

CEC continues to vitiate

We do not want another voter list fraught with anomalies

INSTEAD of tendering his resignation which self-respect demanded since both the High Court and Supreme Court found his decisions unlawful, the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) decided to script yet another act of the voter list drama on Thursday which is violation of the spirit of the two judgements. It appears that nothing is going to stop him from what he is bent on doingdiscredit the office of the Election Commission, to say the least. This time the Election Commission (EC) has announced that it is all set to begin the arduous task of updating the voter list from today, but it also made it known to all that it is not going to follow the rule of going door to door. A bit of media digging reveals that though the work is to begin today, no budget has been prepared nor approved for the purpose. On top of it, there is a lack of proper directives and planning of the EC secretariat to provide guidance to the field level off-cials and staff.

With so many loose ends dangling around, the EC watchers now apprehend that the embedded complexi-ties in the procedure, such as, producing receipt of mu-nicipal tax or house rent, an affidavit of age or an at-tested copy of SSC certificate etc., are likely to discour-age prospective voters from coming forward for regis-tration, and that the costly exercise would once again produce another voter list fraught with anomalies.

Election can be termed as a "festival of democracy." This national expression of "people's will" becomes an occasion to ensure the adult franchise in a bid to elect the true representatives of the people. The elected rep-resentatives then sit in parliament to run the affairs of the country as per the dictates of the constitution. Therefore, preparation of a flawless voter list is a pre-condition and a solemn responsibility that rests on the shoulders of the Election Commission.

Obviously, the officials entrusted with the job are re-quired to perform to the best of their ability. But, the CEC in question, instead of coming up with his best has in his own peculiar way vitiated every attempt to pro-duce a voter list worth the name. He has been disre-spectful to the directive of the High Court and subse-quently that of the Supreme Court. It has gone down in the record books how he has taken his own sweet time to react to the SC directive with regard to preparation of a fresh voter list. Henceforth, it may be said that CEC's ideas and actions have turned out to be a chronology of misadventures at the cost of national resource and pa-tience.

We strongly hold the view that an EC without the present controversial CEC hanging around would per-form better with regard to preparation of an updated voter list. We hope the authorities will take the people's concern seriously for the greater interest of the nation without wasting further time.

Newspapers publish imaginary tales?

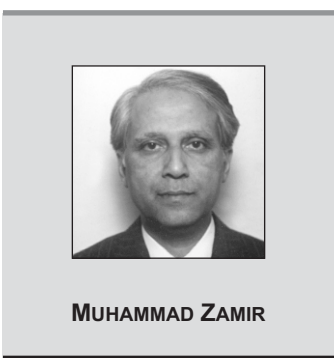
It's credibility of media that pays off

MEDIA once again got a tongue-lashing from the government. And this time it came from none other than the prime minister of the country while delivering her speech at the current session of the parliament. She said that despite all the developments taking place in the country newspapers are writing imaginary tales. However, she also mentioned in the same breath that people were not taking such stories into cognizance. One may logically conclude here that if such imaginary tales were being rejected by the people then the gov-ernment should not be having anything to worry about.

The media is simply carrying out its basic responsi-bilities as it happens in a democracy. It is projecting the happenings as they actually taking place on the ground and keeping the people informed on all issues of public interest and concern. There is but little scope of indulg-ing in fiction. Media also serves as a vehicle to provide the link between the people and the administration. It often helps government to see the other side of things that might have escaped the attention of the establish-ment. Therefore it alerts government to do a better job. From that point of view the media here is no different from any other in democratic countries. On the country the journal-ists working for media at field level here have often been subjected to torture and oppression and some of them were even killed.

The honourable PM's observation that people do not believe the media reports is also unfounded. We would like to state in that context, that over a period of time if anything the circulation of most newspapers have been on the rise. It is nothing but their credibility that pays off.

Election Commission continues its short-sightedness



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

FOR a change, the Government and the Opposition appear to have agreed on one thing. Both sides feel that the Chief Election Commissioner should gracefully leave his post.

The Opposition however want this reform process to go a little further. They want the two other recently appointed Election Commissioners to also quit.

In the meantime the 'joga-khicuri' (confusion) continues to grow. The obduracy of the Election Commission and its officials has become for them an ego-factor.

The Opposition for some time have been pointing out that the Election Commission has failed to discharge its constitutional duties. They initiated a judicial process to establish their views in this regard.

Readers already know of cases being filed in the High Court, appeals made and clarifications and directives issued in this regard. Eventually, the penny dropped among the senior leadership of the government. First, it was the Law Minister, and then it was the LGRD Minister and then the Commu-nications Minister. After that, it has

become almost fashionable for members of the Cabinet to support such a view against the CEC and the activities of the EC.

Nevertheless, the CEC and his colleagues have been like the proverbial horse that can be dragged to the pond but cannot be forced to drink.

The latest twist in the tale came four days ago with the Election Commission deciding to send its officials from July 1 to villages to

those who are mentally challenged will have to come from their asylums to have their names struck off from the rolls. In addition, those who have turned 18 will have to suitably prove their claims before they can be included in the rolls.

Mind you, we are talking here of not one million people but well over ninety million expected voters out of a population of nearly 150 million.

I Just cannot understand how anybody sane can think that review

People submitting applications for registration as voters will also have to attach receipts of municipal tax payments or house rent receipts or receipts of payments to village guards. There is also the pre-condition of submitting affidavits of age or attested copies of SSC certificates with applications in prescribed forms. It has also been mentioned that no one will be able to obtain the prescribed form (No. 2) for enlisting himself on the voter list

drive. They have however not really moved forward from their rigidity. Intransigence and shortsightedness have hampered their perceptions.

The Election Commission is being run today on an autocratic basis. The CEC's interpretation of the latest court ruling on the voter list blatantly ignores the spirit and intention of the Court's order. Transparency and authenticity are being sacrificed. This can only lead to a political crisis.

POST BREAKFAST

The first step should be the voluntary resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner and the two other Election Commissioners. They have unnecessarily created a complex situation. They have to go because people on both sides of the spectrum have lost faith in their credibility. The selection of these individuals to these high posts were, unfortunately, undertaken with questionable design. The government could subsequently appoint a fresh set of officials who are above controversy and whose credibility is not in question. The government could also strengthen the moral threshold of the Election Commission by enhancing its independence.

undertake a month-long revision of the voter list. Similarly, election officials at District and Upazila headquarters have apparently also been directed to undertake similar action. However, the EC, while doing so, has unfortunately kept the gates of controversy open.

Any planned revision of the electoral list will still not be undertaken by going from house to house. Contrary to the Election Act 1982, the people will have to come to the Election Officials to get enlisted. In simple terms, we are where we were. This new decision means that the dead will have to be taught to rise like Lazarus, so that their names can be deleted. Similarly, all

of such massive figures can be undertaken by a 'total of 83 Registration Officers (RO) and 6273 Assistant Registration Officers (ARO) posted at suitable places in the Wards of Union Parishads (UP), Municipalities and City Corporations' within the short time available with the Election Commission?

The Election Commission has also informed the press that 'all necessary forms will be available from them (ROs and AROs) and that any eligible person can apply for inclusion, correction and amendment of his or her name on the voter list.'

However, even this enlistment process will not be that simple.

without submission of the required documents.

The Election Commission appears to have forgotten that nearly 45 percent of the population in this country is functionally illiterate. In that context, it can only be termed as foolish to expect that the voters will be able to complete this exercise as expected by the EC.

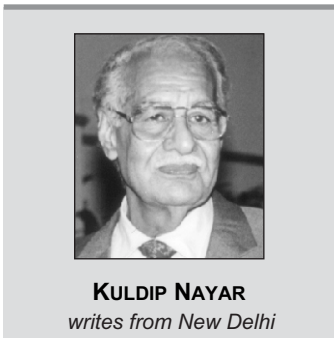
This whole approach can only be termed as an effort to discourage people from coming forward and participating in a process that is part of their civic right.

On June 14, the Election Commission cancelled its earlier decision of using the information collected through its controversial

The Election Commission has to understand that its very credibility is at stake. The Government has to also realise that time is running out and steps have to be taken on a priority basis to solve the problem.

I have mentioned in my earlier columns that reforms need to be undertaken in many areas of the Election Commission and the functioning of its Secretariat. This includes accountability within its organogram and independence not only in its functioning but also in its financial resourcing. I have also pointed out the need to bring maintenance of law and order in the polling areas, during the period of elections, under the authority of the

What ails India?



KULDIP NAYAR

ASHTRAPATI Bhavan is not a court of appeal. But over the years, it has become a forum where concerned citizens have sought the attention of the highest in the land to the problems which the government has failed to notice, much less tackle. The President has no authority to redress wrongs. He has to work through a government. Yet he has often forwarded to it the

complaints he has gathered from those who have narrated their tale of woes or that of their friends and associates. He is all ears when listening.

This belief led some eight concerned citizens to meet President Abdul Kalam a few days ago. The specific instance in their mind was that of underworld's attack on film director Mahesh Bhatt. But they had gone to how their concern over a principle -- the principle to live securely from the increasing power of the don, the mafia and the underworld to which people were perpetually exposed. They told the President how criminals, communalists and casteists were throttling our democratic, secular polity from breathing free.

They made three points. One was how the creeping fascism was devouring the country bit by bit, and how the anti-social elements pounced upon individuals or groups which dared to differ with them. Two, the respect for the rule of law was lessening day by day. The authorities did not act either because of political pressure or because of fear of masters. The

third point was that the society had become so insensitive that it

"What are your suggestions?" the President asked. "Give me five points." One at the meeting tried to propose something. But the President cut him short by the remark: "I want all of you to put your heads together and e-mail your five suggestions to me directly." He promised to consider them. The concerned citizens are yet to meet and draft the five points. Their problem is that they live in different cities and have a busy schedule. Yet they want

* Only 27.8 per cent of the Indian population resides in cities, but three-fourths of the unemployed are in rural areas. If the growth rate of our economy is a commendable 10 per cent, then why is 26 per cent of our population still below poverty line? The real

challenge before us is to overcome the imbalance in distribution of our resources and outputs.

* A strong judiciary is a key ingredient in the development of the

* The greatest challenge before the Indian judiciary is the tremendous docket explosion. The courts are flooded with cases and this has, consequently, led to immense pendency. On an average every year, the Supreme Court decides about 40,500 out of 42,000 cases

filed, the high courts decide 11,23,500 out of 12,41,00 cases and the subordinate courts decide 1,32,22,000 out of 1,42,29,000 cases filed. In spite of such high

destructive. If the society we aim at cannot be brought about by big-scale violence, will small-scale violence help? Surely, it cannot. Partly because that itself may lead to a big-scale violence and partly

because it produces an atmosphere or social theory that enables the individual to rise above his petty self and think in terms of the good of all. In a sense, every country, whether it is capitalist, socialist or communist, accepts the ideal of a welfare state. Capitalism, in a few countries at least, has achieved this common welfare to a very large extent, though it is far from having solved its own problems and there is a basic lack of something vital. Democracy, allied to capitalism, has undoubtedly toned down many of its evils and, in fact, is different now from what it was a generation or two ago.

* Ultimately, the constitution is the most important for us because it regulates the governance. Dr Rajendra Prasad, president of the constituent assembly, said after the constitution was passed: India needs today nothing more than a set of honest men who will have the interest of the country before them. We have communal differences, caste differences, language differences, provincial differences and so forth. It requires men of strong character, men of vision, men who will not sacrifice the interest of the country at large for the sake of smaller groups and areas and who will rise over the prejudices which are born of these differences. We can only hope that the country will throw up such men in abundance.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

Communicative method of teaching English : Does it deliver?

SIKANDAR ALI

THE state of teaching and learning English in Bangladesh, barring the cases of a few English medium schools, is appalling, to say the least. Even after ten or twelve years of compulsory English, students are hardly at home with the language. The precariousness of the situation has made our education planners sit up and give it a serious rethink.

Only recently communicative method has been introduced at the SSC and the HSC levels. The aim is to give students genuine practices in the four language skills -- Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing -- and to enable them to speak and write the language fairly comfortably, the implied emphasis being on oral communication. But, to all appearance, the so-called communicative method has failed to deliver.

The secondary and higher secondary text books, comprising a collection of passages drawn from diverse sources, are indeed a good reading. But what is lacking in the new syllabi is that no particular skill is targeted. Nor are there any clues as to what linguistic and cultural hindrances a non-native speaker of English is likely to confront in a native situation.

In all fairness to the method in question, a diligent reading of these passages should no doubt equip the learners with massive word power and facilitate their reading comprehension to a certain degree. But as far as language learning is concerned, words learnt this way are of little practical help when it comes to expressing oneself in a real life situation. Instead, concentrating on the idiomatic usage of some basic words like get, make, take, put, give, do etc. which constitute the magic of spoken English, would be amply rewarding. These words bring home to the learners the fascinating aspect of the language and help improve the quality of his/her English. This is a world which our syllabus designers have never bothered to unfold to the young learners.

A language is rooted in its culture. Without the knowledge about the culture of a language speaking as a skill cannot be effectively learnt. Culture is pervasive in a language -- in its structure, in its intonations, in its punctuations and pauses and even in its silences. Special lessons in some cultural words should unmistakably find place in the reading texts. Students must be thoroughly introduced with such cultural words as Hallo, Hi, Good

The new hand book on grammar portrays only a cosmetic update of what used to be the traditional grammar book. No wonder, the taste, flair and beauty that authentic English exhibits, is conspicuously missing there. Grammar taught as a dead set of rules has proved anything but useful to generations of students. Against the background of an evolution of language teaching all over the world what is required in our case is to have a correct understanding of the nature of cultural and linguistic difficulties our students are likely to encounter and offer some practical tips to tackle those.

Morning, Please, Thank You, Sorry, Excuse me etc. without which no civilised conversation can be sustained with a native speaker and the lapses of which may bring a world of trouble in a native situation. Hence to initiate the students into the culture, some relevant extracts from contemporary English texts could serve the purpose best.

The job of the students would be to condition themselves to those sentence patterns and diction through repeated practice until they can manipulate freely within those structures and can replicate them at will. Unless trained in authentic use of English, students cannot possibly know the accepted form of expression. Unaware of natural workings of the language, they may fall for artificially constructed structures with unhappy choice of words

leading to an awkward expression unintelligible or only vaguely intelligible to native speakers.

Lamentably, at no stage of our learning up to graduation level, there is any active oral use of English in the class room either by the students or by the teachers themselves. Even the introduction of communicative method makes no difference. There being no explicit dialogue making lessons, the act of speaking has been left to the whims of the teachers and the students. As usual the class room teacher keeps himself busy reading passages and providing translation in the mother tongue which is followed by solving some grammatical riddles. The pupils simply keep quiet, look at books and get through the lesson without learning anything. The mutual disinclination to speaking

owes to the factor that speaking has nothing to do with passing the examination.

Of course, whether a student at the secondary level, given the poor initiation at elementary level, can at all express himself/herself in tolerable English is an open question. As usual a young learner gets started with reading as a matter of legacy and with it comes the inevitable question of writing. She/he learns the alphabets first, then individual words followed by short sentences. This early introduction of printed or written form is a potential threat to language learning. Language specialists lay stress on learning to understand and speak at least some of the language before learning to read or write it. A young learner's acquisition is natural, free from mother tongue interference. At this

stage, simple structures have to be drilled into him till they become part of his instinct. But in practice, the language activities done at the primary level is far from satisfactory. Hence when a child grows up with inherent weakness, s/he finds it difficult to cope with the communicative method at the advanced levels which eventually frustrates its purpose.

Listening is a part of speaking and is just as important. An average Bengali learner's listening is atrocious. No matter how conversant one may be with written or spoken English, unless his ear is attuned to the tongue, he is bound to find himself hopelessly at a loss in the face of the steady flow of speech. This is because the colloquial cliches, the word combinations the stress and intonation he hears are

distinctly different from what he has been used to. Only persistent practice through audio lingual aid can come to his rescue. In this regard the current communicative approach remains stubbornly silent as the previous grammar translation method.

Free composition is something still foreign to our students. Memorising is their usual recourse to get through the examination. The condition the students to guided writing there is no NCTB authorised text book written in standard English, students invariably fall back upon the traditional note-books which are only replete with mistakes. Worse still is the face that these so-called note-books betray complete disregard of the writers for English idioms and display colourful distortion of normal English. The kind of English represented in these books is a revelation, if we may so call it, of abysmal depths to which our standard of English has fallen.

After a spate of criticism and adverse reaction for the banishment of explicit grammar from secondary and higher secondary courses, the NCTB authorities

have reintroduced grammar at SSC level. Despite their best of intentions, the new hand book on grammar portrays only a cosmetic update of what used to be the traditional grammar book. No wonder, the taste, flair and beauty that authentic English exhibits, is conspicuously missing there. Grammar taught as a dead set of rules has proved anything but useful to generations of students.

Against the background of an evolution of language teaching all over the world what is required in our case is to have a correct understanding of the nature of cultural and linguistic difficulties our students are likely to encounter and offer some practical tips to tackle those. This job has been done admirably well by Professor M Harunur Rashid of North South University in his book "English for Bangali Learners." By reading it one can learn English through fun. The NCTB authorities would do well to take stock of it if they are at all planning to introduce any grammar at the HSC level.

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