

Iraq election passes off

Still more miles to go

DESPITE the threat of terror attacks and its actual conversion into suicide bombings in places, the turn-out in the Iraq election has been large, more than what the occupation forces, and even the political analysts, had expected. But the pattern has been exactly what was predicted, the Sunnis, a significant segment of Iraqi polity had stayed away, true to the pre-polls survey which indicated that as much as 70% of the Sunnis preferred not to vote.

However, in elections like these, it is the procedure, the time-frame and the participation, more than the outcome that count. But, seeing the Sunnis who held the reins of power so far, un-represented, brings forth the question of any enduring efficacy of the election or the fulfillment of the aim that the election was designed to accomplish. National reconciliation very much remains the issue.

Even though, the majority community Shias have been catapulted into power after a long period of denial and the Kurds in the north have a sense of vindication of their own, so long as the actual levers of control are not relinquished by the US-led allied forces, the Iraqi exercise of power remains elusive.

Inasmuch as one sees in the election and in the high turn-out, albeit in selective areas, a clear indication of the Iraqis' desire to take the future reins of their country in their own hands, one also cannot fail to see the clear indication of the ballot, that they would like to see an end to occupation.

But much remains to be accomplished. Given that the polls will elect a constituent assembly, whose task it would be to draw up a constitution, to be approved by a plebiscite, a constitution framed without the inputs from the Sunnis and their participation in its framing, would only deprive it of the legitimacy that it needs to be vested with to be acceptable to all the parties concerned.

This is where the UN has to come in a more tangible and robust way to ensure that Iraq, given the make-up of its society, its multi-cultural and multi-ethnic character with fissiparous tendencies, does not disintegrate. Something that is not beyond the realm of possibility, if all the views and aspirations of all ethnic components and other minorities are not adequately represented in the future democratic dispensation in Iraq.

Taste of double series victory

No looking back from here

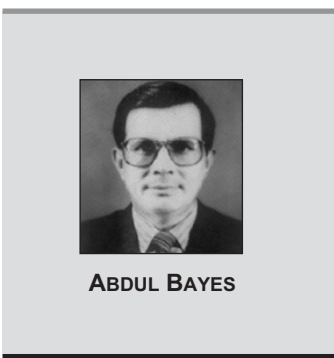
IT was a great moment for our cricket. After the historic Test series win, our boys have added another feather to their cap -- the first ever ODI series victory. Congratulations, Tigers.

It was not an easy sailing. They lost the first two matches and were on the verge of facing the same scathing criticism that came their way ever since Bangladesh became a member of the elite club. But they demonstrated the kind of determination and fighting spirit that we had seen rarely in the past. It was a wonderful comeback. The final was a truly exciting encounter as both sides were looking forward to clinching the series. The Zimbabweans were off to a good start , but once again our spinners took charge of the situation and the hosts could only reach a modest 198. Spin bowling is definitely one department where the boys have improved beyond measure, following the tradition of this subcontinent.

But then the thing that the huge number of cricket fans enjoyed most yesterday was some real fireworks by the two Bangladesh batsmen, Aftab and Rafique. It was a great match for young Aftab who played some superb shots all around the wicket. It was ruthless clubbing at its best! Rafique, too, showed that he has matured into a genuine all-rounder. The Zimbabwean bowlers were never allowed to settle on their line and length and they watched helplessly as the Bangladeshi batsmen powered their way to the target in 33 overs, leaving the crowd in a state of sheer ecstasy. They had reason to be elated. Cricket can indeed be a source of joy.

But we should not rest on the oars of home series victories against a none-too-strong side. The sense of triumph, great as it is, must not be allowed to blur our vision of the future. We will have to compete against far stronger teams in future to prove our real worth in the international cricket arena. The challenge ahead is a tough one and can be met successfully only if the boys continue to improve the way they have in recent months. Coach Dave Whatmore has lived up to his reputation in a truly convincing manner; he has already honed a bunch of talented yet raw youths into a fighting unit. They should now be prepared to play competitive cricket at the highest level on a sustainable basis with some confidence-building victories under their belt.

Kibria's death and devil's days



ABDUL BAYES

LIKE millions in the country, I mourn over the brutal murder of SAMS Kibria, MP. Any nation should be proud of producing a personality like Kibria -- one of the most brilliant, highly cultured, mild mannered and internationally reputed diplomat. He marked his presence in language movement, became a freedom fighter and, at the fag end of his fine career, joined politics to serve the country that he fought for. I had personal contacts with him. I was blessed with his love and regard for me. Off and on, we had discussions on the socio-economic and political situation in the country.

As a finance minister, I found him fond of hearing from others, rather than unilaterally delivering his options. Sound, soft-spoken and sensible -- he had the typical traits of Monmohan Singh of India. I must note that during his tenure as a finance minister, Bangladesh reached an economic growth rate of 5 per cent plus for consecutive years -- still an unbroken record. The then Awami League government pursued a path of growth with social justice -- a vision that he vehemently carried to his colleagues.

People of the country at that time were relatively more in peace and prosperity. Kibria had never had his knee down to donors.

Deaths are destined with births and therefore expected to visit every one of us today or tomorrow. But some deaths are unacceptable, as they are unbefitting, especially, in a civilized society. And I would like to deny the death of SAMS Kibria. He was killed in a grenade attack while holding a public meeting in a remote area called Baiddar

witness such deaths of leaders and workers of other political parties also.

Our government claims to be elected and democratic. What kind of democracy it is where opposition leaders and workers are killed in a series of attacks? I was listening to Mr Abdul Mannan Bhuya who termed the killing as an act of 'anti-state' and "anti-democracy" people. We are told that the President of the country and the Prime Minister also held the same view. Is it

runs the notion -- the government set up an enquiry commission headed by a justice -- allegedly with political lenience to the party in power -- to send the report, as it seems, to the cold storage.

Initially, the reactions from the government were sensible but soon turned out to be seriously grievous when the blame started to be put on Awami League's shoulder! Even when the so-called enquiry was 'in progress', astonishingly, some top leaders of the ruling party argued that

Kibria by a helicopter from Hobigonj. Mr. Kibria was not an ordinary man. Beside, his extraordinary antecedents was a member of the parliament and a former finance minister. The news of the blasts and the injuries would not have taken much time to take actions. Maybe, a timely treatment could save this valuable life.

By any standard of judgment, the law and order situation in the country is at its lowest ebb. The overall efficiency of the government is also in serious question.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

With the untimely death of SAMS Kibria, the nation lost a pure politician -- highly educated, cultured, logical and committed to the cause of the people. Such type of politicians are very rare in present day Bangladesh. But the way things are moving and the way government is failing to contain terrorism, I fear, such politicians would be on an extinct very soon.

Bazar under Hobiganj district. After the end of his speech, while descending from the dias, reportedly, assassin's grenade blasted to claim 5 lives including Kibria's and many others are still groaning with injuries.

The most pertinent question at the moment in my mind, nay in many minds is: what is happening in the country? Where Bangladesh is heading? It seems that, one by one, Awami League leaders and workers are being killed to eliminate the spirit of secularism from the soil. It also seen that grenade attacks or bomb blasts are mostly targeted to that party. Had it been a random incident -- not planned and purposive -- we would possibly

so, Sirs?

If yes, then we are surprised to see that the so-called anti-state and anti-democracy elements are growingly assuming enormous power. These criminals and terrorists are up to negate the government and the state that the party in power claims to have been mandated to look after. Just recall the 21 August incident. A series of grenades were thrown to kill Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the opposition. Luckily she escaped death but a score lost lives including Ivy Rahman. Some top leaders of Awami League were seriously wounded. What was the role of the government in catching the criminals? As an eyewitness -- so

Sheikh Hasina might have garnered the grenade attack to raise public sympathy! All such suspicious of the ruling alliance, we presume, went as shelter for the criminals. The most barbaric incident could hardly get a berth through discussions in the parliament about the deteriorating law and order situation in the country. While the government or the party in power might not be directly involved in such heinous acts -- and I hope so -- its dilly-dallying in bringing the criminals to the book and illogical arguments to cover its inability or inefficiency tend to go a long way to establish the contrary.

We fail to understand why the government failed to bring SMAS

The Principal Secretary of the PM has been prized with an extension for the fourth time. This is rare and ridiculous too. It seems that the administration is void of talents. Allegedly, party loyalists -- even if corrupt or inefficient -- are getting extensions and promotions while the competent ones are being guillotined. If it's muscles replacing merits then it's a sign of substantial sickness for a society stepped into modern management.

On the other hand, allegedly, RAB had been raising score in the name of containing terror. They are not only catching criminals but also killing them in 'cross fire'. Crossfire is a random action where both the sides are suscepti-

PRSP: Prophecy versus pragmatism

Local governments should be the focal point before money is placed

SHAMSUL HAQUE

IN Dec 2004 the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was finalised for Bangladesh by a group of economists and bureaucrats. Noticeable euphoria and excitement were shown on TV screens by some of those directly involved in its preparation. On the other side of the globe Jeffrey Sachs, an economist at the Earth Institute at Columbia University in New York, has been arguing for more aid for the poor of the world for long. He has been supporting this IMF led project changing his previous stance on effectiveness of IMF. Sachs was a critic of earlier IMF prescribed Structural Adjustment Programmes as it failed to reduce poverty in most of the participating countries. All these have been going on in the background of the UN sponsored Millennium Development Goal to reduce the number of poor people in the world by half by 2015. Sachs has been joined recently by Gordon Brown, the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, calling for a Marshall Plan for developing African nations, the poorest of all. George Marshall, the then US secretary of state, designed the Plan in 1947 that transferred \$13.1 billion in financial support to Europe before shutting it down in 1951. Gordon Brown was speaking on the subject in Cape Town, South Africa, in the background of the report prepared by The Commission on Africa, a policy group set up by Tony Blair, UK prime minister.

Last week a local newspaper reported that the finance minister called the PRSP paper as "bo-

gus" one without mentioning why it was so. Perhaps his comment was prompted from the low aid absorption capacity in the government as he has been experiencing serious difficulties in implementing ADP to support modest growth targets of 5-6 per cent year. Similar to his concern others in Europe also argued that the comparison with Marshall Plan was misplaced. Donald Johnston, secretary general of the Paris based OECD raised the same question of aid absorption capacity seriously. He also

and institutions were best placed to spend money wisely, he said.

Lack of institutions has been nakedly exposed in all aspects of governance in Bangladesh. Most important of them are the law and order and local governments. It is widely known how many good intended government projects such as FFE, FFW, HPSP(donor supported) and some infrastructure projects under LGRD either failed or produced little benefits to the poor due to lack of effective and accountable local governments. The highly centralised

fund through sample surveys and if found satisfactory the allocation be raised for selected Unions to Tk. 5 lakh and more. Capacity building requires gaining experience through actual works. This project should be treated as such even if not much is achieved in terms of targets.

The government perhaps is also contemplating to hold Upazila Parishad election this year. That would be another step in the right direction as it would create another layer of local government to deliver govern-

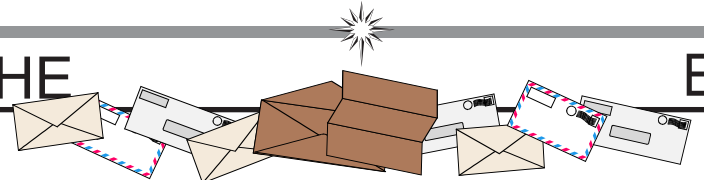
is a lot more to solving these problems than pouring money into them". Let us learn from those who have experience of doing things in practice, rather than from those who simply think about doing it by others. Jeffrey Sachs as an advisor to UN on the MDG programmes and those who prepared PRSP paper in Bangladesh belong to the latter group of intellectuals. Gordon Brown's outpouring of concern may have been due to the guilt riding when he related with Harold Macmillan, another British Prime

lected from the richer class in the society, those who siphoned off huge amounts from banks such as Rupali over the years are not liable in any way for any of the losses and defaulting loans that are causing failure of the bank. Saifur Rahman, the finance minister of Bangladesh, knows these practicalities and he at many times spoke about them but failed to make progress.

In the trial of Enron and WorldCom collapse in the USA directors and officers of those companies have been coughing out millions of dollars out of their personal saving besides payments from insurance companies to meet court established claims. Intellectuals in Bangladesh should speak and write about getting public money back from those who plundered it in the past. Similar to Jeffery Sach's support for IMF led PRSP shall economists in Bangladesh join hands with IMF and GOB to recover half the money needed for the bail out of Rupali Bank from its directors, officers and borrowers? There is at least one lesson that we can learn and put in our legal framework that in the future directors and officers of companies both in public and private sector will be asked to share losses due to their fault and negligence. There is no argument whatsoever to burden the poor again and again by borrowing under PRSP or any such foreign aids unless we establish institutions of effective local government, law and justice and accountability for those in positions of prominence.

Shamsul Haque is a professor of finance, IBADU.

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Bangla Bhai

I have carefully gone through your report on Bangla Bhai published on 27, January 2005.

I am angry and sad. It has been several months since this demon Bangla Bhai has been treading on the sacred soil of Bangladesh. Twice more frustrating is the fact that senior members of the Administration, including two of the important ministers, have issued statements in this regard which turned out to have no substance.

Clearly, people of considerable authority in the government are protecting Bangla Bhai. Do these people realize that such acts have long-term ramifications and at some point may even jeopardize the very existence of this Nation? Besides, this very Bangla Bhai may turn out to be their Frankenstein. It is not an issue for this government alone, it is a universal and timeless one. This is

a killer virus in the society. It challenges the very principles over which our nation stands. Bangla Bhai is anywhere in the world are enemies of the human race.

The government is elated about its elite force Rab and its exploits of eliminating "known terrorists" through what is now popularly known as "crossfires". I wonder what is preventing it from going into action in this instance. If reporters of the dailies have access to Bangla Bhai and are able to interview him, how come our super boys of the police and the home ministry are unable to find him?

If Bangla Bhai and his kind are allowed to commit their heinous acts we shall not need external or any other "forces" to damage the image of our country. It is this kind of insensible behaviour in many Muslim majority states which creates the opportunities for the powerful and rogue states to interfere in our

internal affairs.

Shamsher Chowdhury
Dhaka

We need Rab

This is in response to the 'concern' of all those worried people from home and mostly from abroad, who are leaving no stone unturned to diminish the good work done by Rab. For those who are living in a 'saner world' and expressing their views, the only thing I can say is 'come home and comment.'

When a common man dies or a garments worker is violated, it is just news. But when some criminal with a track record of numerous charges of murder, rape, torture is killed by some agency it is big news and all our brothers living in the 'civilized world' are so concerned.

For those who are from Bangladesh, some of them may have

their 'reasons'. But ignorance is not a blessing.

One of the vernacular dailies tried to picture Moffakar , the mastermind of numerous cold blooded murders as a revolutionist. When BBC English service was struggling to cover the news of Tsunami and even violence in Iraq was getting a slim slot, our BBC Bangla service religiously continued their tirade against Rab. It seemed one or two 'teachers' or 'journalists' were getting murdered every day by Rab.

Reviewing the performance of Rab, one can be assured that the innocent 'Munna' (of concerned citizen) has nothing to be afraid of, rather the criminal Munna should count his days.

Saif
Dhaka

Deadly attack on

Awami League

The January 27 news of the deadly attack on the Awami League convention at Habiganj and death of SAMS Kibria and others was most unfortunate, but not unexpected. The trend which has been going on in Bangladesh for the last one year was an indication of this and other similar type of horrendous activities. Bangladesh has great history of tolerance. Since the killing on Oct 31, 2003 of Shah Alam, an Ahmadiyya, at Raghunathpur in Jessore, only because he was an Ahmadiyya Muslim, the Bangladesh embassy officials in the United States were contacted in Nov 2003. Having no positive response from the officials here in the US, We contacted the Bangladesh government high officials in Dhaka through faxes, letters . But all these officials turned a deaf ear

and never acknowledged and responded to our concern. Of course we were concerned about the violent death of our Ahmadiyya brother but we showed our anxiety for the future events which may take place in Bangladesh. The example of Pakistan was already there, which has been hijacked by terrorists though they have made their constitution fully "Islamic". We approached our government officials to make our feelings known to all those working for the rights of people. The problem is that the fanatic groups are following a policy which is far from human , let alone religious.

We hope that truth and justice shall prevail in Bangladesh.

Zinda Mahmood Bajwa
New York, US

Tigers!

Yes, they have fought back like real tigers. They wiped out the 0-2 deficit in great style. The cricket fans saw some high class batting when young Aftab Ahmed and the seasoned warlord Rafique gave a demonstration of stroke play. We are elated.

But then we should not be too confident. Bangladesh have to go a long way before we can consolidate our position. The series win against Zimbabwe should give the boys enough confidence to face stronger sides in future. I am sure they will live up to our expectations.

A fan
Dhaka

Shocked

The news I found today is shocking and I don't have any words to express my feeling. I am not an Awami league or BNP supporter.

I was unable to fight the anarchy (my view), since I didn't gather the

quality to be a sustained good leader and flew to another country. I am hoping that there will be a good leader and he will lead the process of recovery from the present crisis. I don't know when it will happen- may be in my lifetime or the next generation (if we are willing to pay the price - sacrifice!). I am not sure that the present government got the wake up call from this incident. If it didn't, then we may have to prepare ourselves for even worse days.

Enam, On e-mail

Dear readers,
We have a new e-mail address for the Letters to the Editor page. Please send your letters to **letters@thedailystar.net**