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TIME's coverage

Bangladesh not to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia or even to the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina. However TIME has failed to project a much more visible image of the economic deprivation still haunting the majority of the population. Millions in both urban and rural Bangladesh face the daily dilemma of black outs (including in Gulshan, which is described by TIME as Dhaka's most posh neighbourhood), shortages of water, shortages of fertiliser for farmers, political persecution by the ruling party against any sort of opposition and of course the corruption and inefficiency of public

firms and institutions. As for the rise of militancy, well then how can the prime minister state that she didn't know about it until August 17, 2005 when all the newspapers and private television channels were running interviews and images of Bangla Bhai and his accomplice Abdur Rahman months before? Abdur Rahman happened to be a member of the Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing (Jamaat is also the BNP's coalition partner). To my view the fight against militancy is simply a stage managed drama by the ruling party to get ground in the upcoming election. They helped create the militants and



nurtured them (the ruling party MPs even allied publicly with Bangla Bhai as reported by TIME). Now they are destroying them to win votes through this staged managed drama. What a wonderful play! Md. Umran Bin Kamran Chowdhury Gulshan 2, Dhaka

Fair election

Bangladesh had three parliamentary elections under caretaker government in 1991, 1996 & 2001. Those elections are now a model to the whole world, and many people in other countries are demanding such type of elections. But my question is, how much fair were those elections? Those elections could not and cannot stop the corrupt, land grabbers, loan defaulters and other criminals to take part and dominate in the whole process. As a matter of fact, the election activities have become the playground of those elements, because of their black money and muscle power. The good and capable persons who can run the country quite well stay away with their hands crossed for want of such might and money.

Thanks to The Daily Star for inviting us to join in the debate started by the CPD, Prothom Alo, DS. For a long time I have been advocating an Electoral College system in our country (BD Observer, 3.4.1996, BD Observer, 3.12.1996). The present system has totally failed to give us an election free of violence, booth capturing and false votes. I find the constituencies are too large for an honest person to spend for electioneering. The CPB had proposed an election on party basis. But their formula does not advocate people's representatives from the people but from the centre on the basis of total votes counted.

The debate started recently by the CPD, Prothom Alo and DS proposes to launch a movement all over the country in the name 'Joggya Prarthi Andolon'. A 'Joggya prarthi' may mean in English, 'capable' or/and 'fit' or/and 'qualified'. To elect a peoples' representative with those qualities sounds definitely very good. But my question is, how shall you judge the person having those qualities? You cannot do it by interviewing, or from CV, or from any sort of application format. Because, it is just impossible to find a person who did not get benefit from the culture of corruption we practiced

since the birth of our nation. I want to solve this question by positive application of laws, not sparing anybody.

But my other questions remain on the board. Where does a caretaker government stand when black money dominates the whole electioneering? Who shall guarantee the fairness of the government during its long tenure elected thereby? What will happen to the local government elections, when the caretaker government will be absent? Nowadays, a candidate for the parliamentary seat spends one to ten crore taka on electioneering. Once a candidate is declared elected, he and his promoters immediately set out to regain the money spent, with a target beyond limit. Some students and labour leaders also contest in the parliamentary elections. Where do they get money from? An honest man in this country shall never dare to contest in elections in the prevailing situation. Can we not make the system approachable to every man and hold fair election?

I want to propose the Electoral College system again for a fair election in this country.

1. First, people shall elect 1,00,000 'Jana protinidhi' at the range 500 to 1000 votes per seat. Thus it shall be easy for the candidate to get known to the voters.

2. The Jana Protinidhi candidates shall seek votes on party tickets or contest independently. As soon as this election is complete it shall be clear which party is going to form government.

3. In the second step, Jana Protinidhis shall elect 10,000 Union/Ward Chairman, 1,000 Thana chairman and 200 Members of the Parliament (MP).

M. Inamul Haque
Director General
Bangladesh Haor & Wetlands
Development Board

Success, failure & crossfire

Nowadays news media is enjoying freedom and becoming credible in our country. Electronic media popularity has reached its peak. Every day lots of incidents occur here and there.

One thing has become very much boring to us. Television gives priority to three events very much--the prime minister saying they did a lot; nobody did ever, and the opposition saying the government is doing nothing. Crossfire is one common story and everybody knows the story.

Achievement, failure, and crossfire! We have become tired of watching the same thing again and again. Please say something new.

Hasan Rahman
Uttara, Dhaka

UK visa

The British High Commission (BHC) in Dhaka had taken a good decision to let a private company to handle visa applicants and set dates for interviews of applicants with the High Commission. This decision had brought relief to visa applicants desiring to visit UK. Earlier the few hundred visa applicants had to queue up very early in the morning at the BHC to submit their applications and only a few could make it to the receiving counter.

BHC also had a separate counter known as 'drop box' for applicants who had travelled on UK visas earlier. Applicants with previous travel records had no problem submitting their applications in 'drop box' counters and the service was quick and wonderful. Ever since the new company has taken over the charge, there is no separate counter for 'drop box' applicants and one has to wait in queue for an interview like any first time applicant.

I hope my letter will get due attention of the British High Commission.

Z. Ahmed
On e-mail

Spare parts for RMG industry

There is no news in the press on local manufacture of components and spares for the thousands of garment factories in Bangladesh.

Some of these parts could be

easily fabricated locally, to save a considerable portion of foreign exchange spent on imports. Any feasibility exercise carried out?

A Mawaz, Dhaka

Clean candidates

In our fifteen years of democracy, we are observing that all the major political parties are nominating candidates for election on the basis of their muscle power and financial clout.

Today each and every party prefers industrialists, retired bureaucrats and businessmen, discarding the real patriotic politicians. The situation is worsening day by day and in any election whether it is national election, by polls, City Corporation or Union Parishad election, we have to look for the relatively better candidates from among the corrupt people. Even though the election is fair, candidates having shady backgrounds get elected as in some cases all the candidates may have more or less the same kind of track records. This is how our democracy is ruined and we become deaf and dumb. The countrymen are not optimistic about the future of our democracy. Can't we change it?

The student community can raise their voice in favour of the clean candidates. Let's do it together.

Mars Sohel
BUET,
Dhaka

Do we need politics with education?

This is with reference to the news published "Several students hurt in clashes" on metropolitan page of the Dawn (Karachi, Pakistan) on 6 April, 2006.

Here I would like to say that, "Do we really need political groups in educational institutions? Do we?"

If yes, then what should be the objective or motto on which they should work on in educational institutions such as Karachi University? Because usually it has been witnessed that most of such clashes took place due to their personal misunderstandings not on a matter related to the benefit of Karachi University itself. These incidents of clash amongst two different party students' groups eventually create hypertension in

the university premises resulting negatively on academic environment. So here I would like to make a suggestion that either this politics culture be removed from universities/colleges and students union formed at official level or these political groups be made to follow some rules and regulations to work in a cooperative manner with each other to avoid such incidents in future.

Adillah Inaam Khan
Karachi, Pakistan

New power plant

A news item recently published in the Daily Aamar Desh stated that a new power station will be built at Meghna Ghat for 450 MW power generation. It was a real pleasant surprise and I personally feel the government deserves credit for fulfilling this vital need for the greater national interest.

M. I. Karim
On e-mail

Transparency begins at home

I refer to a certain German organisation that is trying to teach a 1,400-year old civilisation that corruption is bad. Nobody ever told us that, of course.

The said German organisation would do well to look into the financial shenanigans of a certain German chancellor who allegedly received a certain amount of money from a certain French prime minister through a certain oil company. The said Chancellor resorted to such underhand tactics to win a certain German election in order to push through a certain single currency. He felt - astutely - that without the said single currency, the nations of western Europe would revert to their earlier savagery. The whole matter has - certainly - been hushed up.

Let us return to our own, splendid civilisation.

Iftekhar Sayeed
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Whose baby is it?

Terrorism is one of the greatest evils of our country. All the people should say no to terrorism. But our accusatory politics is a great evil as well. In the April 5, 2006 issue of The Daily Star it published the interview of two top women leaders of the major political parties

BNP and AL taken by Time's journalist Alex Perry. When he questioned to the prime minister about the opposition leader's stand that insurgency was her (PM's) "baby" then she answered, "No it's not my baby. It's their baby." The opposition leader claimed that the terror groups are protected by the government. This is their baby. Now the questions arise, who are the actual parents of insurgents? Are there any other parents who are hiding beneath the accusatory politics? Then what are the responsibilities that the two major political parties should take?

Abdul Kaium Khan
Southeast University, Dhaka

True democracy

I read the article "In praise of true democracy" by Kazi S M Khaasul Alam Quddusi. The simplistic write up does not delve deep enough into the issues concerning governance.

We should remember that democracy is the negation of autocracy and negation of democracy is again autocracy!

Roney
On e-mail

Terror financing and Islami Bank

Islami Bank has been fined Tk 1 lakh for the third time for carrying out transactions in funds for terror acts. The bank had been penalised for the same offence twice before on similar charges for violation of the provisions of the Money Laundering Act.

During the second week of last month, Bangladesh Bank had requested the State Minister for Home Affairs for an enquiry into the matter. In the meantime Islami Bank in response to Bangladesh Bank's letter had informed Bangladesh Bank that charges were being framed against as many as 20 of its officers and employees and that due disciplinary actions would be taken against the individuals.

We strongly feel that imposing a fine of a meagre sum of Tk 1 lakh is too negligible a penalty against a commercial Bank. What one really needs to do is to take much sterner measures. In the meantime the enquiry against 20 officials currently being charge sheeted should be

carried out by an independent body that should include amongst others, officials from the Ministry of Home, preferably one or two members from the Intelligence Agencies. In this regard we are also in agreement with the Managing Director that individuals involved in such offences should be tried in the criminal courts of justice. After all, these transactions and financing have directly contributed to the murder of innocent people.

It has been a number of months since the relevant agencies of the Administration had identified the sources of terror financing including the organisations involved. Several weeks ago a leading Bangla Daily had also published the names of individuals along with corresponding individual bank account numbers, yet the disciplinary actions taken so far against the perpetrators are exchange of a few letters between the Bangladesh Bank and the bank allegedly involved in the transactions including imposition of a fine of Tk 1 lakh.

We are certain that such light measures will not make the slightest dent on the existing scenario of terrorist acts but may end up as an incentive for revival of terror acts with renewed vigour. We urge the Administration to move more decisively with a strong hand and without any further loss of time.

Shamsher Chowdhury
On e-mail

Successful ministries!

Many thanks to Shahnoor Wahid (April 06) for reminding us of our successful government ministries. Now surely the government can't claim anymore that the media never highlights its positive achievements.

However, it seems that Mr. Wahid forgot to mention some of our most wildly successful ministries.

I think all can agree that the Ministry for Transport Chaos has been successful beyond our wildest dreams. By indiscriminately piling more and more 2-3-4-wheelers onto our choked roads, they're well on their way to meeting their target of creating gridlock & standstill traffic on our roads.

And how could we forget our most successful ministry: Ministry to Maintain Primacy in the Corruption Championship? No other govern-

ment ministry can ever hope to equal the achievements of this ministry, which has single-handedly put Bangladesh on the world map!

Readul Islam
Kalyanpur, Dhaka

Power crisis

It is difficult to find any place where power does not go at least once a day. The crisis in our country has been increasing day by day but the solution is not in sight. The students are suffering, the office, mills and factories have to stop and life becomes unbearable in this very hot weather because of lack of electricity. The government has urged that they are trying heart and soul to solve this problem but what they are doing is not satisfactory. The country still has a shortage of 1500 to 1800 MW (approx.) power and this crisis is worsening day by day.

Although the quantity of power required in our country is not so high compared with the other countries, but still we are unable to produce the required quantity. Many power generating stations are not functioning and the government must take immediate steps to repair them and set up small power generating station either in the public or private sector. Systems loss has to be controlled and of course pilferage must be stopped. It is true that the government is still supplying power

at a low cost although they buy it at high price but we hope that the government will solve this problem not only to get votes but also to ensure the rights of the peoplesomething for which they got the mandate in the last elections.

Syed Ashek Ahmed
Dept. of EEE, RUET

Seeking honest men

Prof. Yunus is looking for honest men. The truth is that we are passing through the worst times in our history. The truth is that this time is not to be compared with any other time. The truth is that the powers that be are involved in activities that violate all democratic norms and ideas.

Dr. Ujjwal
On e-mail

Insurance for law breaking?

Crime doesn't pay. Meena Bazar does. Shoppers who get ticket for illegal parking on the sidewalk get the fined amount paid by Meena Bazar upon showing receipt. DS reported this strange arrangement back on October 2, 2005 (page 17). Six months on, the practice still continues.

Clearly something is not working. The purpose of a penalty or punish-

ment is to make the offence a bad bargain to the offender. But those who sacrifice large social interest for small personal gain will more readily do so if someone else's money pays for it.

Are the fines so inadequate that big retailers find it profitable to bear it themselves in return of shoppers' business? Aren't they aiding and abetting law breakers?

Ashish Ahsan
Uttara, Dhaka

SUST students

A newspaper is the voice of helpless people. People unable to do to do anything on their own knocks the door of newspapers for a helping hand. The Daily Star has so far rendered very good service in that area. On March 22, I had sent a letter to you about the activities of the Anaconda Group at SUST and you published it. Thanks for that. Now it has knocked the door of the authorities very well but they are still helpless against the student-wing of the ruling party which has some members in that group. Other political party members are also working in that group. And now they are asking people to find the sender of that letter (me).

A student, SUST
On e-mail



PHOTO: AFP

Finale at Fatullah

Fatullah is far away from Sophia Gardens. But the cricket that Bangladesh played at Sophia Gardens in Cardiff in an ODI on 18th June 2005 and the Test that they were playing at Fatullah in Narayanganj on and from 9th April 2006 apparently tends to carry the same tone and tenor in its bravado and belligerence. And, that too against the all-winning Australians!

The application that Bangladeshi cricketers showed in Fatullah seems to suggest that Sophia Gardens wasn't perhaps all of a flash-in-the-pan victory, after all! One is however confronted with the inconsistency of a streak of defeats peppered with scanty wins that has been dogging Bangladesh for umpteenth years now, and which has understandably been provoking denigrating remarks on its Test status from various quarters for quite some time now.

In fact, even Australian Captain Ricky Ponting was also persuaded to the same doubtful notion about Bangladesh's cricketing ability for meriting Test status not very long ago, though he has tempered his past remarks with a prudent prognosis on Bangladesh's prospects on arrival in Dhaka, if not for assuaging the

hosts, but for recognition of Bangladesh's recent streak of wins, particularly over Kenya, a long-time parenthetical companion of Bangladesh in cricketing standards, with whom Bangladesh has now achieved a difference with day-lights in between.

What, then, has made the difference for Bangladesh to perform as it has been doing for some time now? As Bangladesh's Coach Dav Whatmore would perhaps be prone to saying with understandable aplomb, "It's confidence, Old Chap". Whatmore has diligently been articulating on the aspect of faith and confidence for quite some time now, insisting in the same breath that Bangladesh wasn't wanting in talent though. Take, for instance, the cases of Shahriar Nafis, Habibul Bashar, Aftab Ahmed, Ashraf, Mashrafi-bin-Mortuza, Rafique, Razin Saleh, Khaled Masud, Shahadat Hussain, Enamul Jr., et al.

Faith and Fatullah do indeed appear to have become handy handmaidens for Bangladesh's success on the cricket field. While Sophia Gardens sizzled with the sheer delight of a serenading spirit of youthful exuberance, Fatullah does not appear to be a fever pitch of frenzied

and frenetic fervour. Fatullah rather seems to convey a coming-of-age for Bangladesh's Cricket, - brimming with faith, and confidence and dogged determination.

Cricketing pundits in the commentary box have also ascribed this faith-gelling fiesta at Fatullah to a youthful team bonding together, not with barmy bravado, but boiling over with confidence in their capabilities. Confidence has done the trick for Bangladesh's cricket team, and detractors and doubters have hopelessly been put in their place.

If the finale at Fatullah is the beginning of the end for Bangladesh, it is likewise the end of the beginning for those who had doubted in Bangladesh's Test playing capabilities. Confident cricket has at last caught up with Bangladesh's team, but let Fatullah not be the last hurrah! Let Fatullah not be the last frontier.

Nizamuddin Mahmood Selim
Nasirabad, Chittagong