

## Voters have spoken

*Chittagong elections a learning experience*

It is no exaggeration that there was a sigh of relief at the peaceful completion of CCC election, which, by all accounts, was conducted freely and fairly barring some stray incidents. This has caused many pessimistic and gloomy speculations on its prospects to come to naught.

Where there was so much of money being flaunted around, where the selection of the polling officials left much to be desired and where intimidating utterances were traded freely, the majesty of the people's verdict comes as a sobering thought and an unmistakable reminder that people's judgment will assert itself ultimately.

Mr. Mohiuddin must be congratulated on winning the mayoral seat for the third consecutive time. Felicitations are also in order for the EC, the law enforcing agencies and the major political parties for their contribution in the smooth conduct of the election. The ruling alliance has acquitted the verdict of the people of Chittagong with equanimity, a commendable gesture indeed in our context.

What is heartening to note is the fact that although the major political parties had gone to extreme lengths in harnessing their efforts to see their candidate elected, it is the merit of the candidate, his credibility and credentials, his acceptability and popularity and his efficiency were the considerations that swayed the voters in making their choice of the candidate. This is an object lesson for those who feel that money and muscle power, political clout and dubious links are enough, and that the people would vote for any Dick or Harry that political parties chose to put up as their candidates.

However, there are certain things that appeared to mar what was primarily an well-organised election. According to some local and international observers the process of vote casting in some polling stations were inordinately slow, there was mismanagement in some polling centres, and presence of false voters in some polling stations and casting of false votes were noticed.

The EC must draw lessons from the CCC polls and address in all seriousness the observations of the monitors to ensure that these are averted in future.

## Living with such a data gap!

*Infant fatalities from accidents appalling*

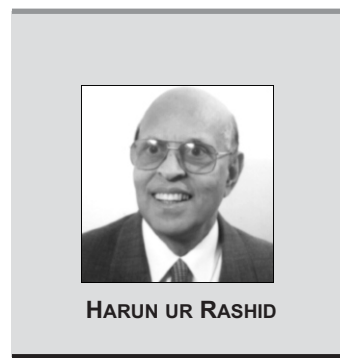
A new dimension to child mortality has come to light -- thanks to a UNICEF-sponsored health and injury survey conducted in Bangladesh by the government and the alliance for safe children. We are shell-shocked to learn that 30,000 infants die every year from injuries and accidents and that 13,000 were permanently disabled among 10 lakh children who were injured in 2002. More than two years have passed since the benchmark year, almost invariably, albeit unquantifiably, adding to those dreadful statistics. That data gap needs filling, and hopefully, with the information gathering process already set in motion by UNICEF, it won't be long before we do the catching up with the calendar.

The revelation does make the fact of our having brought down the child mortality rate sound like something of a myth. And, there lies a message which is that child healthcare must adopt as one of its core component a strategy for injury prevention.

The deaths are caused mainly by drowning, road accidents, burns, falls, animal bites, electrocution, suffocation and internal injuries. This is not to forget that a huge number of children are disabled and orphaned by the accidents. In all, it is an injury epidemic we have been living with without even knowing about the progeny attrition.

The immediate remedial option for us is to launch a massive awareness campaign among the rural masses, in particular, about the incipient, yet avoidable, dangers of accidental deaths during infancy. The health and family welfare minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain who released the survey report on Monday thought this was a revelation to the government. We, for our part, confess to having been caught unawares by the surging new dimension to child mortality ascribed to accidents and injuries, even though there must have been news reports from time to time on the mishaps, *sans* perhaps the required focus on child victims. While we make it up with a fresh vulnerable children-oriented approach, we do think that the government, the NGOs and the community have a lot to do to not only sensitise the poorer households about taking the toddlers under their wings in a real sense but also to provide material support by way of extending a protective umbrella over the children.

# Can US claim moral high ground on human rights abuses?



HARUN UR RASHID

ON February 28, the Bush administration issued its annual report titled

"Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" that contains the human rights record of 196 countries, including an assessment of Bangladesh's human rights record.

It portrays a worsening record of human rights for Bangladesh, stating: "Poor human rights record worsened and the government continued to commit numerous abuses." Referring to the RAB action, the report says: "The Rab and security forces committed human rights abuses and were rarely disciplined, even for egregious actions. Security forces committed a number of extrajudicial killings."

On the judiciary, the report states: "Lower judicial officers were reluctant to challenge government decisions and suffered from corruption ... the higher levels of judiciary displayed some degree of independence and often ruled against the government."

China and many Latin American countries have also been subject to criticism for their human rights record.

### Critics' views

Questions have been raised in different quarters as to whether the US has objectively assessed the record or has been influenced by its political motivation.

Deputy Director of the Washington Office on Latin America, Kimberly Stanton said that: "The credibility of these reports depends upon a coherent and objective analysis. This year, the political priorities of the US government affected the evaluation of

Besides the allegations of lack of objectivity and political motivations of the report, one fact that merits attention is whether the US under the Bush administration can claim the moral ground on human rights abuses.

Many human rights activists state that the Bush administration at least cannot talk about abuses of human rights record of other countries, when in recent years, its forces have committed dreadful human right abuses on Iraqis and Afghans with

### rights abusers?

One may easily argue that the US has been responsible in arming many human rights abusers. The US is the largest seller of weapons to developing countries. Amnesty International in 2000 released a report, "A Catalogue of Failures: G-8 Arms Exports and Human Rights Violations" called on the big powers to make public the name of companies that supply weapons to countries accused of gross human rights

the mother of all human rights violations. The horror of poverty was highlighted by the UN Secretary General on October 17, in observance of International Day for Eradication of Poverty. He stated: "How many times have we said that poverty was incompatible with human dignity."

Big powers including the US ignore the growing denial of basic human rights due to poverty. They perceive human rights only as political rights, not as economic or development rights. Bread and liberty are the two

and poverty in half by 2015, only \$50 billion a year in aid is required.

On September 20 last, a summit against hunger and poverty was held at the UN in New York. Its final declaration was signed by 113 countries and declared: "There is enough knowledge and resources in the world to free us from hunger and poverty." But the US refused to sign the declaration.

### Conclusion

If Washington wants credibility of its report on human rights abuses, the Bush administration needs to think seriously: (a) who has been the gross violators of human rights in the last two years, (b) who are the seller of arms to the countries, accused of human rights abuses? And (c) what is the allocation of their budget for poverty alleviation across the globe?

The Bush administration cannot criticize others on human rights abuses because it is guilty of gross violations to many people in Iraq and Afghanistan. If the so-called "land of freedom and liberty" is to be truly respected, then it must recognize that human rights apply universally.

It is not good enough in contemporary world for the world's super power criticizing gross human violations of other countries, while being completely oblivious of its own record. To gain the moral high ground the Bush administration needs to look at itself critically before it criticizes others. One sitting in a glass house should not throw stones.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## BOTTOM LINE

It is not good enough in contemporary world for the world's superpower criticizing gross human violations of other countries, while being completely oblivious of its own record. To gain the moral high ground the Bush administration needs to look at itself critically before it criticizes others. One sitting in a glass house should not throw stones.

the data in some cases."

For example, Stanton said Venezuela was criticized for its human record while the right-wing conservative regime of Columbia has been given a positive treatment, although everyone knows that the President of Columbia has curtailed the liberty of its citizens. On Ecuador, Stanton said that the report "barely mentioned" a purge of the Supreme Court, a devastating blow to the independence of the judiciary.

A Chinese spokesperson reportedly said that "I would like to take this opportunity to make the point that the US should stop using double standards on human rights issues."

### Moral high ground?

impunity. The scandal at Abu Ghraib prison by the US forces in Iraq is well publicised, so also its treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

The Bush administration's unfettered power in approving gross human rights abuses on the detainees has been horrendous and some of the detainees from the Guantanamo Bay have been released after three years without any charge whatsoever. Iraqi prisoners were not denied the protection of the 1949 Geneva Convention on the Prisoner of War. Such gross violations go against all canons of international law.

### Who is arming human

violations.

Although there is a protocol that the weapons should not be used for abuse of human rights, the compliance of protocol has been either totally ineffective or overlooked. It is common knowledge that weapons thus acquired, are often used by leaders of many developing countries, to suppress discontent arising from legitimate demands by citizens, political opponents and critics of government.

### Mother of all human rights abuses

The most important dimension of violation of human rights that is often forgotten is the existence of poverty.

It is acknowledged that poverty is

sides of the same coin. Deprivation of either must inevitably damage the foundation of the other. That means one cannot separate the two dimensions of social fabric as the sun cannot be separated from sunlight.

And what is the record of aid assistance to fight poverty by the Bush administration? While the Bush administration has earmarked defence expenditure for 2004 of nearly

\$400 billion, besides the war expenses on Iraq and Afghanistan, the foreign aid to remove poverty has been very meager. It is the lowest of any developed country as it spends 0.14 percent, much less than 0.7 percent of GDP as recommended by the UN. It is estimated that to cut hunger

# CCC polls: Reflections on Mohiuddin's landslide victory

BRIG GEN JAHANGIR KABIR, *ndc, psc*

MAYOR Mohiuddin has won a landslide victory for a third consecutive term as city father of Chittagong. He has increased his margin of victory from 17,000 in his second bidding in 2000 to a whopping 90,000 plus for his third consecutive term, which shows that he has actually gained in popularity, belying the trend of incumbency disadvantage in the Bangladeshi electoral culture.

My wife firmly believes people do not vote for a party or a person for second time consecutively as no one meets election pledges or the people's expectations. Based on results so far, she is nearly always right. But Mohiuddin Chowdhury disproves that theory and I feel happy that it has been proved wrong in the case of the mayoral election of Chittagong. Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury's three consecutive elections are eye openers that politics is still possible in Bangladesh if one lives close to the people.

Mohiuddin is not a high-profile politician or an angel by reputation. He is hardly known in intellectual circles, nor achieved excellence in any profession. He has been a full-time politician all his life, right from

the days when I knew him as a student.

He comes from an eminent political family, but is not in the mainstream of its political inheritance. His modest connection is overshadowed and opposed by the mainstream political inheritors of his clan.

He is an Awami Leaguer, but is not exactly in favour with other stalwarts of the region. He could not

the city. He has improved its road system, and established schools, colleges, mosques, madrasas, and a university. In addition, health facilities, sanitation, and drainage have also improved considerably.

He is very respectful to the elders - an old tradition of Chittagong.

He is not known to be deeply religious, yet hundreds of people go on Hajj every year; well organised and hugely subsidised by him.

face and one position. He is not a minister or an MP. He hardly visits Dhaka and rarely goes to his village home in Rajuan upazilla. Mohiuddin Chowdhury is always with the people of Chittagong.

In 1994, for the first time he defeated BNP appointed Mayor Mir Nasiruddin when the BNP was in power and had all the national assembly seats from Metro-Chittagong in the bag. Mir Nasir is a

Besides, Mohiuddin is a brilliant organiser and a master agitator. With no incumbency advantage and the Awami League demoralised, following defeat in national elections, Mohiuddin convinced the people of Chittagong in 1994 that he was the right man for the job. It was not so much due to the fact that the Awami League was in power, but for his closeness and services to the people that he was re-elected in

almost reluctantly joined politics later, and not to serve the people. In democracy, public service runs contrary to the attitude of many successful politicians in Bangladesh today. If the "guy next door" has started winning elections, people's power is finally reaching back to them to the detriment of the non-resident and part-time politicians. In successive defeats of many national and international personalities, it is observed that everyday shaking hands and kissing babies has started taking a toll on the high-profile names.

It would be wrong for the Awami League to pride itself on the landslide victory of Mohiuddin, as the mandate was for the person and not the party. Political scientists and universities should make the mayoral election of Chittagong a case study as to how candidates can impress the average voters.

Congratulations to the electorate of Metro-Chittagong and good luck to Mayor Mohiuddin.

be a favourite of the central leadership. He was the only voice that opposed publicly the decision of his party on the construction of the private container terminal alongside Chittagong Port on the estuary of the Karnafully River, and held it in suspended animation.

But the people of Metro-Chittagong did not give a landslide mandate for all these reasons. Let us see why they voted him in for a third consecutive term.

During the last ten years as city father, Mohiuddin has done a lot for

Mohiuddin's Hajj Kafela is the best organised and cheapest pilgrimage, usually preferred by those who cannot afford the exorbitant cost of Hajj.

Yet, he is also a man of the minorities.

He has good communications with all political parties and his door is open to all. He lives the simple life of an ordinary man. Many observers are not surprised that followers of other parties (if not totally hooked by party loyalty) also voted for him. One thing is sure; he has only one

nice person and pleasant personality. He, too, takes pain to meet the people.

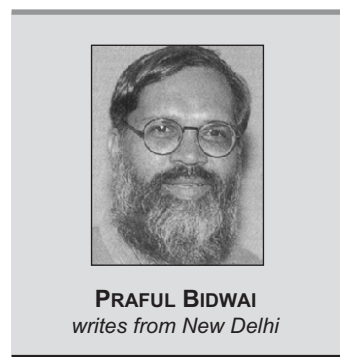
But having nearly a dozen national leaders from the area and more than half including himself as ministers, the demands of office and liaisoning with party and government is obviously a hectic exercise that takes most of his time, leaving little for the resident of Chittagong. Mir Nasir is more popular with non-resident Chittagonians in Dhaka and elsewhere. It is a comparative situation that gave the advantage to Mohiuddin.

2000.

Unlike Khokon in Dhaka, Minister Mir Nasir failed to dislodge the "guy next door" Mayor Mohiuddin. Mohiuddin is not quite held in the high esteem of the legendary Nur Mohammad Chairman of British days. But when elderly people recall the services of Nur Mohammad Chairman, many demand that Mohiuddin be like him. Is Chittagong making another Nur Mohammad Chairman?

One of the major problems of our politics is that many of our leaders became powerful first, and

# Grave crisis in the Parivar: Giants turn out dwarves



PRAFUL BIDWAI  
*writes from New Delhi*

EVEN one month on, the seismic waves sent out by Mr K.S. Sudarshan's vitriolic attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party's leadership refuse to die down. The RSS *sarasanghachalak* launched a broadside against both Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr L.K. Advani.

For a while, it looked as if Mr Vajpayee, who has been repeatedly targeted personally by Mr Sudarshan, would assert his authority to end the controversy.

Instead, Mr Vajpayee sulked, saying: "I do not fear death, but I fear getting a bad name." Then, he fired a salvo at Mr Advani, telling him to follow Mr Sudarshan's advice and make way for younger leaders! Yet, Mr Vajpayee backtracked in his characteristic style and defended Mr Advani against Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi's veiled attack on the party leadership.

He has since staunchly defended the RSS and boasted that he has been its member since childhood. He

couldn't have found a worse way of diminishing himself.

Amidst this ugly controversy, the entire top leadership of the *parivar* stands discredited. Nearly destroyed is the RSS's cultivated image as a "disciplined" organisation, where absolute obedience to the Supreme Leader is prized.

For the first time, a *sarasanghachalak* was publicly contradicted by his own deputy (Mohan Bhagwat). The BJP's image, battered by its electoral debacle and its confronta-

Now, week after week, Ms Bharati spews venom at Mr Advani, threatening him with a "Mahabharata-style" war, in which she would play Arjun.

The BJP's unending succession crisis contrasts sharply with the smooth transition in the Communist Party (Marxist) from one generation to the next. On organisational coherence, ideological clarity, and political principle, the CPM scores way above the BJP.

Nominally, both are termed "cadre parties." But within the BJP, the cement of ideology crumbles beside

Both are aware of the damage they have inflicted upon themselves and are awkwardly trying to control it.

For the moment, the BJP's "strategy" is to deal not with Mr Sudarshan, but with second-ranking RSS functionaries: general secretary Mohan Bhagwat and joint general secretary Suresh Soni. They are both in their 50s. It hopes they might be reverential towards Mr Vajpayee-Advani.

Such tactics will probably fail. The current scuffle has produced realignments. On the *sarasanghachalak*'s side are Uma Bharati, Murlidhar Manohar

of power. This has brought frustration to the surface. Its immediate cause was the RSS's annoyance at being bypassed when Mr Advani took over the BJP and a recent attack on the "Hindu vote" concept by a BJP ideologue in Bhopal.

There have been other spats too. In 1998, Mr Sudarshan forced Mr Vajpayee to cancel Mr Jaswant Singh's appointment as Finance Minister. Two years later, he attacked Mr Vajpayee's "kitchen cabinet" and foster family. In retaliation, Mr Vajpayee got Mr Sudarshan to move

austerity.

The RSS is also anxious because attendance at its *shakhas* is dropping. When threatened, the RSS returns to its hard-line moorings. It wants a more pliant BJP leadership.

However, the BJP is now too big to be bullied. Some of its leaders believe the RSS's door-to-door mobilisation during elections cannot win it more than, say, 5-6 percent of the vote. They believe the NDA allies can contribute more.

Such contrary perceptions and calculations have precipitated an unwinnable tug of war inside the *parivar*. The BJP, for its all fascination with globalisation, is in no position to cut off its ideological dependence on *Hindutva* or its organisational links with the RSS.

There is scope in India for a conservative Right-of-Centre party that is not aggressively communal, like Europe's Christian Democrats.

The BJP cannot be such a party. The Vajpayee-Advani leadership does not have the stomach to make it one. If it couldn't change while in power, it's unlikely to do so now.

What's on the cards now is more contention and strife within the *parivar*, and a bitter power struggle. That spells the BJP's further, serious, possibly irreversible, decline.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

tionist opposition for opposition's sake, has further nose-dived. Its tallest leaders have been exposed to be pygmies -- petty men and women with consuming ambition but no vision, driven by parochialism, and lacking a sense of solidarity.

The BJP's succession problem has proved intractable. Its former president Venkaiah Naidu quit because he could exercise no authority over peers like Ms Uma Bharati and Messrs Pramod Mahajan and Arun Jaitley. He begged his patron (Advani) to take over. But Mr Advani has failed to rein in Ms Bharati. He expelled her, but soon retracted.

venality and ambition.

As important as the BJP's crisis are changes in the RSS and in relations with it. The RSS top leadership is reportedly divided between Maharashtrians and non-Maharashtrians. This is unprecedented.

The RSS *sarasanghachalak* used to be aloof from the nitty-gritty of politics. But since Balasaheb Deoras, this has changed. Mr Sudarshan wants a more aggressive role -- potentially conflicting with the BJP's.

Yet, the RSS doesn't know to push the BJP towards hard-line *Hindutva*.

Joshi, the VHP, Swadeshi Jagaran Manch and Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram.

Arrayed against him are Messrs Advani, Naidu and Mahajan, and the *sangh's* Maharashtra group. Others, including the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, are neutral/vacillating.

Their differences cannot be easily reconciled. For instance, for the VHP, the importance of the Ayodhya issue is *absolute*. For the BJP, it's a political instrument and bargaining counter. Its *relative* utility depends on political balances of power.

The RSS-BJP confrontation must be seen in the context of the BJP's loss

from Delhi to Nagpur.

In 2002, the RSS forced Mr Advani's appointment as Deputy Prime Minister -- on the understanding that the *parivar* would go slow on the temple. Mr Vajpayee assigned no additional responsibilities to Mr Advani.

The RSS and its extremist associates yielded to the BJP on many issues -- especially neo-liberal economics. While in power, the BJP could silence them by offering patronage. Some *sangh* leaders got worried at *pracharaks* leading a life of luxury -- far removed from the *swayamsavak's*

ment-friendly.

One ought to emphasize that everything is in the name, or almost so. What could be boldly introduced now, taking public opinion into serious consideration, in terms of symbol of the nation's aspirations, will strike deep roots in popular acceptability and consciousness in the fullness of time.

Syed Muhammad Hussain is a retired Ambassador and Secretary to the government.

## OPINION

# Secretariat or Ministeriat?

SYED MUHAMMAD HUSSAIN

LIFE is full of anomalies and after a while these become not-so-noticeable part of everyone's life. These once-obvious anachronisms, at least some, are still irksome for many.

The location of the government has continued to be in the secretariat (*shachibaloy*) since the colonial days. In Kolkata, it was sometimes referred to as Writers' Building and

in Dhaka, as the Eden Buildings. But formally the secretariat remains to be the seat of the government to this day, despite the political process through several decades has yielded governments having cabinet Ministers. And devolving the governance and the governmental functions in the Ministries. And here comes the paradox -- in Ministries being located in the Secretariat and Ministers attending their offices located in the Secretariat! Secretariat

by definition means the place where Secretaries attend to their official duties and functions. This was the set-up, and quite tenable apparently, in the colonial days. Basically at the time, the imperial powers were exercised through the Crown-appointed Governors-General, Governors and Secretaries, all Englishmen, and the latter were invariably the members of the British Indian Colonial/Civil Service.

In the sovereign government, the

elected Ministers (mostly) are in charge of the Ministries and logically, they should be housed for official work, in the Ministerial (in coining this highly feasible word, we could well contribute to the English language). The Secretaries and the rest of the bureaucratic apparatus are to function in the Bangladesh Ministeriat, establishing logic and reason in reflecting the appropriate importance of the elected representatives in leading the country's

affairs.

The popular argument that Ministers come and go is not only fallacious but also highly derogatory. The same status of non-permanence of Secretaries and officials at all other levels in relation to a particular Ministry or position is equally valid. The Ministers serve in Ministries and leave as the Prime Minister desires as per the provisions of the Constitution.

Hence, it is time that such a glaring

anomaly is removed. The Ministeriat should be what the Secretariat has been so far and in fact, it would enhance the status palpably. In Bangla, an ideal word, if I may suggest, will be '*Sharkaraloy*' a la *mantranaloy, shachibaloy!* Moreover, one could also propose that for an effective public imaging of the government in symbolic form like the White Hall, White House and so on, we could search for our unique name for the seat of governmental appara-

As for the centre of power, the appellation 'Prime Minister's Office (PMO)'; both the Bangla and English versions, how shall I put it, is uninspiring and mundane. PMO and Ministeriat complex could be painted in green (the shade we have in our National Flag) and named 'The Green Mansion' (In Bangla one could think of '*Shabuj Bhaban*' or other fitting names '*Bangla Bhaban*' or '*Shapla Bhaban*'). Shabuj Baban has the added advantage of being environ-