banquet was given in his honour in Bangabhaban. The speech Bhutto delivered on the occasion was not free from unpleasant reference to the past. Bangabandhu was annoyed and chose to deliver his speech in Bengali. Although many senior bureaucrats were present on the occasion Bangabandhu asked Humayun Kabir to translate his speech into English so that Bhutto could follow. In the translation there was more than the original speech. Humayun added cosmetics and appropriate retorts. Bangabandhu was so much moved by the wonderful translation that he later on embraced my Excellency and emotionally said "Humayun, you have saved my face tonight. I am very proud of you."

Despite many such laurels Humayun Kabir suffered at times in his career. I think he was a victim of his success. He suffered silently but never complained publicly or privately as he was a thoroughbred gentleman. He was a typical bureaucrat and a loyal servant of every government.

The irony of fate was that he was often misunderstood. Ershad thought he was Zia's man. Khaleda thought he had links with Awami League and Hasina thought he was a BNP man.

During the Iran-Iraq war President Ziaur Rahman shuttled between Dhaka and Tehran frequently. As the Ambassador of Bangladesh in Tehran it was Humayun's duty to look after the president of the country. Along with

President Zia he also came into news very often.

Soon after Ershad grabbed power throwing out a democratically elected President he ordered a transfer for Humayun Kabir from Tehran to Dhaka. Humayun was at that time under order of transfer from Tehran to Istanbul and his personal belongings already reached Turkey. The Foreign Ministry could not care less. He had to come back and on arrival was posted out to the Ministry of Communications. At that time, I remember Humayun saying "They (the govt.) may give me a sweeper's job but they do not know that I will do the sweeping better than anybody else". As a joint secretary as well as chairman of BRTC he left his mark. When he was chairman, a BRTC bus met with an accident at Savar. It was a weekly holiday and Humayun had no transport with him. He phoned me for help. We two traveled to Savar. He personally supervised the rescue operation, consoled the accident victims and their family members. His presence gave a lot of strength and courage to the rescue operators.

Humayun Kabir's performance as an Ambassador is well known. He had an inborn flair for high level salesmanship which is called diplomacy. We all thought he would get an automatic extension in Washington but he never lobbied any quarters for this. He was to retire in December 1996. Both his daughters, coincidentally, were to take their final exams within three months of his retirement. Most reluctantly he asked for an exten-

sion of three months so that he could return to Bangladesh with his family members. At the behest of Bangabandhu's daughter, I was told, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs turned down his request, asked him to leave his post and return to Bangladesh forthwith. Like a loyal bureaucrat he complied. This is how he was paid for his loyalty to Bangabandhu who loved him like a son.

Common friends of Humayun have got endless sweet memories of our association with him. Last year he attended Salimullah Muslim Hall Alumni Association's annual get together at the Officers' Club. He was there the whole day and took the opportunity to reminisce his university days. Those who were present there will recall that his speech was one of the best. We were deeply touched. In a moment he took us back to the 1950s and we felt so nostalgic. At a subsequent meeting of the association it was considered appropriate to repeat the recorded speech and everyone present virtually cried because by then he was gone never to return!

Although I was his so called biographer I could not write anything when he died. I filed in my moral obligation. I owe my 'Excellency' a heavy debt. I just scribbled a few words of reminiscences and in the process if I have been able to redeem a portion of my debt I think I can sleep in peace.

On this day I pray to Allah to grant Ambassador Kabir a place in heaven. May his soul rest in peace.