The Daily Star

POINT 综COUNTERPOINT



After retirement from government

service, Rezaul Karim actively joined

politics and was a member of the

Advisory Council of the BNP. He was

so proud of his role in the liberation

war and his attachment to

Bangabandhu that many of his friends

and well wishers believe that he had

He was also the President of Ban-

gladesh Commonwealth Society, and

Chairman of PKSF (Palli Kormo-

Sahayak Foundation), Presidents of

Swanirvor Bangladesh and Kushtia

District Association and many other

social organisations. He was also a

member of International Observer

Groups, which monitored elections in

Last February, Rezaul Karim tele-

phoned me to inform that two of his

latest books, 'Kutniteker

Abhigotta" and "Kutinitiker Diary",

were being launched at the Ekushe

Book Fair at Bangla Academy on that

day. He wanted me to read the books.

which were basically autobiographi-

cal, about his experiences in various

capitals. He thought that I might find

them interesting as I too had served in

many of those stations, such as New

Delhi, New York, Jeddah, and Tehran.

I went to the book fair, bought the

books and read them with keen inter-

My last encounter with him was

last March when one of our local

Bangla satellite TV channels had

invited him and me to take part in

their programme entitled "Probashe

Sri Lanka, Cameroon and Pakistan.

joined the wrong political party.

Electoral malpractices: Problems and prescriptions

Muhammad Nurul Huda

OST elections in independent Bangladesh have experienced various kinds of malpractices. The worrying part, however, is that over the years the nature and intensity of the irregularities and illegalities have assumed such a fearful dimension that there are justifiable premonitions about the holding of an acceptable and credible national poll. Admittedly, there are causes for concern as the viability of a democratic polity affecting the quality of life of the citizens across our political divide is at stake.

Looking back one may find that small level forgery, forcible closure of voting through muscle flexing by bullies of the party, voting by impersonation in some constituencies were resorted to by a section of the political party, particularly in the sensitive or remote areas of the country. By and large these did not attract serious attention as it most often did not significantly affect the national polls. The situation, however, changed ominously as extraconstitutional rule descended on the body politic and the period between 1982 to 1988 saw some of the worst electoral malpractices that were legally punishable and morally reprehensible, to say the least. Sadly for the nation, the public services of the country that included subordinate magistracy and the enforcement apparatus, amongst others, played a pathetically energised and ignominious role in the shameful stage managed election at the behest of a malevolent autocrat. Expressions like 'Media Coup' became known for the first time in our part of the world where despite the economic adversity the general population and the election managers could be proud

of tolerably healthy electoral practices. The fall of autocratic rule in December 1990 raised hopes about

fair election but unfortunately the democratic aspirations got a rude jolt at the irregularities of the now lamented 'Magura bye-election' and the least participated February 1996 national polls. Continuous agitation and 'hartals' by the then opposition parties shortened the tenure of the government that

followed the February 1996 election

recognition. However, this arrange which are inaccessible communiment has not been fully successful cation wise. Vote counting in assuaging the fears of a biased i.Ulterior arrangement and proviand rigged election.

sion of excess ballot papers/boxes It is pertinent to note that the in collaboration with election Caretaker Government only overofficials. sees the national election while ii.Rigging the counting process subsequent elections like byeby resorting to removal of some elections for parliament and other

ballot boxes, interfering and changelections to the local bodies are ing the tabulation, changheld during the incumbency of an ing/altering the cancelled votes, increasingly overbearing and interchanging the votes in favour of fering party government. The particular candidate. recent experience of Dhaka-10 bye

iii.Causing disappearance of ballot boxes during their movement from polling centre to the District headquarters. Deliberate disturbance at polling

Against the above backdrop it may centre for facilitating forgery: worthwhile to dwell on the i. Fixing dummy candidate and electoral malpractices that has consequent appointment of ficticharacterised our polls in the hope tious agents with a view to underthat demonstrable countervailing mining the opportent

commit forgery

trative manipulation

the polling centre.

sonnel.

results.

the losing candidate

Some suggestions

with the concerned voter list. II. Vote casting through electronic system can be introduced at least in the urban areas along the lines practiced in neighbouring India. Alternatively, transparent ballot boxes may be arranged to avoid malpractice.

III. All candidates should be provided with the list of concerned presiding, polling officers and their assistants at least 15 days prior to the election. Any objection by the candidates in this regard should be sorted at the same time. Similarly, the list of polling centres should be distributed and publicised at the same time.

IV. The counting of ballots shall be held in presence of all agents and unnecessary gathering/assembly of persons during such counting must not be allowed.

The Election Commission has, undoubtedly, a pivotal role in the conduction of a fair and orderly election with the help and support of field level administrative officials along with enforcement functionaries including the Armed Forces personnel. The cooperation and proper performance of the support organisations can be ensured by a tough and demonstrably efficient Election Commission. Unfortunately, this has not been possible due to structural deficiencies and personality factors.

iii. To stall voting on the pretext

iv. Cancelling the entire voting

process of a centre after counting

and preliminary announcement of

of minor problem and conveniently

commencing later in the absence of

agents of opposing candidate.

measures are taken in time. Some of the malpractices are listed below: Corrupting the election environment

election for a parliamentary seat

does not bode well for a fair election

The malpractices

i. Resorting to vote purchase by open disbursement of cash and kind like mobile phone, bicycles, clothes etc to the vulnerable section of the voting population.

ii. Restraining the actual voters from voting by means of intimidation/threats and resorting to inspired fray/altercation. This technique is used to scare away the weaker section of the population, particularly the religious minorities

iii. Scaring and driving away the voters by motivated use of the law enforcement personnel in the form of unnecessary preemptive arrest, torture and consequent spreading of fear.

Vote forgery

lar centre.

i. Forcibly taking control of some voting centres for a definite time for applying pressure to vote for partisan candidate. ii. Printing of excess ballot

papers and its illegal distribution. now along with provision of photoiii. Excessive false vote casting graph for each voter in the list. The resulting in more votes cast than final voters list should be com-

ii. Appointing partisan observers V. The maximum number of to exert unhealthy influence and ballots per polling booth may be limited to 350. Votes cast in excess Mismanagement and adminisof this number will result in the cancellation of the election at such i. Providing incorrect voters list booth or centre.

to a candidate and using another at VI. Election may be staggered over a period of one week. On each ii. Appointment of partisan day such election may be held at a election officials and arranging maximum of 9000 centres. Accordexcess ballots or presentingly, distribution of election offiing/stuffing the ballot boxes in cials and law enforcement personcollusion with such partisan pernel may be worked out.

> VII. The counting of votes may be held on the last day of election. The ballot boxes of earlier held polling may be kept at designated secure places. The counting of last day's poll may be done at the concerned polling centre.

VIII. The Armed Forces personnel may be utilised in guarding the v.Misleading the Election Comaforementioned ballot boxes at mission by transmitting the lead of designated places

IX. There should be a definite policy for appointing presiding and I. As far as practicable the computpolling officers and their assistants. erisation of voters should start from All political parties should be able to concur on this policy. All election officials may be drawn from government if election is held over a week.

Rezaul Karim: My tributes

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

Some preventive measures like the following may be taken to forestall untoward happenings. I. In respect of election observation group and related matters there can be a steering committee

party observer team for each con-II. National level election observation organisations have to be registered at least six months prior to the election and this should be widely publicised for the benefit of public information. Their functions and responsibilities should be

fixed III. Information about foreign observer groups may be declared at least one month prior to the election. They may be sent to violenceprone and far-off polling centres.

stituency

IV. Identity papers/cards for the observers should be issued by the Election Commission. This should be done 15 days prior to the election

Ballot paper printing and vote cancellation

I. In order to avoid complication or dispute the opinion of all political parties may be sought in this regard. Specifically, comments may be solicited from proposed all party observation team.

II. The laws or rules regarding cancellation of casted votes should be definite and clear. Similar measure should be taken in matters of acceptance/rejection of nomination papers.

The Election Commission has, undoubtedly, a pivotal role in the conduction of a fair and orderly election with the help and support of field level administrative officials along with enforcement functionaries including the Armed Forces personnel. The cooperation and proper performance of the support organisations can be ensured by a tough and demonstrably efficient Election Commission. Unfortunately, this has not been possible due to structural deficiencies and personality factors. Within the existing provisions the Election Commission can still stand tall and make all concerned realise that in matters pertaining to a credible poll they are in charge

EATH is inevitable. Yet, when a senior and affectionate colleague suddenly dies, one is gripped with shock and grief. Rezaul Karim, a career Foreign Service officer of 1959 batch, was one of our most successful diplomats. He served as Bangladesh Ambassador to China, Iraq, Iran, and in each district along with an all-Soviet Union and as our High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and United Kingdom before his retirement from diplomatic service in 1992.

> Among the Bangladesh Foreign Service officers, he has probably served as Ambassador to the largest number of countries. He returned to the diplomatic arena recently after long 13 years and went to Cairo as our Ambassador last August. He served in that capacity till his death.

> Rezaul Karim was a language movement activist and a valiant freedom fighter. He declared his allegiance to Bangladesh in 1971 and served as the Deputy Chief of Bangla desh Mission in London. After the liberation of Bangladesh, Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, who was heading the London Mission during the liberation war, returned to Bangladesh leaving him in charge.

The high point in his career came on 8 January 1971 when he was called to London Heathrow airport to receive Bangabandhu on his release from captivity in Pakistan. It was a defining moment in our national history. Rezaul Karim has given a graphic account of that memorable day in his latest books. It was Rezaul Karim who first apprised Bangabandhu about our War of Independence.

Soon thereafter, he was called to Dhaka to Head the European Division in the Foreign Ministry. During the initial years of our independence, he played an active role in obtaining recognition of Bangladesh by other countries, as well as in Bangladesh's joining various international organisations. Subsequently, he was sent to establish our Mission in Saudi Arabia and later became our Deputy High Commissioner in New Delhi. His first Ambassadorial assignment was to Sri Lanka in 1978.

I first came in contact with Rezaul Karim in 1971. At that time, along with my senior Bangali colleagues, I had left Pakistan Embassy in Washington DC, declared our allegiance to Bangladesh, and opened the Bangladesh Mission. We used to keep in touch with him in London. However, I met him for the first time in 1974 when I came to Dhaka from Washington DC on home leave.

He was always elegantly dressed and very professional. He was kind and affectionate to his junior colleagues and was always generous

officers, and their wives, to a theatre establish air links between Tehran in Bailey Road to see the play 'Sajano and Dhaka by Iran Air. Rezaul Karim Bagan.'We thoroughly appreciated was very happy at these positive this kind gesture. developments.

When I was posted in Bangladesh Mission to the UN in early eighties, he came on a visit to New York from Baghdad where he was our Ambassador. He had served in New York in the sixties. As usual, Rezaul Karim took all the officers and their wives for a sumptuous dinner at an expensive seafood restaurant on the New York wharf.

He also visited me in Jeddah where I was Consul General in late eighties. The Consulate General was still in the same building that he had rented in 1975. Many Saudi officials that I came in contact with still warmly remembered him.

Before I left on my ambassadorial assignment to Iran in mid-nineties, Rezaul Karim and Salma Bhabi hosted a farewell luncheon for my wife and me. He invited all our colleagues who had earlier served in



Iran. He briefed me in detail about life in Iran and also emphasised the need for strengthening bilateral ties with Iran. He specifically mentioned that I should try to arrange a visit to Bangladesh by the Iranian President and also work for the establishment of direct air links between the two capitals.

He had a rich collection of books and antiques. After the lunch, he showed us his well-known collection of walking sticks from different parts of the world. These sticks were svstematically numbered and arranged with brief description of each of them. This surely inspired my wife Tuhfa to intensify her own collection of walking sticks.

Rezaul Karim was posted in Tehran in late eighties and we were indeed happy to see how fondly the Iranian people remembered him and Salma Bhabi.

Within months of my arrival in Tehran, it was possible to arrange the first-ever visit by an Iranian President to Bangladesh. President Rafsanjani's visit to Bangladesh in November 1995 ushered in new era of bilateral cooperation including the agreement on setting up of the second oil refinery in Amen Chittagong. Bangladesh also took

Muktijuddho" to narrate our experiences in London and Washington DC, respectively, in 1971. I was quite surprised to learn, while was in the US on a visit, that Rezaul Karim was going to Cairo as our Ambassador after so many years of retirement. He left for Cairo before I returned to Dhaka In his death, the country has lost a capable diplomat, a sound administrator and a dedicated public servant. At the personal level, Rezaul Karim

was a caring eldest brother (his youngest brother told us before his namaze-janaza, how he took care of them when their father had passed away), a loving husband, an affectionate father and grandfather. He was a deep patriot and we were told at his Qul Khwani how he had gifted his personal house in Kushtia to his district Association.

I pay my tributes to this kind and sympathetic senior colleague and pray for the salvation of his departed soul. May Allah give Salma Bhabi, and their children and grand children the strength to bear this irreparable loss.

and everything shall be under their watch.

the concept of a non-partisan and neutral Caretaker Government was accorded the constitutional

pleted fifteen days before the elecoved number of a particution commencement. Each contest-

ing candidate should be provided iv. Massive vote-rigging in areas

This will minimise bias and friction.

Election observers

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former Secretary and IGP

with us. In 1979, on a trip to Dhaka from Colombo, he and Salma Bhabi took ten mid-level Foreign Service

advantage of that historic visit to Syed Muazzem Ali is a former Foreign Secretary

Securing Saarc, proving one-self If there is a possibility, or even a slight chance that somewhere there has been a

security measure unattended, Bangladesh will be accountable. Its Prime Minister is chairman of the conference this year, its role is insurmountable.

MANEEZA HOSSAIN

THE stakes for the Bangladesh government, currently hosting the 13th Saarc meeting, are considerably higher than usual for such gatherings due to the public image considerations.

Dhaka is a cleaned-up city; security at the airport has been noticeably updated; the airport facility itself is uncharacteristically spotless. The country is in a battle to prove itself against words from the international community, which has labeled it a "safe haven" for terrorists, while expressing doubts on its administration's ability to assume the considerable responsibility of hosting a conference of this magnitude.

The size of the conference is substantial only relative to the current state of South Asia. A meeting of high-level officials of the seven member states (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, and Bangladesh) may go unnoticed in many places, such as New York or Brussels, which are accustomed to such events. However, in the wake of the recent suspension of India's Foreign Minister, bombings in the Indian capital before the high religious festivals of Diwali and Eid, Pakistan's uneasy recovery from the recent earthquake, Sri Lanka's

rebirth in the aftermath of the tsunami, as well as Nepal's continuing Maoist insurgency, regional cooperation -- underlined in an era of the global war against terror, for the region that hosts the worlds most dense population of Muslims could never have been more timely

> 13th Saarc meeting, a meeting that has been postponed twice, first due to the tsunami, and subsequently the Indian Prime Minister's refusal to attend. However, one of the founder's of the concept of Saarc is the present Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's deceased husband, former President Ziaur Rahman. Because the country was recently attacked by simultaneous bombings in 63 of its 64 districts within a forty-five minute time span and evidence of rising Islamic militancy is now beyond reasonable doubt, the Prime Minister is on a personal mission to recover Bangladesh's once admirable reputation as a nation that has hosted record progress, not the least of which has been in the area of opportunities for women. Yet in this fury of insuring all the

security loopholes have been measured, the agenda for the conference is unarguably one: developing anti-terror measures for the region in the global war against terror. High level officials

who have served in past Bangladesh administrations openly criticize the government in having lost the forest to see the trees: every ministry is overwhelmed with insuring that no terrorist acts -now observed in almost every member state -- seep through its security blanket. In fact, the capital Bangladesh is ready to host the looks like it is under siege. Starting

five days before the inauguration of Saarc, 80,000 special forces, including military troops, will be deployed in the nation's capital. If there is a possibility, or even a

slight chance that somewhere there has been a security measure unattended. Bangladesh will be accountable. Its Prime Minister is chairman of the conference this year, its role is insurmountable. If. under the sharp eves of almost 300 international journalists, who have been granted special permission to cover the story, there is a slip -- the Prime Minister herself will be personally accountable. The possibility of a security leak has created an unforgiving pressure on Bangladesh; failure will place into stone the country's image as a $head quarter \, of \, South \, Asian \, terror.$

Maneeza Hossain is Manager of Democracy Programs at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a Washington DC-based policy institute.

Treasongate: Anatomy of a scandal

RON CHEPESIUK

HE moment that the Bush administration has been dreading for months finally arrived on October 28 when Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald indicted Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff, neo-con, and a chief architect of the disastrous Iraq War. Libby was heavily involved in the Pentagon's Office of Special Operations. The Office was responsible for finding for the neo-cons a justification for the decision to go to war with Iraq that the neo-cons had already made. Libby's indictment is a blow for an administration that boasted it would bring back morality to the White House after the peccadillo-ridden administration of Bill Clinton, and pontificated to the world about the axis and the all the other evils it claimed are plaguing the world. On the popular Sunday TV talk shows two days after the indictment announcement, pro Bush journalists and analysts were quick to point out that Libby wasn't indicted for blowing the cover of the CIA agent Valerie Plame. True, but Fitzgerald was quite clear that he believed Cheney's top aide learned of Plame's classified identity from the CIA, the US State Department, and Cheney, and then blabbed what he knew to reporters. "It is important that a CIA officer's identity be protected, that it be protected not just for the officer but for the nation's security," Fitzgerald said. "Mr. Libby was the first official known to have told a reporter." For allegedly doing that, Libby was indicted on charges of obstructing grand jury investigation by lying about his actions. If convicted, Libby could spend as many as 30 years in prison. The verdict was sweet for Plame and her husband

Joseph Wilson, a US career diplomat

for 23 years who served under both George Bush, Sr. and Clinton, and was acting US ambassador to Iraq when the country invaded Kuwait in

In an article Wilson wrote for the Los Angeles Times last October 29 Wilson described the attacks on Valerie and himself as "upsetting, disruptive and vicious." Wilson elaborated, "They (the attacks) amounted to character assassination. Senior administration officials used

acknowledge publicly that the uranium claim was baseless.

> the matter. The heretic would have to pay for speaking truth to power. In his Los Angeles Times article, Wilson explained what happened next: "Payback, not just to punish me but to intimidate the critics as well." Using their contacts and allies in the press and Congress, the neo-cons desperately tried to discredit Wilson's fact finding mission by claiming Valerie

But that would not be the end of

INSIDE AMERICA

Who knows? Maybe if the trial of Treasongate, as this scandal is being dubbed, takes place, embarrassing details about how the White House makes policy could come out. Maybe we will even start hearing the familiar question we heard many times during Watergate: what did the President know and when did he know it?

recommended her husband to

the power of the White House to make our lives hell for the last 27 months." The neo-con cabal in the Bush administration ended Plame's nearly 20 years of stellar service to her country because husband loe had the audacity to expose one of the big lies underlying the rational for going to war in Iraq, which Bush put forth in his 2003 State of Union address, namely that Iraq had attempted to purchase significant quantities of uranium from the African country of Niger

The CIA sent Wilson to Niger to investigate and he found no substance to the claim. Wilson wrote a report that was buried, and true to its predictable pattern, the Bush admin istration ignored other reports since they contradicted its preconceived plan for regime change in Iraq. Wilson felt compelled to go public with his findings and wrote a New York Times opinion piece, forcing neo-con cabal front man George Bush to

undertake the Niger assignment. Lackeys for the cabal tried to distort the issue by claiming that while Plame was on the CIA payroll, she was not actually undercover, so it was okay to reveal her name because she deserved no protection. As conservative journalist Michael Medved tried to explain it: "Let's be honest about this. Mrs. Plame, Mrs. Wilson, had a desk job in Langley (CIA headquarters). She was back and forth every single day.'

Distorting the nature of Plame's iob made other CIA agents, past and present, go ballistic. They wrote letters to Congress and testified before it. They appeared on TV to explain the effect that this political partisan attack on one of their own was having on CIA agency morale and on national security. In an "Open statement to the Leaders of the United States House of Representatives and the Senate," nine former

CIA agents and one Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), wrote: "We stand in her (Plame's) stead, and ask that the Republicans and Democrats honour her service and stop the campaign of disparagement and innuendo aimed at discrediting Mrs. Wilson and her husband. There has been more than dispar-

agement and innuendo. Wilson has revealed that he and his wife have received death threats. Further, no one yet knows what has happened or

will happen to the people who associ-

ated with Plame during her long spy

career. But as Larry Johnson, a former

CIA and State department official put

it: "At the end of the day, the harm will

be huge and some people potentially

may have lost their lives." All of this is

bad news for George Bush, Jr., whose

floundering, incompetent adminis-

tration has been hoping to put behind

it the question of how it put led or

misled our country into war. It also

raises questions about the role

Sneaky Dick Cheney has had in

revealing Plame's identity. Who

knows? Maybe if the trial of

Treasongate, as this scandal is being

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ing Watergate: what did the President

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asked if he would fire any aide that had leaked Plame's identity. In an article last October 19, however, the New York Daily News reported that Bush actually knew that Rove was involved in Treasongate two years ago. "He made his displeasure known to Karl." one presidential counselor told the Daily News. "He made his life miserable about this.'

Bush must have breathed a deep sigh of relief when his puppeteer Karl Rove, was not indicted. Rove, however, is not out of the woods yet, for it can still happen. Meanwhile, some Democrats in Congress are calling for Bush to fire Rove, but that would be like asking George, Jr., to cut off his right arm.

The press has played a seminal role in this scandal and will continue to

play a big role at the trial. The names of three reporters Judith Miller

(New York Times), Mathew Cooper (Time), and Tim Russert (NBC) -appear in the indictment and they all said they spoke with

Libby about Plame. Libby claims to have learned of Plame's identity from Russert, but the TV journalist has said that the two did not discuss the CIA agent. Both Miller and Cooper have said that Libby discussed Plame with them.

Miller has been linked prominently to Libby in the media, but this will not be a trial of simply "he said, she said." It will be "Libby said, they said," Libby will undoubtedly fall on is sword for his former bosses, so it will be interesting to see if the judicial system buys Libby's expected defense, which will be "I was too busy to remember."

(In the next column, the author will examine the role of the media in Treasongate.)

Ron Chepesiuk is a Visiting Professor of Journalism at Chittagong University and a Research Associate at the Vational Defense College.

Consider that in June 2004 Bush gave an unequivocal "yes" when