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Congress wins

We are delighted to know the results of the general elections in India. And we hail the Congress's victory not for defeating the BJP, but for the fall of politics based on religion. We hope this win will shift Indian politics from communal violence and religious polarisation of the masses to a neutral, democratic and tolerant culture. It should also be a lesson for the fanatic political parties in other South Asian countries.

However, we expect that the new Indian government will solve the tricky issues with Bangladesh like sharing of water and border tension through peaceful negotiations.

Rubab Abdullah
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

BJP's debacle

In the Indian polls, the Congress has routed the BJP led NDA coalition. Mr Vajpayee's "India shining" motto boomeranged on the BJP. The BJP had many shortcomings that wreaked havoc on it. They played a dubious game with secularism. The Gujarat pogrom and politicisation of the Ram Mandir issue are examples of the BJP's game plan. They highlighted the IT sector but ignored the peasantry. Their success was absolutely cosmetic. Mr Vajpayee's mega river linking project was also not approved by a huge number of Indians. Their objection to Sonia's nationality was outrageous. The BJP wanted to capitalise on the recent camaraderie between India and Pakistan. But it did not work.

India is a vast country. Its development should not be confined to Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore only. Indian people want an

egalitarian society. Sonia Gandhi, the spouse of Rajiv Gandhi, is active in Congress politics for many years. She is going to be the next premier of India. The leaders of Bangladesh should take lesson from the Indian polls. Mr Vajpayee resigned instantly without any demur. They accepted the people's mandate without any hesitation. But in Bangladesh crude rigging, gross rigging and subtle rigging follow the election results.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Dept of English, DU

Lessons to learn

The Indian prime minister resigned soon after the election results had been declared. The BJP had many a time criticised Sonia Gandhi for being a foreigner, but she also did not lose her patience, and replied to all these accusations very politely. They both showed tolerance and respect to each other. These are only a few of the examples of good characters, which the general people expect from the politicians.

But unfortunately, we the people of Bangladesh are seeing different scenarios every time before and after the elections. In our speeches we severely attack the opponents, and the opponents also brutally answer those attacks in their speeches. We after coming to power always claim that the opposition party had done nothing good for the people, all the good deeds are being done by only us. And if we lose the election, we do not want to resign.

There is a lot to learn from our neighbouring country, besides the Hindi films and songs.

Nazrul Islam Rizvi
Teacher, Scholastica School, Uttara



PHOTO: AFP

Magic at lake

In my exercise regime, I took a walk to the bridge at Road 7, Dhanmondi. The flowers, trees and the horizon were still shrouded in the veil of secrecy. A transient misty haze hung in the day-night interlude. The air was balmy, refreshing,-- and the eyes were in respite from the glare that come pouring from the vivid summer sky. Overhead birds could be heard chirping across the lake.

The water view of the lake was healing, -- a sigh of relief in the non-stop urban conversation. I got a nostalgic flashback of my village river that I visited last time.

The podium that sits on the edge of the lake water had a small crowd of health-seekers. Some boys and girls were lost in their musical outpourings of life and nature, a profusion that was precious beyond measure. Tagore is divine.

Syed Badrul Haque
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Unjustified

It is true that the Awami League's ultimatum to bring the government down from power on April 30 has failed. But the Awami League's cry,

protest against the government for its damaging activities against the well-being of the people and the country may be based on genuine grievances. The government has left no stone unturned to suppress the protests in unjustified and undemocratic ways. If the protest and movement against the government was spontaneous then a lot could have happened. If the government i.e. parties in power did not deploy and use armed police and allowed the protesters to come out on the streets, it could be judged whether the public wanted the government or not.

It is true that an elected government has every right to rule the country and to protect the interests of the people and the state. But it has no right to resort to repression.

Alauddin Khan
Taltola, Khilgaon, Dhaka

Too many holidays?

The recent 'holidays' week in May 2004 has been sarcastically pointed out in the press. It is time the authorities reviewed the situation through a public debate.

In the LDCs, there is a fondness and attachment for remembering

the past and indulge in a large number of holidays and sentimental anniversaries, compared to the pragmatic attitude in the developed world, where the options are left to the private sector. Sentimentalism has to be guarded, and must not stand in the way of efficiency in public service. The loss of man-hours is staggering in a year.

The number of official holidays may be reduced gradually, and the optional and other special types of holidays increased, so that public activities suffer less. Most of the public offices may be kept running with skeleton staff, and those who volunteer for duty on holidays may be compensated in some way (usually one day's extra basic salary for the day). The ceremonies have to be cut down, and trimmed. The useful data from such outputs have to be published for crating healthy public opinion.

On the other hand, it is a fact that a large number of employees in the big cities keep their families at their ancestral homes, and have to go 'home' at periodical intervals. To lessen the strain on the pocket, special travel passes may be made available at a discounted rate for

such 'home' trips. This may reduce 'French' leave.

Alfa Ahmed
Dhaka

Inspectors are not working!

As the head of a family, it is a matter of concern to note that the inspectors and monitors in the public services in the different government departments and agencies are not working diligently and honestly, judging from the institutionalised corrupt practices prevailing in the society, and the almost complete absence of news on their activities in the mass media. They can catch neither the big fish nor the small fries, although the society is floating on 'oil', and the country is floating on gas!

The cabinet is aware of it, hence the government may be pleased to announce some stringent measures against the defaulters. Disciplinary action is not being taken or is delayed due to alleged political interference and cover. The service rules may be reviewed to introduce some clauses fixing allowances proportionate to the number of cases convicted. Similar is the case of neglect in operation and maintenance (viz. the factories and the utility services in the public sector).

There is too much politics all around, with too little political output. The inputs are impure, as these are not sorted out properly, while the internal processing is dubious. The question is how to rule the country?

Abdul M Ahmed
Dhaka

An unbearable agony

I am an engineer very unfortunately married to a daughter of a government officer, presently retired. All family members of my father-in-law including my wife very often advise me to boost up living standards, to increase monthly expenditure to the level of the brother-in-law of my wife. But it is not so easy on my part. My father-in-law very often questions about my simple life style and fingers to his other son-in-law, an engineer of Roads and Highways Department. He criticises my simple clothing and poor ranks of my relatives. My father-in-law is very much proud of his blood, house and sons, openly expressing the disgrace he feels for me.

Even though it is certain that the origin of their pride are mainly bribes and the illegal commissions from the government clients, but they are not ashamed of disclosing their earning sources, rather they take pride saying that people bring money to them and force them to receive it. They say, "we are so important persons that people happily give us money."

Within a small time, that very brother-in-law has made a lot of fortunes. He has big apartments in the posh areas of Dhaka, although his monthly salary is not supposed to be more than TK 12,000. And my father-in-law made a house worth taka more than 10 million and he bought a lot of landed property in his home district, although his average monthly salary was not more than Tk 15,000.

On the contrary, my average monthly earning is about taka 75,000. During the last 16 years of service life, I could not reach the economic level expected by my father-in-law, because I supported

my parents' family and my own higher education abroad.

On May 1, 2004, I was scheduled to leave for Hiroshima, Japan, to join a contract-basis job for six months. Accordingly, I gave my wife taka one lakh for monthly expenditures. She got angry realising that the money is not enough for six months. But I promised her to send additional money when she will need it. However, she was not happy. On 28th April she asked money for daily needs. I gave her Tk 500. "It is not the price of even a fish," she replied.

Who and what will be responsible for this agony? Isn't it the bribe culture which is now accepted socially?

A sufferer
Kallyanpur, Dhaka

UN walking into unknown terrain

History repeats itself and the burning example is the US-led alliance which has to suffer dire consequences in the long run in Iraq. I have seen how brutally a group of beasts was torturing the war prisoners in Iraq. Where are the UN and its human rights, Geneva Convention and Amnesty International? In Iraq, US Yankees are torturing the naked, helpless prisoners and they don't bother about the conventions or treaties. Obviously, it is a conspicuous violation of human rights. Then, the UN, are you deaf and dumb, lame and blind? Can't you do anything there? You can put restriction on Saddam's war-torn Iraq. You can ban the 'Taliban government.' (Saddam was a tyrant ruler and 'Taliban' was a fundamentalist state.) then why not the US? Today everywhere it is fighting against the general Iraqi people, threatening Syria and Iran, killing poor Afghan people. It also used harmful precision bombs and cluster bombs on general Afghan and Iraqi people in the recent wars.

Probably, you can't do anything. You talk about democracy and human development. What kind of development, is it to kill innocent people? What kind of democracy is it? Rantissi is dead, Arafat is passing his days in front of the door of death. By whom? certainly Israel. Everything is going on calmly and smoothly where you (UN) have nothing to do. Then what is the justification of your existence?

Now, I believe that the UN is not a 'United Nations'. Rather it is an association for toast and tea, coffee and Pepsi cans. It is an association to pass bill against Arafat, to say 'yes' in favour of Israel (By giving a veto to the condemnation bill). The US used its veto power and dismissed the 'condemnation bill' which was submitted by the Muslim nations to condemn the killing of the physically disabled Hamas chief. The UN was established to save mankind from another world war but it has already begun in a new form. It is a new kind of war for (oil) and money. S Korea, Poland, Japan, Thailand, Australia, the UK and the US and many other states are playing the role of conquerors in Iraq. It is certainly a burning question as to how many countries you need (in the US-led alliance) to declare it a new kind of world war.

The UN has failed against a monster. A monster which believes

in democracy (!), which does not want to harm, any human being (!), preserves human rights (?), replaces the tyrant suppressor (though it is itself a suppressor) and kills the innocent people to save the world!

The UN mission is lost in the maze of global politics dominated by the only superpower.

Rizwan Ul-Huq
Khulna

Small enterprise re-financing scheme

Bangladesh Bank issued a circular on May 02, 2004 containing the salient features of Tk 1.00 crore scheme for income generation through the expansion of small industries and business activities in the country.

This commendable initiative of the government, for the first time, is one of the visionary endeavours to regenerate the growth of SME for balanced economic development contributing much to GDP.

It has indicated that a loan of Tk 2.00 to Tk 50.00 lakh will be given through schedules banks to small enterprises to be re-financed by Bangladesh Bank to the schedule

bank at the prevailing bank rate.

Undoubtedly, such kind of fiscal measures are required to ensure the millennium development goal and reduce the poverty level by half within 2015 AD. Unfortunately, the scheme as announced needs few modifications to attain its objectives as follows:-

1) It has been stated that the industry and business enterprise having Tk. 1.00 crore as assets will be defined as "Small Enterprise". There is however, doubt whether an organisation, having such an amount of asset may be interested to take Tk 2.00 lakh as loan.

2) The salient features do not cover all enterprises involved in agricultural sector or engaged in off-farm activities.

3) The rate of interest to be charged should have been specific. It has been stated that refinancing by Bangladesh Bank to scheduled banks will be at the prevailing bank rate. But there should have been a binding clause that no scheduled bank will demand service charge of more than one per cent to make it attractive and thus, confine the rate of interest to less than six per cent.

4) As regards the collateral security,

the circular is silent. It means that the Bank may demand security of Tk 1.00 crore for the loan of Tk 2.00 lakh only which will surely discourage the small enterprises to come forward to avail the opportunities of this scheme.

5) For processing such a small loan, schedule banks may not be interested and therefore, there should have been some obligatory instructions from the central bank to this effect.

6) The objective of this scheme is to support and safeguard the marginal and small enterprises as safety net. Unfortunately, the salient features did not entail any clause to protect the small enterprises in case of any default in payment.

In fact, our goal is poverty alleviation by ensuring macro economic stability in the country. This scheme should look into this vision more seriously to make the advances fully utilised in letter and spirit.

Dhiraj Kumar Nath
Dhaka

Fall of Baghdad and its aftermath

With the celebration of the first year of Iraq occupation, the US led coalition forces are facing intensified uprisings almost every day in every nook and cranny in the soil of the world's cradle of civilisation. Most of the Iraqi people, both civilians and insurgents, are directly or indirectly raising their voice against the fiendish invaders. As a result, sporadic skirmishes rage through the main cities of Iraq. The US, along with some of its staunch allies, trespassed the Gulf country on some absurd pretexts that the country possessed a tyrant regime, weapons of mass destruction and was maintaining a direct link with al-Qaeda, albeit it was proved to be a sheer lie.

After the toppling of the autocratic Saddam regime, the inhabitants of Iraq heaved a sigh of relief. But their assertions went wrong very soon when they witnessed the pillage of their pristine city. After the fall of Baghdad, their beloved country went under the clutches of some alien invaders and they experienced a total disorder of their home land both socio-economically and administratively. They are passing their days like 'aliens within their own country'. These are giving them the impression of being imprisoned in the hand of their so-called liberator! Although The US had to transfer the power to an Iraqi administration, but now they are playing hide and seek with it.

For these reasons, some insurgents are becoming more furious and rebellious and every day scores of innocent lives are being lost amidst the battles. The situation will turn even more critical if the Bush administration does not find a pragmatic solution as soon as possible.

In the meantime coalition forces caused colossal and irreparable loss to the sovereign country by waging an unjustified war. The US forces came to Iraq with the slogan of liberating the Iraqis from the oppressors, but ironically their so-called benevolent instincts started changing toward a diabolical deception.

We condemn the excesses committed by the US and British troops in Iraq.

Mihir Kumar Das
Jagannath Hall, DU



Everest Team: adventure, not misadventure

My attention was drawn to the letters of Mr. Saif and Mr. Rajib Das published in The Daily Star on Bangladesh Everest Team. As a member of this team, I feel like saying something regarding our activities. At the beginning I thank Saif and Rajib for their letters.

All the members of Bangladesh Everest Team-1 have the experience to trek nearly all the high mountains of Bangladesh. And the members of the second team know as 'Mountain Dew team Extreme' are very young and have recently been recruited under our guidance.

It is important to say mountaineering and climbing are not a matter of joke. We know it well. To become a climber and mountaineer a very tough training and hard work is must with first class physical and mental abilities. In the mean time, eight mountaineers of Bangladesh have completed basic mountaineering course from various mountaineering institutes of India. At present two members are undergoing training. Six members are on the way to Everest Base Camp for feasibility study and acclimatisation. Individual and team preparations are going on simultaneously in a very pre-planned manner. In September, the seniors will take part in advance course and juniors will do the basics. Each and every one is bound to complete four types of courses to gather mountaineering knowledge. We have a plan to summit a peak within October-November, 2004. Through this type of continuous efforts a good number of climbers and mountaineers will come out. Through this type of programme within five to ten years, a group will be formed for final expedition targeting Everest.

On 21st September, 2003, Bangladesh Everest team was formed. But that was not the beginning. Maruf, Reja and Ripon three youths of Dhaka trekked Keokeradong in 1998 and from then trekking became popular in Bangladesh.

We are not expecting sudden success. Our expectation is high but we are just the beginners of the relay. The coming generation will hoist the red-green flag on the top.

M Shamsul Alam Babu, North Dhanmondi, Dhaka