DR. MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

LEST WE FORGET

T was sometime in the year

Professor Noman

Rediscovering 'a nice man'

HERE is no controversy about the principle that an election will be conducted by the Election Commission based on up-to-date voter list so that nobody reaching the voting age on the date of voting is denied the constitutional right of voting. Again, all votes are supposed to carry equal weight, which means that the delimitation of constituency must also be up-todate. The Election Commission must ensure that the voter list is upto-date and delimitation reflects equal or nearly equal weight of votes in all constituencies. It can hardly be achieved through ad hoc arrangement as is practiced now, and is susceptible to easy vote rigging by way of enlistment of fake voters, multiple enlistment of same voters, casting of proxy votes for absentee voters, intimidation of voters, manipulation of vote count. etc. There is a necessity for effective, permanent institutional

Local self-government: There is now a greater realisation of the importance of a scientific local selfgovernment system as stipulated in the constitution. Whether the local government will be of two or three tiers is to be resolved once for all and broad guidelines provided in the constitution, scrapping vague laws. Though, the concept of Union

Parishad, Upazilla and Zilla parishad is well understood in Bangladesh, it has not been established as a functional institution. The members of the Parliament apprehend that there might develop a clash of interest between them and the chairmen of the local bodies, who are chief executives of their respective entities. This apprehension is baseless in that the members of parliament are supposed to be full-time law makers at national level, while the chairmen are supposed to be full-time executives of their local entities, delivering service to the people according to the broad legal framework determined by the constitution and relevant laws of the parliament.

The chairmen and the members of local government council/deliberative assembly are supposed to be paid handsomely. Though the population of the country of about 140 million is large, the area of about 147.570 sq.km is quite small to justify 6 divisions, 64 districts, 507 upazillas and about 4,484 unions, if we decide reasonably high pay for the elected members. If the present Union, Upazilla and Zilla system is to be retained, the number of Zilla may be reduced to about 25. Upazilla to about 200 and Union to about 3,000. A serious thought may be given to the number of tiers and the number of local self-government

bodies. There is a scope of reducing the number of tiers into two. Upazilla may even be abolished by increasing the size of the Unions. As the number of municipalities are increased, larger union size will curtail the cost of administration. The total employees of local government will be much higher than that of the central government, which may help in conducting election at much

Functions of local self government: The duties of the local bodies health insurance, healthcare and hasic health check service, 4) generation of productive employment, 5) provision of social security, such as unemployment allowance, old age allowance, child care allowance, re-education and training for the unemployed, soft loan to smallbusiness entrepreneurs, national pension, etc., 6) local infrastructure building, setting up of schools, community centres, libraries, sports facilities, parks and recreational facilities. 7) administration of com-

Authenticity of voter list, local govt and fair election

17) enactment of local laws, and various other service under their own responsibility and also as agents of the central government. The personal information about any citizen shall not be divulged to any third party without the authority of law. If the local government performs all their functions neutrally and properly, the citizens will enjoy improved social life in peace.

Authentic and up-to-date voter list: The local government election is supposed to be non-party based in stipulated period of, say, 15 or 30 days. Anybody reaching the voting age, as may be determined by law, shall be obliged to get a new replacement of his old citizen registration card which shall serve as voter ID as well. Similarly any person reaching the age of 60 or the age recognised for old-age benefit shall get his citizen registration card replaced with a new one to claim his

As local self government has not yet been operating with all its

If it is sincerely desired that service is delivered to the people, election is conducted fairly, people's rights are established, economy is revitalised, national capacity is built up, universal compulsory education is introduced, human resource is developed, industrial base is strengthened, full employment is approached, and social peace is established through government-people trust and not by imposition of anti-people irrational law. There is no substitute to institutionalisation of scientific local self-government system that does not

Identity of voter and fair polling must be ensured through a foolproof system

like Zilla, Upazilla, Union parishad, city wards, and municipalities are supposed to include :-

1) Registration of all citizens within their jurisdiction with photographs, fingerprints, retinal image and other necessary information that does not impinge upon their constitutionally guaranteed privacy. (No information may be recorded without the knowledge of the person concerned). 2) registration of birth. death, marriage and divorce, 3) pulsory education, 8) provision of agricultural extension service, 9) maintenance of public safety, risk management and disaster counter measures, 10) collection of taxes (including automobile tax). 11) waste disposal, 12) regulation and supervision of small businesses, 13) protection of environment, 14) local police administration, 15) inheritance recording, 16) issuance of citizenship, birth-, residence-, marriage- and divorce-certificates,

One week on from 7/7, a hush fell

over Central London as Londoners

stood side by side amongst the floral

tributes and messages during two

minute's silence to honour the dead.

of these terrible events, then it will

be the resolve Londoners have

shown in refusing to allow terrorism

to impinge on how they live their

lives. This has been evident in the

way the ethnically diverse commu-

nities around Edgware Road -- the

Arab street of London -- have stood

In the joy Londoners showed at

winning the Olympic bid, and in the

determination shown to resist terror

and prejudice, London's true

challenging for us all as London

absorbs these momentous events,

with the investigation into the tragic

shooting and civic leaders keeping

an eve on the state of community

relations. But Londoners' early

response has shown that we

respect each other because of our

differences and despite them. This

is why so many people, from all over

The next few months will be

strength is shining through.

together in the wake of the attacks.

If anything positive is to come out

principle, as such this institution is always ready to provide authentic, official, up-to-date voter list as well as the list of people qualifying for old-age allowance and other social benefits, based on established and verifiable records. The date of birth in the citizen registration will determine the voting age. If any citizen changes his address of residence he shall be obliged to report the change to the corresponding new local government office within a

desired functions and next parliamentary election is not too far, the preparation of citizen registration cards serving as voter ID with photograph can be started right away with those who are going to attain the age of 18 on January 1, 2006, which shall be delivered to them, say, a few days before their reaching the age of 18 or the age of voter eligibility. The citizen registration cards of other citizens or new voters can be prepared accordingly and delivered to persons concerned directly. After some years, the system will be established firmly and confusion of

voter list will disappear. As the election for Union Parishad, Municipality, cities and wards are already completed, there is no hurdle in launching the process. Time is definitely a constraint, but local college students, school teachers and civilian volunteers can be mobilised, supported by Election Commission, the government agencies placed under EC and willing civil society. The local government members shall provide active help in recording information correctly endorsed by the representatives of EC and elected local government body representatives. The EC has already asked for a fund of Tk.146.29 crore for the purpose.

Fair election: Even if the voter list is flawless, the identification of voters is perfect, the election itself may not be fair if the voters cannot cast their votes freely for the person they choose without fear, intimidation or allurement of money or blessings. The electoral law limits the election campaign period to 15 days or so and campaign fund to five lac taka which may appear to be too low and alleged to be exceeded by many candidates. The vote buying is prohibited. The qualification criteria are stipulated in the constitution. The electoral law may ordain disclosure of private information of the candidates as may be necessary for their evaluation by the voters. For election to be on fair ground a candidate must be required to relinguish his executive position in any private company, public corporation or local government bodies and shall not enjoy any benefit from such organisations during election period and after being elected. The compliance of which shall be ensured by the election commission with the help of the executive organs of the state, which they are bound to provide according to law. In order to preempt any violence, or violation, the police system must be wellprepared. Though recently, police is backed by members of armed forces, there still remain some chances of wrong doing.

If the local self-government can be institutionalised, KOBAN (police box -- a Japanese police system adapted from French system) which is now widely adopted by most of the south east Asian countries may be effectively introduced. This system helps detection of not only election law violation, but also any social

As most of the general voters are not yet well-educated, high-tech electronic voting system may not immediately be effective. If voter ID cards are introduced, a mix of manual and computerised system can produce desired result.

Election review board: An Election Review Board may be established to expeditiously deal with election law violations and other election-related matters. It shall be empowered to cancel the election result of any particular constituency, or to reverse the election result in favour of the second highest vote winner if gross violation by the declared winner is established. The function of the present election tribunal may also be strengthened to serve this purpose.

If it is sincerely desired that service is delivered to the people, election is conducted fairly, people's rights are established, economy is revitalised, national capacity is built up, universal compulsory education is introduced, human resource is developed. industrial base is strengthened, full employment is approached, and social peace is established through governmentpeople trust and not by imposition of anti-people irrational laws. There is no substitute to institutiona-lisation of scientific local self-government system that does not compete with, but rather supports, the central government.

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1963. My father and I were passing on foot by the Jagannath Collage. We ran into a handsome gentleman who seemed to be quite intimate with my father. That the gentleman was an advocate by profession could be seen from the dress he had on. They exchanged words regarding each other's welfare while I stood nearby them. He looked at me and said Your son? Which school does he go to?" My father said in reply "He has just passed his school final, should now go to a collage." He looked at me and asked "Which collage would be your best choice, Baba?" In reply I said "I have applied for admission to Dhaka Collage." He happily said "Very good, very good" and to my father the gentleman said "In Dhaka Collage there is someone very close to us, Professor Noman, son of Advocate Abdul Lateef Shaheb. Such a nice man, indeed." My father agreed and expressed similar sentiments. The gentleman turned to me and said "You will certainly come to know of him, if you are admitted to Dhaka Collage.' After exchange of wishes we parted and were on our way. My father later mentioned to me that the gentleman was Advocate Dewan Abul Abbas, hon'ble member of the Legislative Assembly and a widely respected man in Comilla Nabinagar area. I had not seen Noman Sir till then.

But had since the urge to see and come to know that 'nice man'. Soon afterwards, having enrolled as a student of Dhaka Collage I had the fortune of seeing and attending classes of Noman Sir, of knowing and discovering the 'nice man' that Professor Noman was. In his manners, gait and speech style -- a man of exquisite finesse, inevitably charming, a man always on best of terms with himself. We had only two classes a week with him. And with great eagerness we used to look forward to the two classes every week. Whosoever had the fortune of becoming a student of Professor Noman they must have had an abiding imprint of his welcome influence on them. Therein certainly is the glory of a teacher's life and profession, a trait that is supposed to reward the teacher and the taught

From then on, 'I had enjoyed my fortune of remaining close and near to him. The more I observed him. The more I felt that he had come by some more treasure of life that made him a 'nice man' of dignity with respect for others.

When I remember him, host of events and moments and incidents crowd in my memory. At the start of those dreadful days of 1971 while our whole family was fleeing Dhaka

for the ancestral village, on the way thought of finding out if Noman Sir had succeeded in coming out of Dhaka and if he too had fled to his village. On the same motor launch I found out from a fellow-traveler that Noman Sir with his family members had gone to his village by this same way a day or two earlier and that he had also taken with him to his village Professor Rehman Sobhan. A few days after, to know of the welfare of Noman Sir I had gone to his village home. When I reached there I found him sitting on a stool, a book in hand

in a corner of the yard of their home.

He was extremely happy to see me. I said, "Sir, I have come only to know if you are safe and well." He said, "how could one be safe and well under such circumstances? Anyway, nice to see you, it is good you came." Someone brought a stool for me to sit on. After a while, a man of the village, a bit senior in age, came to see Noman Sir. By and by Noman Sir heartily engaged himself in an affectionate conversation with the man, at ease and spontaneously in the local dialect of his village. The conversation itself seemed so courteous and pleasant that I watched and listened amazed and wondered -- is it the same person who used to lecture to us on Shakespearean sonnets in moduated Oxbridgian accent. And the same man is so much at one, so undiscernibly, with a villager who perhaps had never been to school

After 25 years since then, in 1996 on September 6, laying him on his final resting place, standing by the grave, a man (someone of the family) raised his hands in prayer and prayed by saying -- "Hey Allah, You have seen he did his every duty to us all his life -- he spared no pains to see us grow up as good humans we pray for the salvation of his soul. Hey Allah grant our prayers. We trust in your grace." That was Noman Sir, a legend, an educated, cultured and cultivated, dignified and dutiful man, in his elements a teacher, 'a nice man',

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London united

In joy, grief and now determination

Londoners' early response has shown that we respect each other because of our differences and despite them. This is why so many people, from all over the world, choose to make London their home in the first place. And this is why terrorism will not defeat us.

MURAD QURESHI

ULY 2005 has been the most dramatic month that Londoners have seen in the last 20 years. On Wednesday July 6, London was awarded the Olympic and Paralympic Games for 2012 and we all seem to "punch the air" that afternoon in Trafalgar Square in London. Believe you me it was important that we beat Paris and New York to that accolade.

On Thursday, July 7, over 50 Londoners died and 700 were injured in a horrific attack on our city including my local tube station, Edgware Road, On July 21, bombers tried again but failed. The day after we had a very nervous Friday morning which set the climate to the tragic shooting of Jean Charles de

These are such very different events it is hard to know how to reconcile them. But London in its inimitable fashion has done exactly

business of being London -- of being a place where people, no matter what their backgrounds or values, will come to seek a better life for themselves and their families, respecting and valuing the differences and opportunities that London offers them. Jean Charles de Menzes himself came to London to work and save enough to set up a cattle ranch in Brazil. These two very different events

have two things in common. Both will affect London for years to come in such a myriad of wavs that we are only now starting to understand what they might be And both showed that London

has a huge strength that comes from our very diversity and our tolerance that is a sign of great hope for the future.

The bombings of 7/7 have had a deep effect on London. We know that people have been affected here Westminster, particularly in the attack on Edgware Road tube station, and our thoughts are with them during this difficult time



the world, choose to make London their home in the first place. And this is why terrorism will not defeat us. This was illustrated well at the Notting Hill carnival this past weekend. Three quarters of a million people united at the Notting Hill

carnival to give a defiant message, London is back in business. The massive street party is proof that the capital is unbowed by the July 7 and July 21 attacks. The joyous atmosphere was an expression of unity in London united, one world in one

city. And a London united can win accolades like the Olympics.

Cllr Murad Qureshi is a London Assembly

Katrina devastation greater than worst fears

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

OUTH ASIA, particularly Bangladesh has been projected, time and again, by western media pundits as disaster prone area in the world, but they perhaps conveniently ignored occurrence of such things in Europe and the United States. But now the people have been witnessing many parts of Europe being affected by floods every year since 1999. But it actually begun in 1953 causing 200 death. And tornado, hurricanes and cyclones have been visiting the United States since time immemorial. In 1609 a fleet of ships carrying settlers from England to Virginia was struck by a hurricane. Some of the ships grounded at Bermuda. The passengers were first inhabitants in Bermuda. This episode inspired Shakespeare to write Tempest. The French lost bid to capture the Atlantic coast of North America because of hurricane which hit in 1565 to disperse their fleet. In 1900, hurricane hit Galveston in Texas and took the lives of 8000. Florida's southern part saw worst hurricane in September 1928. Therefore, the phenomenon of natural disasters does not confine to South Asia alone.

The United States has been confronted with severe fury of nature since June this year with intervals. Season of tropical storm and hurricane have been sweeping the coasts from Miami . Florida to Alabama, Louisinia and Mississippi in the south. It is interesting to note that hurricane and tornado have been associated with the names of women in the United States like Arlene, Camille, Ivan and Katrina.

Of late Hurricane Katrina has violently swept Louisinia, Mississippi, Alabama, Miami and Florida from 25 through 31 August at a speed of 125 to 140 miles an hour causing havoc in its trail. Millions of people in Florida, Miami, Mississippi and Louisiana have been made homeless. Most Katrina Hurricane affected victims took shelter in Superdomes in Mississippi and New Orleans, which were again ripped off by the hurricane. About

Risk assessment firms estimate that it could cost the insurance industry around \$25 billion to compensate. Last year four separate hurricanes that hit Florida and other east coast areas of the United States cost insurers nearly \$23 billion. "The devastation is greater than our worst fears. It is just totally overwhelming," said Governor of Louisiana Kathleen Blanco while Federal **Emergency Management Agency called Katrina the most significant natural** disaster to hit the United States.



A swathe of devastation across the coast one and a half million people were

evacuated from many affected places. Evacuated people in Mississippi and Louisiana remained without drinking waters and electricity for days until situation improved. According to Washington Times, more than three-quarters of a million people were without electricity from Louisiana to Florida and Mississippi and Alabama . Mile after mile of coastline settlements in Mississippi and Alabama were simply wiped out. Debris from flattened buildings littered streets, and smell of natural gas from broken lines wafted through the air. Levee breaches added misery to

the city dwellers of New Orleans in

the wake of the hurricane that then headed towards Tennessee and

Thousands are feared dead now and damage to properties could accede billion of dollars. There were reports of an unknown number of bodies seen floating in the flood waters in New Orleans and Louisiana. The hurricane was followed by a surge of waters 15 to 20 feet high in many places in New Orleans and Mississippi. As a result, many houses and stores were inundated and many houses collapsed as well. In spite of this severe type of hurricane the death toll is relatively low in comparison to south Asian countries. This is because in the United States the population is also comparatively low and they are better equipped to cope with such disasters. Federal emergency agency is also prepared to tackle the worst situation arising out of natural disasters. Early warning system is very effective which helped eighty percent people to leave their homes for safer places. It is an irony that many looters were seen and caught while the hurricane was sweeping New Orleans and Mississippi. And it is sad that relief took too much time Many oil refineries in Louisinia.

Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico were damaged. Assessment of damage has not yet been com-

pleted. Oil production dropped by 1.4 million barrels a day. The storm halted barge traffic on the Mississippi going to upriver refineries. The hurricane in fact paralyzed energy production all along the Alabama coast which is known as oil and gas hub of the United States. The hurricane battered offshore oil platforms and pipelines as well. This has resulted in oil price rise. There is a possibility of further rise in oil price unless oil refineries are back to production

Although late, the Federal government has mobilised a massive emergency assistance programme to rush baby food, communications equipment, generators, water, and ice into hard hit areas. President Bush declared Louisiana and Mississippi as disaster zone and pledged extensive federal assistance for the victims. President Bush is expected to tap into nation's emergency petroleum stockpiles to help refineries affected by the

American Red Cross has made an appeal to Americans to donate money to help the hurricane victims. It has kicked off what it calls the largest mobilisation of resources in its history for a single disaster. It has dispatched hundreds of its volunteers to work in the affected areas Thousands of volunteers, rescue workers, utility crews from the capital were on the move to the affected areas in the South. Some commentators said there had never been such a magnitude of hurricane in 30 years. Risk assessment firms estimate that it could cost the insurance industry around \$25 billion to compensate. Last year four separate hurricanes that hit Florida and other east coast areas of the United States cost insurers nearly \$23 billion. "The devastation is greater than our worst fears. It is just totally overwhelming," said Governor of Louisiana Kathleen Blanco while Federal Emergency Management Agency called Katrina the most significant natural disaster to hit the United States

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, a former Bangladesh diplomat, resides in Virginia

London tube returned to normal.