

## Error ridden voter list

Major work needed to make it fool-proof

WE must thank the National Democratic Institute (NDI) of Washington for pointing out the level of inaccuracies in our voter list, something that the election commission should have detected by now. Earlier, a national group, Brotee, revealed similar findings. Isn't it the EC's job to keep the electoral roll error-free? It is for them to make periodic reviews, without which the document must become obsolete.

Although the NDI finding is from a random sampling of a limited number of voters and polling stations, it could be well representative of the state of the accuracy of the entire voter list. The tally of 12 percent of the facts and figures appearing in the voter list being faulty, is a very large anomaly indeed. We suggest the CEC with his team gets to work on this matter instead of involving themselves in extraneous discussions with embryonic political parties.

The deductions from the NDI exercise together with Brotee reinforce our earlier comments that the matter of scrutinising and updating the voter list is a continuous process that must be conducted throughout the year and not be undertaken just before the election.

There are certain inherent problems that accompany the voter list. And that have much to do with the urban populace more than those living in the rural areas. There is nothing worse than eligible voters left out of the list. Equally bad is the presence of ghost voters in the list. Both situations are unacceptable and must not be allowed to happen.

We take comfort from the fact that the EC has announced its intentions of conducting yearly scrutiny of the list and of involving the local bodies in this exercise. But why has it taken three national elections for this to dawn on the election commission?

There is no alternative for the EC than to go high-tech in this matter. Modern technology must be employed to collect, collate, and maintain a data bank that can be updated with the least hassle. Above all, there is the need to consider introducing voter ID cards if we are to prevent abuse of the voter list.

## Even mourning is muzzled!

Politics plummets another fathom lower

AUGUST 15 has been the victim of ravages of political fortunes in the ugliest and thoroughly reprehensible of forms. First, what should have been a state-declared and calendar-enjoined national mourning day had been swiftly abandoned by the BNP-led coalition on assumption of power as a self-serving political statement of the government.

And now -- thanks to the rabid political hooliganism orchestrated by ruling party activists -- unprecedented road-blocks were placed on this year's observance of August 15 as a national mourning day by the opposition Awami League. In at least 20 different locations of the country, BNP activists openly pounced on the mourning programmes, rallies, and destitute feeding organised by the AL in commemoration of Bangabandhu's assassination with grateful and grief-stricken remembrance of the supreme sacrifices he had made for the liberation of Bangladesh.

That even the mourning of the death of a leader who led the people to freedom was allowed to be subjected to such demeaning treatment by political opponents is utterly repugnant to minimum sensibilities about decency and decorum in inter-party politics. There could be glass-house implications to the obstructionist attitude displayed by BNP loyalists to the AL mourning programmes ostensibly on the ground that the PM's birth anniversary celebrations were being affected. We hope a bad precedent has not been set, but supposing if the commemorative programmes related to the assassination of president Ziaur Rahman would be even slightly marred by any reactive segment of opposition loyalists, how unfortunate that must be.

That is exactly the reason why a government, like the society at large, must never fail to reflect an immutable attachment to certain core values which include respect for national leaders, let alone that for a leader of the stature of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

We can't think that the assaults on Awami League processionists and their programmes originated in any central decision. In that view of the matter, we urge the BNP high command to condemn the oppressive behaviour of those activists by way of publicly disassociating themselves from the latter's misdeeds. BNP must distance itself from the elements who bring the party not only bad name but also spell doom for the future of any working relationship with the opposition. If it fails to do so, we will be forced to conclude about collusion at the highest levels of the ruling party.

AH DEWAN

IT'S a disgrace that this nation which was carved out of Pakistan as an independent sovereign Bangladesh through 9-month long liberation war, waged and fought against the Pakistani occupation forces in the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, feels no compunction in witnessing his death anniversary not mourned and observed nationally.

How is it that even BTV, which is the state electronic media run by the citizens' tax money, can refuse to run any stories on the man's life, his political vision and struggle, and his achievement -- stories which are now among the treasure troves of, besides ours, world history of the twentieth century, for the world recorded the events of the creation of Bangladesh and the man who led the events to culmination.

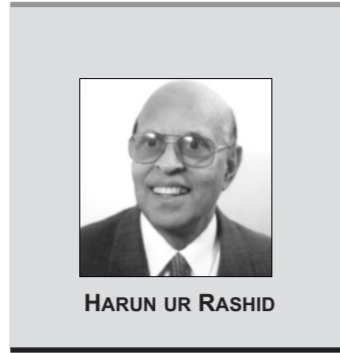
In contrast, BTV could spend whole days and weeks, even month for the man, Ziaur Rahman who came much later in the politi-

cal scenario of Bangladesh. Ziaur Rahman's announcing of the independence of Bangladesh on March 27, 1971 over makeshift radio as already declared by Bangabandhu on March 26 must be regarded as a milestone, and was followed by his participation in the war of liberation. So he has also a special place in our esteem and in our history of liberation.

But on no account should he be placed at the pinnacle at the cost of Bangabandhu who sustained toil, trial, and tribulation for the cause of Bangladesh for long 23 years under the oppressive and exploitive rule of the Pakistanis, and who for his unending struggle for the legitimate political and economic rights and interests of his people won their hearts to be their beloved leader.

BTV arranges programme of discussion on the death anniversary of many renowned personalities of the country and I followed one such programme on veteran writer and journalist, the late Abul Mansur Ahmed. During the discussion BTV displayed many books authored by him. But it took

## UNSC reform doomed?



HARUN UR RASHID

HERE is a saying among UN diplomats that the UN has a "heart of gold" but "feet of clay." The heart of gold refers to the noble purpose and principles of the UN Charter and the feet of clay refers to the inherent weaknesses of the UN because of the conflicting interests of five veto-carrying permanent members of the Security Council (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the US).

Media reports indicate that the much-expected reforms of the Security Council (Cabinet of the UN) in its enlargement has stumbled because of lack of unanimity among the most powerful five Council members. Under the UN Charter any amendment of the Charter needs the support of the five permanent Council members.

The following discussion may make it clear to the readers why the reforms even before they have been discussed at the General Assembly (Parliament of the UN) in September are doomed.

## Proposed reforms

One of the UN reforms proposed by the task force headed by the former Thai Prime Minister Dr. Anand Panyarachun has been to expand the existing number (15) of members of the Security Council to

24. In suggesting nine additional seats, they recommended two models.

Under Model A, there would be three additional non-permanent members and six additional permanent members. Under Model B, there would be eight additional members for renewable four-year terms and one additional non-permanent member for a two-year term.

The task force, formally known as the High-level Panel on Threats,

of military force; (c) An agreed definition of terrorism; and (d) How to address non-state actors (terrorists who have no support from any state).

But, nations have become more interested in the democratisation of the Security Council than in other reforms. Chinese Ambassador to the UN Wang Guangya reportedly said: "We now face a dilemma. The whole reform agenda has been hijacked by this

tries, Egypt, Nigeria, or South Africa.

The formation of G-4, according to many UN observers, has been counter-productive. Ordinarily, the UN works under regional group system -- Asia, Africa, Europe and Others, and Latin America.

If any country wants to secure a seat in a UN body or its proposal to move forward, it must first seek approval of its own regional group. If any developing country is involved, then the second stage

191-member UN General Assembly (at least 128 votes). If African countries do not back them, they will have no luck to win that kind of majority in the Assembly.

Now the G-4, sensing the danger began negotiations with African countries. They have their own agendas and reportedly want three permanent seats and two non-permanent seats.

The G-4 is now being opposed by another group, called Uniting for Consensus (UFC), consisting

Charter is carried through, it will require not only two-thirds of the members of the General Assembly, but also no negative vote of any of the five permanent members.

Media reports indicate that the US and China have revealed their cards. They will not support the G-4 initiative. The US lends its support only to Japan, not India and Germany (they opposed the Iraqi war). The visit of India's Prime Minister to Washington, although otherwise successful, did not sway the US to change its view.

The negative votes of two of the five permanent members of the Council means that the expansion proposed by the G-4 is doomed. It implies that the four countries, India, Brazil, Japan, and Germany, seem to have been on the wrong track in multilateral diplomacy.

## Conclusion

51 countries established the UN sixty years ago on June 26, 1945, and obviously its structure, set in 1945, is no longer fit to address contemporary global issues. The UN has been crying for reform, particularly within the Security Council, because it does not reflect existing global power realities with its 191 member-countries.

The G-4 countries are unable to win support from the five current permanent members. The bottom line is that the UN can only be reformed as the five permanent members of the Security Council allow it to be.

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

## BOTTOM LINE

51 countries established the UN sixty years ago on June 26, 1945, and obviously its structure, set in 1945, is no longer fit to address contemporary global issues. The UN has been crying for reform, particularly within the Security Council, because it does not reflect existing global power realities with its 191 member-countries. The bottom line is that the UN can only be reformed as the five permanent members of the Security Council allow it to be.

Challenges, and Change, was established by the Secretary General in November 2003, after he failed to halt the invasion of Iraq by US-led forces in March 2003 without the approval of the UN Security Council. The task-force, consisting of 16 distinguished individuals drawn from different countries, was asked to probe the nature of today's global threats and recommend collective solution through reformed UN.

The recommendations of the task force will be debated at the coming session of the UN General Assembly in September this year. (which Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is reportedly expected to attend).

The task force proposed mainly the following reforms:

- Expansion of the Security Council;
- Legitimacy criteria for the use

one issue (Security Council expansion). UN reforms cover many areas and it is simply putting the cart before the horse to talk too much about the Security Council expansion."

## Formation of a G-4

Naturally, the prized additional seats of the Security Council have dominated thoughts of many aspiring nations, and more importantly the issue as to which group of countries would get the seats.

Early on Japan, Brazil, India, and Germany formed a group, called G-4 and canvassed for themselves to get the seats as permanent members and proposed for a 25-member Council, up from the current 15 seat Council (10 more seats, not 9 as proposed by the task force). In their view, the other two permanent seats would be occupied by two African coun-

comes to the Group of 77 -- consisting of Asia, Africa, and Latin America -- for its approval. If it is approved, then it becomes the proposal of Group of 77, now consisting of about 127 developing countries. Both stages are important.

## Critics' view

Some say that India and Brazil should have processed their case through the usual procedures. What they have done is to join together with Japan and Germany who are not members of the Group of 77 of developing countries. And as a result they have skipped the normal procedures, annoying other developing countries, especially the African countries, numbering 53.

In order to get the support of the General Assembly, the G-4 needs to win two-thirds of the votes of the

mainly of Italy, Canada, Spain, Pakistan, and Mexico. They oppose creation of permanent seats in the Security Council and more or less support Model B reform, proposed by the task force.

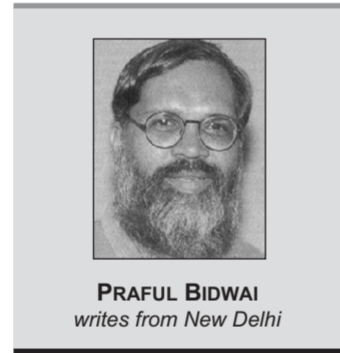
Furthermore, Italy and Spain oppose Germany, Pakistan opposes India, in Latin America, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico are against Brazil, and South Korea and China oppose Japan. It shows how regional rivals gang up against a regionally powerful country.

## Veto power of the big five

The biggest hurdle is to ensure that no country among the existing five permanent members of the Security Council -- Britain, America, France, China, Russia -- would vote against any amendment. Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, if any amendment of the UN

## Don't shield communal killers

The Nanavati Report and after

PRAFUL BIDWAI  
writes from New Delhi

THE charred and hacked remains of the dead eloquently described a horrible and heart-rending tragedy... Women, children and a handful of [men], hiding under dead bodies... They were rescued by reporters... They were emotionless. A three-year old girl, stepping over the bodies of her father [and] three brothers... clung helplessly to a reporter, pleading, "Please take me home" -- Newspaper report from Trilokpuri, November 3, 1984, where over 350 Sikhs were killed in 36 hours.

Yet, a police officer told the reporters filing the story, "Nobody has been killed in Trilokpuri." Shortly thereafter, a Sikh youth, his stomach slashed, collapsed in their arms.

The contrast between reality and the official version of the massacre that followed Indira Gandhi's killing was stark. As violence raged through bustees and middle class colonies, the police largely watched. In many

cases, they participated in the bloodshed and looting.

This writer had just flown into Delhi from Bombay that morning and witnessed the events. The tension was palpable. Malignant rumours flew thick and fast about how "thousands of Sikhs" had celebrated the assassination. "They must be taught a lesson," it was whispered.

By the evening, systematic killing and arson began -- at the

The hopes that the Nanavati Commission would spur adequate corrective action stand belied. The government's Action Taken Report (ATR) is another black-mark in this prolonged cover-up of the state's collusion with premeditated killings.

The Nanavati report is shoddy. It recognises that the violence was "systematic," "organised," and conducted under "instructions" -- but fails to fix culpability, especially

zens' groups like Nagarik Ekta Manch, which interviewed thousands of eyewitnesses and produced a booklet entitled "Who Are the Guilty?" Nine official commissions couldn't achieve even this -- despite their authority and resources.

Justice Nanavati found the Delhi authorities collectively guilty, but individually innocent -- a contradiction! He also held that top officials, including Lt. Governor P.G. Gavai

level" leaders organised the violence. This won't do.

Even more disgracefully, the Centre didn't commit itself to action even where the Nanavati report warrants it. It's only under the Left's pressure that Dr Manmohan Singh asked Msrs Tytler and Sajjan Kumar to resign.

There was "credible evidence" against both. The government originally diluted that observation as amounting to "probabilistic"

India's claim to high global stature doesn't lie in the Security Council or nuclear weapons, not even in growing economic power. It lies in democracy and pluralism. That claim will become a farce if heinous mass-level crimes go unpunished. That would be a tragedy not just for Delhi's Sikhs or Gujarat's Muslims, but for all Indians.

behest of Congress leaders, who mobilised mobs crying for "revenge." Columns of smoke rose all over Delhi. Vehicles were stopped to check the passengers' identity.

Soon, Sikh truckers were "necklaced." Lorry-tyres containing kerosene were hung around their necks. They were burnt alive.

Officially, 2,733 people were killed in the worst communal violence in Independent India, barring Gujarat.

Twenty one years and nine enquiry commissions later, the perpetrators of the carnage haven't been brought to book. Not one politician or policeman stands convicted. Only 13 people of the thousands who killed, raped and burned, have been held guilty.

at the apex level. The judge was working within the confines of the evidence before him. Evidence of communal violence can often be manipulated. Testimonies can be changed. Key witnesses can be bribed or bludgeoned to shield powerful individuals.

The role of Congress politicians in plotting and organising the carnage has been well-documented. They took their cue from Rajiv Gandhi who infamously said: "When a big tree falls, the earth shakes."

The coterie around Gandhi, including Messrs Jagdish Tytler, HKL Bhagat, Sajjan Kumar, Arun Nehru, and Kamal Nath instigated or condoned the killing.

Some of these connections were carefully recorded by citi-

and Police Commissioner S.C. Tandon, shouldn't be prosecuted because they have retired.

This makes no sense. Mr Tandon has retired, but he is liable for actions committed while holding office. Mr Gavai took his orders from the Union home ministry. He seems to have been made a scapegoat.

Mr Gavai ordered Mr Tandon to call in the army in the morning of November 1. However, the army effectively arrived only on November 3, by which time hundreds had been killed. Mr Gavai says Home Minister Narasimha Rao "hid like a rat" for three days.

There was no political will to stop the violence, and later, to punish its perpetrators. The Congress pretends that only "local-

evidence. But all criminal cases are registered on probabilistic evidence! Only conviction needs conclusive proof.

The ATR rules out prosecuting Mr Bhagat because of his poor health and Mr Kamal Nath because of a witness's changed affidavit. Poor health can justify a lighter sentence, not the absence of prosecution. Similarly, it's for a trial court to evaluate the evidence against Mr Nath. But the ATR drops their prosecution altogether.

This travesty of justice will horrify the public and signal that impunity for grave crimes is the rule in India: the powerful cannot be brought to book; the rich rarely go to jail. The law is only applied against the powerless.

The UPA must not vacillate over fulfilling its "solemn promise" to pursue all individuals named by Mr Nanavati and previous inquiries. It must charge them and try them in special courts.

A higher principle is involved. If India is to live up to the great democratic aspirations of its people, it must affirm the rule of law -- systematically, painstakingly, and impartially. This is a precondition for democracy.

The anti-Sikh pogrom presents a special challenge -- and an opportunity to do justice to the victims of a gruesome massacre.

Taking prompt and serious action on the Nanavati report will be a prelude to the Ultimate Test the nation faces: namely, denying impunity to the perpetrators of barbarity in Gujarat. Gujarat was greater in scale and brutality than Delhi, especially in its bestial quality of sexual violence. It was also more directly state-instigated.

India's claim to high global stature doesn't lie in the Security Council or nuclear weapons, not even in growing economic power. It lies in democracy and pluralism.

That claim will become a farce if heinous mass-level crimes go unpunished. That would be a tragedy not just for Delhi's Sikhs or Gujarat's Muslims, but for all Indians.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

## OPINION

## The nation's disgrace

By trying to deny his place as our founding father despite all his struggles, by not meting out due punishment to his killers, and finally by not paying him due tributes through observance of his death on August 15 as a state sponsored National Mourning Day, we are betraying ourselves and presenting ourselves before the world as a nation of betrayers.

recourse to hiding one of Abul Mansur Ahmed's most voluminous works titled "From Sher-e-Bangla to Bangabandhu."

Mr. Ahmed, a senior politician, meticulously illustrated, as he himself saw, Mujib's rise to as the charismatic leader, Bangabandhu, and finally the "father of the nation." Maybe the powers that be are all bent on denigrating Mujib, and in line with that, among many of the detractions, his picture in the currency note was removed, and his mural in the Cantonment also. If that could be allowed to happen, why should we be surprised that BTV would not to show a book that bears the word Bangabandhu in its title? Being saddened in the manner

in which Sheikh Mujib is being neglected in the nation state of which he was the architect, I cannot help recounting a few events that are historical facts, perhaps not known to the readers and leaders of all hues. Who knows not that Sheikh Mujib's six-point programme sowed the seeds of the birth of this nation? The Pakistani rulers sensed in it the disintegration of Pakistan, and so they conspired to liquidate him through his indictment in the Agartala Conspiracy Case. But students' movements and Moulana Bhasani's call "break open the jail, bring out Sheikh Mujib" foiled that conspiracy. And who can deny that his winning of 167 seats of National Assembly

election of Pakistan out of 169 in East Pakistan in 1970 was the Bengalees' mandate for his six-points, and came as a bombshell to the Pakistanis and the Pakistani military junta, and that when they again began to conspire to frustrate the hopes and aspirations of Bengalees, he saw no other way ahead than to deliver his historic March 7 speech. And with what swan song he concluded needs no repetition.

People all over East Pakistan found the right chord in the speech of their most beloved and trusted leader. Was there anybody else who could be so fearless as Mujib to make such epoch-making decision known to the Pakistanis? And with that, 75

million people of East Pakistan found in him their undisputed leader. Pakistan in its history of 24 years was thrown into its worst political crisis.

Who was the towering man but Mujib from moribund East Pakistan to sit face to face with the President of Pakistan who in course of the political discourse with Mujib found it was none but he who was 'the root cause of total disintegration of Pakistan' and took him into captivity to determine his fate. But with the blessings of Almighty Allah to whom his people prayed for his life, and for the freedom fighters who fought with his name in their heart, as also for the pressure of world leaders and world press, he was honourably freed

and he triumphantly returned to his people to take the reins of the newly founded People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Was there anybody else who could claim that position? It is none other than he who thought for Bengalees, fought for Bengalees, and achieved for Bengalees a homeland of their own to turn it into Sonar Bangla. Verily he became the father of the nation.

Yes, he failed in his mission. But should that have got some disgruntled military officers in collusion with one of his trusted colleagues who played the role of Brutus to annihilate him and his family members? That which his arch enemy Pakistanis could not dare do, a few black sheep of his fellow men accomplished!

It was because of his dynamic and patriotic leadership that recognition of most of the countries of the world was gained, the Indian soldiers who made our independence possible were made to leave this land within only three months, which

was unique in history. The Herculean tasks of rebuilding the ravaged and shattered country could be achieved within the shortest possible time, and the country got set on strong footing. In the war-torn country people were disarrayed, violent and split in many groups and many had arms. They were brought under control and discipline to a satisfactory level with thousands surrendering arms. It was possible only because a leader of Mujib's stature and popularity was there.

By trying to deny his place as our founding father despite all his struggles, by not meting out due punishment to his killers, and finally by not paying him due tributes through observance of his death on August 15 as a state sponsored National Mourning Day, we are betraying ourselves and presenting ourselves before the world as a nation of betrayers.

AH Dewan is a retired government official.