

Authenticity of voter list, local govt and fair election

DR. MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

THERE 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.

Local self-government: There is now a greater realisation of the importance of a scientific local self-government system as stipulated in the constitution.

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 chairmen and the members of local government council/deliberative assembly are supposed to be paid handsomely.

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.

Functions of local self government: The duties of the local bodies

health insurance, healthcare and basic 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 small-business 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-

17) enactment of local laws, and various other service under their own responsibility and also as agents of the central government.

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.

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

tion. 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 relinquish 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.

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.

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.

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 laws.

Dr. Mustafizur Rahman is Chairman, the Institute of Development Strategy, Dhaka.

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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.

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,

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.

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.

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.

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 allurements of money or blessings.

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

JULY 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.

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 Menezes.

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

London has got on with the 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.

These two very different events have two things in common. Both will affect London for years to come in such a myriad of ways 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 in Westminster, particularly in the attack on Edgware Road tube station, and our thoughts are with them during this difficult time.

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.

If anything positive is to come out 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 communities around Edgware Road -- the Arab street of London -- have stood together in the wake of the attacks.

The next few months will be challenging for us all as London absorbs these momentous events, with the investigation into the tragic shooting and civic leaders keeping an eye 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 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.

London united, one world in one city. And a London united can win accolades like the Olympics.

Cllr Murad Qureshi is a London Assembly Member.



London tube returned to normal.

Katrina devastation greater than worst fears

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

SOUTH 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, Louisiana 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.

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

LEST WE FORGET

Professor Noman Rediscovering 'a nice man'

M J JAHANGIR

IT was sometime in the year 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.

My father said in reply "He has just passed his school final, should now go to a college." 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."

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'.

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 I 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 his 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 modulated Oxbridgian accent. And the same man is so much at one, so undiscernibly, with a villager who perhaps had never been to school ever.

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 dignified, dignified and dutiful man, in his elements a teacher, 'a nice man'.

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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 storm.

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.

Many oil refineries in Louisiana, Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico were damaged. Assessment of damage has not yet been com-

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