

Elections in Britain: Pyrrhic victory for Blair



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

Commentators appear unanimous that Tony Blair has achieved a pyrrhic victory and is unlikely to last the full term in office. It is a sad end of a political personality, who has dominated the political scene in Britain and beyond. The dilemma that Tony Blair has faced is much bigger than him.

THE just concluded British General Elections, although appearing to produce contradictory results, are remarkable in more than one respect.

Tony Blair the Prime Minister has achieved the remarkable feat of the first Labour Prime Minister to achieve victory in three successive elections. Yet he may not have the time to savour this remarkable result. For his huge majority in parliament has been reduced by more than half; he has a majority of 60 odd seats and has lost more than a hundred. His 36 percent of votes is the lowest ever. It is a bare 3 percent more than the rival Tories. It is thanks only to the British electoral system that he has a comfortable majority within parliament.

The Conservatives have improved their score by nearly 40 seats at the expense of Labour. The third party, the Liberal Democrats, have increased their score by a dozen seats under the leadership of Charles Kennedy, who promptly stated that Britain was moving from its traditional two party politics to tripartite politics. He may have spoken out too soon. The Tory leader Michael Howard offered to resign his post as leader of his party because of continuous failure to win the elections. This is democracy at its best because Howard put up a credible fight and increased his score within the parliament.

It would appear, therefore, that in the latest elections everybody has lost, beginning with Tony Blair, the big loser. What I find astonishing is that commentators, while analysing the results refrain from mentioning the George Bush factor. Blair has been likened to Bush's poodle, so close has been the relations between the two, especially on the question of war against Iraq. We have witnessed the full flowering of relations

between the White House and 10 Downing Street.

There is nothing special about the "Special Relationship." Britain has long maintained very special ties with her transatlantic ally, the US. How can we forget former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, bag in hand, explaining her pro-US President Ronald Reagan stand to waiting journalists. Thus it would seem that in the light of long-standing British policy, Tony Blair did not really have an option. George Bush decided to go to war and the Britain of Tony Blair could not leave him in the lurch. The British public by expecting that Blair could act differently did not understand the dynamics of the situation. Once trapped by Bush, Blair had to mouth lies like the presence of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and poor Blair had to swallow from his opponents the epithet of "liar."

During the election campaign, the electorate seemed totally uninterested in the outstanding performance of the economy by the Blair Government. Yet in democratic elections it is matters of domestic concern that determine the result. That Blair did not face a total debacle was because the lacklustre campaign of his opponent Michael Howard, who continued to support Blair in his war against Iraq. One interesting result was in East London (Bethnal Green and Bow), home of a large Bangladeshi community, mainly Muslim. The Labour candidate Oona King was beaten by George Galloway flying his rebel party flag against Tony Blair. He had been expelled from the Labour party due to his revolt against Blair on his Iraq policy.

The misfortune of Blair bears close resemblance with John Kerry, the Democrat candidate in last years US Presidential election against

George Bush. The campaign had become totally centred on Iraq and Kerry was unable to take a clear stand on the issue. Indeed, the misadventure in Iraq by President Bush has come to haunt some of his allies like former Spanish Prime Minister Maria Aznar, who was ousted from office because of the tide flowing in the country against war in Iraq. That has been the case in Poland and also Italy, where Prime Minister Berlusconi appears to face mounting difficulties because of troops in Iraq.

In all these events there is a clear pattern. If some governments are unwilling or unable to face the fact that sending troops into Iraq, without any reason whatsoever, was a huge mistake, the people throughout the world have condemned this misadventure. The argument has finally come down that it was worth getting thousands killed and Iraq virtually turned into rubble in order to rid the country of the dictator Saddam Hussein. Pathetic attempts are continuing to build something out of the devastation caused in Iraq. What a price to pay!

The commentators appear unanimous that Tony Blair has achieved a pyrrhic victory and is unlikely to last the full term in office. It is a sad end of a political personality, who has dominated the political scene in Britain and beyond. And he was celebrating his 52nd birthday on the day of his electoral victory! Yet the dilemma that Tony Blair has faced is much bigger than him. It has to do with the entire history of Anglo-American relationship that has been built since the birth of America out of the womb of Great Britain.

Arshad-Uz Zaman is a former Ambassador and Acting Secretary General, OIC.

Hidden faces of poverty

DR. SYED JAHANGEER HAIDER

LAST week while visiting some of the worst poverty-stricken districts located in the mid-western and north-western parts of Bangladesh, an intense vision linking poverty and human despair was experienced. Pairs of eyes, anemic and frail, reflecting a total sense of helplessness was suggested that effort on poverty alleviation is but a myth.

Poverty alleviation has become development's catchword. Most of the efforts are focused on improving economic conditions and achieving a few allied social targets. Poverty is measured in numbers, not identifying the poor as human beings.

Lots of advice, counseling and orientation and training are used as weapons of mass alleviation of poverty. Even participatory processes are intensely tried to inspire the poor to change their lives. These efforts are somewhat effective only with those who are ready to change and are not trapped in extreme poverty (the poorest of the poor).

A poor person is one who lacks resources, but enjoys at least the basic needs of life like food, housing, and shelter, while the poorest of the poor is deprived of even the basic needs.

Absolute poverty is likely to transform an individual into an almost mindless entity. Despair and hopelessness is but a constant mental status. Their mind is absolutely gripped in poverty and everything else is blank. They thrive almost without any aspiration, or devoid of any sense of protest or direction, or they hardly display any urge to learn or initiate change in their life.

The ultra-poor (poorest of the poor) constitute about twenty percent of the population in Bangladesh, i.e., about 25 million individuals. Every individual survives through a continuous struggle and hardship and their suffering is just part of their life.

Development can be meaningful only when one is released of the extreme grievances of poverty or when one is free to think beyond the miseries (food and shelter) of poverty. The poorest of the poor are drugged by poverty. It does not let them look beyond poverty. These are the men and women who come and gather around the development strategists or their change agents in the villages, standing, silently and always trying to hide their faces behind somebody. Possibly they hide themselves from their own lives. One does not actually know why they hide -- is it fear or complete despair, which stimulates such behaviour? In either of the cases, they lose the strength of encountering life's struggle and initiate a change.

Do they even dream to turn around their miseries from an asset less (hardcore poor) status to a life that of a poor? The basic difference between a poor and a hardcore poor is that the former at least affords shelter and basic minimum support for life including food every day. A poor can be possibly motivated to participate and initiate developmental endeavours, while a member of the hardcore poor unless released from dire poverty can hardly be part of developmental initiatives. One should seriously ponder before suggesting or inducing participation of the hardcore poor, trapped in extreme poverty, to put their efforts on development, as he or she would hardly find such involvement

It would be possibly misleading to treat the ultra poor as part of a broader group and counting them (as numbers), not treating them as human beings characterised by their unique socio-cultural and economic context. Possibly, this is the reason poverty has been justifiably termed a trap.

relevant unless he/she is free from the sustained miseries of poverty.

How long shall we go on counting poverty in numbers and counting wage poverty alleviation efforts without recognising the poorest of the poor as human beings? All the development strategies are targeting the ultra poor as part of a group comprising poor and non-poor. This proves that either we do not have adequate understanding of the ultra poor and/or we hesitate to face them as a single group, as we may not be able to communicate effectively with them as a homogenous group. Consequently, the chances of failure to meet the targets (consisting of averages) of improving the socio-economic conditions of the poor would remain uncertain.

Have we really taken a challenge or are we distantly dreaming that one day poverty will be removed no matter how the planners or development strategists wage their efforts on the same? It is now imperative that we develop our understanding about the ultra poor. So far, all the developmental literatures are filled with data and information on the poor. This is also interesting that ultra-poor as a group is peculiar mostly to low-income developing countries; the developed countries hardly need to be concerned with ultra poor. Effective developmental strategies to address the needs of the ultra poor are yet to emerge. Development planners in Bangladesh, however, cannot be complacent about the needs and priorities of the hardcore poor, as the very size of the group (25 millions) is overwhelming in terms of management and the needs for resource mobilisation and investments.

Communicating with the ultra-poor is often misleading as the ultra-poor while attending a session or interacting with the change agents hardly negate any agenda for action, instead they play the role of passive and silent observers. The ultra poor while hiding their faces behind an average poor also hide their opinions and eventually reconfirm their beliefs that no body can change their lives. They possibly take their destiny to be omnipotent and irreversible. Meanwhile, shall we sit with this gigantic problem and let the country add the numbers of hardcore poor in millions due to sheer effects of demographic momentum only? No projection can tell us that how fast the number of the ultra poor is soaring and or doubling. One can easily surmise that their number is doubling at a much faster pace than doubling of the overall population.

One definite identity of the ultra-poor that has emerged is that they are completely assetless and some of them (the floating population -- not those living in slums) even pass their lives beneath the open sky, particularly in the cities. Beyond that, even the poets dare not write their stories as this is a group which is like a shadow and has been created due to pursuit of long imbalanced developmental policies and strategies. Efforts are not in dearth, as many development interventions claim launching of awareness building through

participatory means targeting the poor. But are these really reaching the ultra-poor, who prefer to hide than to rise and challenge their destiny for a positive change? The time is ripe to seriously ponder whether the group that we are concerned with can participate in the discourse of developmental jargons. Merely sitting in a group or standing around a discussion is hardly participatory, thus the presence of a few members of the poorest of the poor in the forum is

not a valid indicator of their participation.

Their basic behaviour remains unchanged, i.e., to hide or shy away from any initiative beyond survival. Anybody dragging them to address development without first changing or helping them to come out of the grinding poverty may prove to be futile.

Over and above, it would be possibly misleading to treat them as part of a broader group and counting them (as numbers), not

treating them as human beings characterised by their unique socio-cultural and economic context. Possibly, this is the reason poverty has been justifiably termed a trap, and this implication of poverty is a hard reality for an individual facing its consequences.

How would one bring the ultra poor from their hiding gesture and make them really set their mind for some minimum achievement--possibly this will remain always a myth as long as poor is counted as numbers not treated as individuals. And until we know them and their life stories, reaching them (in their mind set) would remain a far cry. Can we really change the ultra-poor without even reaching their mind?

Dr Syed Jahangeer Haider is Managing Director, Research Evaluation Associates for Development.

Bangladesh Small & Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC)

137-138, Motijheel Commercial Area, Dhaka

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)

- 01. Ministry/division : Prime Minister's Office.
02. Agency : Bangladesh Small & Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC).
03. Procuring entity name : Bangladesh Small & Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC).
04. Expression of interest for : 6 (six) Individual Consultants (National) :
i) CAD (Computer Aided Design) Consultant-1 person, 6mm
ii) Computer Aided Drawing Consultant-1 person, 6mm
iii) Installation & Operational Consultant (Networking, Internet Connectivity)-1 person, 6mm
iv) Dynamic web-site/web portal Design & Implementation Consultant-1 person, 3mm
v) Software Development Consultant-1 person, 6mm
vi) MIS Specialist-1 person, 6mm.
05. EOI Ref. No. & date : BSCIC/Plan/ISBPPB-08/PEC/2004 Dt: 05-05-2005.
06. Procuring method : Selection of Individual Consultant (National) sub-method of PPR-2003.
07. Budget and source of funds : Project Aid, IDA Credit.
08. Development partners : International Development Association (IDA).
09. Project/programme name : BSCIC sub-component of "Institutional Strengthening of BEPZA, BOI, PC & BSCIC (ISBPPB)".
10. EOI closing date : 24-05-2005.
11. Brief Description of Assignment :

- a) Computer Aided Design (CAD) Consultant : Consultant shall work in the BSCIC's Design Center (located at Dhaka) for introducing computer Aided Design Technique for improving the design of small, medium and cottage industrial products.
b) Computer Aided Drawing Consultant : Consultant shall work in the Civil Engineering Division of BSCIC for introducing Computer aided drawing technique for preparation of site map, layout-plan, design for building and industry and other civil constructions.
c) Installation and Operational Consultant (Networking, Internet Connectivity etc.) : Consultant shall design and implement the standard LAN & WAN networking system for BSCIC covering the BSCIC Head Office, divisional and 64 district offices with a view to set up a virtual network which would be facilitated for introducing e-governance and automation environment for the organisation.
d) Dynamic Web-site/Portal Design and Implementation Consultant: The consultant shall develop the existing web-site to web portal with a view to support the e-governance and automation environment.
e) Software Development Consultant : Consultant shall develop three customize software on the following fields : a) Accounts and accounting system of BSCIC in consistency with the existing manual accounting system of BSCIC, b) Personnel administration related database, data input and updating facility oriented software for about 600 officers and staffs of BSCIC Head Office and c) Data banking for BSCIC activities, national and international socio-economic database software.
f) MIS Specialist : Consultant shall review the existing MIS and to develop computerised/Electronic Management Information System for BSCIC with a view to enable this system under e-governance and automation environment.

- 12. Qualification, Experience, Age etc :
i) Qualification : Bachelor/Masters or equivalent degree in Computer Science/Computer Engineering/Information Technology/Engineering/Physics/Applied Physics/Mathematics/Statistics/Business Administration/any relevant discipline of Social Science/Fine Arts etc.
ii) Experience : 10 (ten) years, relaxable in special case.
iii) Age : Maximum 60 (sixty) years.
13. Name, designation, contact details : Md. Matiur Rahman Khan, Deputy General Manager (Planning), & Sub-Project Director, ISBPPB Project, BSCIC, Planning Division, BSCIC Head Office, 137-138, Motijheel Commercial Area (4th Floor), Dhaka-1000. Tel. # 7110565

- 14. Special Instructions for Applicant :
a) This EOI is invited for short listing of Individual Consultant (National).
b) The applicant shall express their interest in accordance with the 'instructions to applicant' and 'application submission' in 'Standard Request for Application for Selection of Individual Consultant (National)' under PPR 2003.
c) Interested eligible applicant may obtain the document of 'Standard Request for Application' for Selection of Individual Consultant (National) including details of terms of reference, qualification and experience, age and necessary instructions for applicant from the undersigned office during office hour.
d) The applicant shall be submitted three sets of expression of interest (one original and two copies) comprising forwarding letter, C.V. with 3 copies recent passport sized photographs, attested copies of all educational certificates, nationality certificate, documents regarding experiences and all other relevant papers and information as indicated in the document.
e) Applicants who are already in employment shall submit their EOI through proper channel otherwise they shall not be considered for selection process.
f) EOI shall be submitted in sealed envelope (clearly marked his/her interest on particular field of consultancy) at or before 4.00pm BDST of EOI closing date to address : Md. Matiur Rahman Khan, Deputy General Manager (Planning) & Sub-Project Director, ISBPPB Project, Planning Division, BSCIC Head Office, 137-138, Motijheel Commercial Area (4th Floor), Dhaka-1000.
g) If there happen any transport disruption or govt. holidays on the abovementioned closing date, the next normal working day will be treated as the valid date of EOI closing.
15. The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all EOIs without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Md Matiur Rahman Khan
Deputy General Manager (Planning)
& Sub-Project Director, ISBPPB Project, BSCIC
নং-বিসিক/জঃ সঃ শা-৬/২০০৫(২৬)
GD-494

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
বিভাগীয় বন কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়
ঢাকাইল বন বিভাগ
দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং ৩০ অব ২০০৪-২০০৫ তারিখঃ ০৪-০৫-২০০৫ইং
এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকল মহলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাইতেছে যে, ঢাকাইল বন বিভাগের অধীন "মধুপুর জাতীয় উদ্যান উন্নয়ন প্রকল্প" এর আওতায়ে ২০০৪-২০০৫ইং আর্থিক সনে নিম্নতফসিলে বর্ণিত নির্মাণ/সেবামত কাজগুলি সম্পাদনের নিমিত্তে অভিজ্ঞতাসম্পন্ন সরকারী/আধা-সরকারী/ব্যক্তিগত সংস্থা/এলজিইডি, গণপুত্র বিভাগের তালিকাভুক্ত ১ম শ্রেণীর অভিজ্ঞ ঠিকাদারদের নিকট হইতে নিম্নবর্ণিত শর্তাধীনে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর নামে সীলমোহরকৃত খামে দরপত্র আহবান করা যাইতেছে।

Table with 6 columns: S/N, কাজের নাম, বিবরণ ও পরিমাণ, কার্যস্থল, টেন্ডার জামানত, সিডিউলের মূল্য, কার্য সমাপ্তির সময়কাল. Contains 3 items related to Madhupur National Park development.

প্রধান শর্তাবলী

- ১। দরপত্র আগামী ১৫/০৫/২০০৫ইং তারিখ বেলা ১:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর কার্যালয়ে, জেলা প্রশাসক ও পুলিশ সুপার, ঢাকাইল-এর কার্যালয়ে রাখিত দরপত্র বাস্কে গ্রহণ করা হইবে এবং ঐ দিনই বিকাল ১:৩০ ঘটিকার সময় নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর কার্যালয়ে দরদাতাগণের উপস্থিতিতে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) দরপত্র খোলা হইবে।
২। দরপত্রের ছক (সিডিউল) আগামী ১৪/০৫/২০০৫ইং তারিখ অফিস চলাকালীন সময় পর্যন্ত উপরোক্ত অফিসসমূহে বৈধ ঠিকাদারী দলিলপত্রাদি প্রদর্শনপূর্বক বর্ণিত (অফেন্ডারগোষ্ঠী) মূল্যে ক্রয় করা যাইবে।
৩। এছাড়া দরপত্র সংক্রান্ত পারফরমেন্স জামানত, বিনির্দেশ, অন্যান্য শর্তাবলী এবং যে কোন জ্ঞান, বিখ্যাদি দরপত্র গ্রহণের পূর্বদিন অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ের মধ্যে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর কার্যালয়ে হইতে দেখিতে ও জানিতে পায়া যাইবে।

মোঃ আবু হানিফ পাটওয়ারী
বিভাগীয় বন কর্মকর্তা
ঢাকাইল বন বিভাগ
সি-১১৫৫

বাংলাদেশ চিনি ও খাদ্য শিল্প করপোরেশন
আদমজী কোর্ট, ১১৫-১২০, মতিঝিল বা/এ, ঢাকা-১০০০
শিল্প করপোরেশন
অফিস স্পেস ভাড়া দেয়ার পুনঃ দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি
সচিব, বাংলাদেশ চিনি ও খাদ্য শিল্প করপোরেশন, আদমজী কোর্ট (৬ষ্ঠ তলা), ১১৫-১২০, মতিঝিল বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, ঢাকা কর্তৃক অত্র করপোরেশনের ৩নং দিলকুশা বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা নির্মাণাধীন "চিনি শিল্প ভবন" এর ২য়, ৩য়, ৪র্থ ও ৯ম তলার যথাক্রমে ২৮৩৫ বর্গফুট, ৩২৭৪ বর্গফুট, ৬১৭৪ বর্গফুট এবং ৬১৭৪ বর্গফুট আনুমানিক সর্বমোট ১৮,৪৫৭ বর্গফুট ফ্লোর স্পেস অফিস হিসেবে আত্মীয় প্রতিষ্ঠান/ব্যক্তিগণের নিকট ভাড়া দেয়ার জন্য দরপত্র আহবান করা যাচ্ছে।