

Hazards of voter registration in camps

One is, therefore, at a loss to understand why the Election Commission is going beyond its constitutional mandate by assuming the gigantic task of preparation and supply of national identity card. The acceptance of this additional and extra-constitutional responsibility by the Commission at this crucial stage shall definitely retard the progress of preparation of electoral roll plunging the Commission in insurmountable difficulty and uncertainty.

BURHANUDDIN AHMED

THE media confirms that the Election Commission will go for simultaneous production of voters list with photographs and the national identity card, employing a new method and advanced technology with the aid of experts from the armed forces of the country.

The decision to register voters in 12000 camps to be located at the polling precincts used in the election to the local bodies is undoubtedly a fine idea, and in keeping with the practice prevalent in many advanced countries of the world. But for our people this is a new idea and, as such, it will be a difficult task for the Commission to implement its decision successfully.

The causes that might bedevil the process of successful implementation of this plan are numerous. One of the major problems is that the bulk of the voters, being illiterate, does not

understand the crucial importance of registration. Because of this, many of them will remain busy with their household business rather than going to camps to stand in a queue for hours for offering their particulars and photographs.

Another problem is that the voters have become accustomed to the process of registration at their residences due to the practice of registration by house-to-house visit for over a period of more than 50 years. Hence, the call of the Election Commission to come to the camps for registration might not be favourably responded to by the voters.

The poverty and the illiteracy together will also contribute their share in opposing successful implementation of the program. The uneducated and poverty-stricken section of the population is ever busy with activities connected with the earning of their livelihood. They might, therefore, view the visit to camps leaving their work unattended

as unproductive. Though the position is so, the voters still turn up in large numbers to cast their votes.

They do so, generally, in view of gratification given to them by unscrupulous candidates before the voting. But the arrangement for registration in camps will be free from such allurements to attract the voters to come to the camps. Because of this bare fact, the chances of voters coming to the camps are minimal. Further, the most difficult problem associated with the program is obtaining photographs of voters, for being photographed is still viewed as a sin by the ladies of the conservative section of the Muslim society.

Experience shows that collection of photographs, even by visiting the houses, proved to be unsuccessful during the operation undertaken by the Election Commission for preparation of ID card for the voters. How can one, under the circumstances, expect that the ladies belonging to the said category will visit the camps for being

photographed?

It is perhaps not unknown to the Commission that there are places where ladies do not come to the polling stations even to cast their votes. Chandra Dighalia in Sadar upazila of Gopalganj district, and Durgapur and Saiani unions of Begumganj upazila of Noakhali district are amongst those places. Besides, to avoid unforeseen problems, parents, in many cases, may not agree to offer the photographs of their young and unmarried daughters.

It is perhaps known to many that, in the past, serious attempts were made by the Commission to provide Identity Cards to voters. For doing that, the Commission not only sent teams of photographers with digital cameras to each and every house of the country but, before abandoning the project, also set up camps and made appeals to the voters to visit them to offer their photographs, but the response, even in the capital city, was very poor. Consequently, the camps were closed down and the project was abandoned after incurring an expenditure of about Taka 25 million. In view of what has been mentioned above, it seems to be safer for the Commission to review the decision already taken.

The Awami League has already demanded sending of teams with



equipments to the houses of the voters for the purpose of taking their particulars and photographs. From my long association with the process of registration of voters, I found on each occasion that the majority of the voters did not show any interest in even coming to the office of the Registration Officer for filing claims and objections to enable the Commission to update the voters list. In view of this, sending of

registration staff with cameras and other equipments seems to be the only method that may yield better results.

Now a mild comment on the decision of the Commission for simultaneous production of voters list with photograph and the national identity card. In this context, let us see what are the functions of the Commission under the Constitution. The functions of the Election Commission have been very

clearly spelt under article 119 of the Constitution. This article says that the Commission shall:

- Hold elections to the office of president.
- Hold election of members of Parliament.
- Delimit the constituencies for the purpose of election to Parliament.
- Prepare electoral rolls (voters list) for the purpose of elections to the office

of president, and to Parliament.

The constitutional provisions reproduced above clearly indicate that the preparation of voters list, but not the national identity card, is one of the functions of the Election Commission. The preparation and supply of the national identity card is logically the responsibility of the Home Ministry of the Government.

One is, therefore, at a loss to understand why the Election Commission is going beyond its constitutional mandate by assuming the gigantic task of preparation and supply of national identity card. The acceptance of this additional and extra-constitutional responsibility by the Commission at this crucial stage shall definitely retard the progress of preparation of electoral roll plunging the Commission in insurmountable difficulty and uncertainty.

The Commission should, therefore, give second thought to its decision. The path taken by the Commission to surmount the problems being faced by the country is extremely slippery. It should, therefore, advance very cautiously to avoid possible accidents.

The writer is the Executive Director of FEMA and held the post of the Deputy Secretary (Elections) in the Election Commission from 1979 to 1992.

The Bangladesh of today

In retrospect, the trip to Bangladesh was rather eventful, and if the change over the last couple of years is anything to go by, then I tingle in anticipation of seeing an even more developed country the next time I visit. While I may not be able to save as much money shopping next time, due to an expectant rise in the Bangladeshi Taka, on my part, this loss will most surely be worth it for the Bangladeshi economy.

KONRAD ISLAM

I had visited Bangladesh in the past, never thought much of it, to say the least. The drainage system was exposed, providing a haven for insects and germs, as well as the opportunity for passers-by to grimace at its smell and view, and as a bonus, one could even have the chance to fall in, and become tremendously ill.

The roads, too, were a health hazard, with their abundance of rickshaws and the occasional car

providing ample opportunity for disaster. Being accustomed to the cooler Australian climate, the hot and humid weather and the ravaging mosquitoes of the Bengali summer didn't exactly help either.

However, after my visit in April of this year, my view of Bangladesh improved significantly. While the perilous roads were still there, there was the occasional official watching over the sprawl of vehicles and pedestrians, and the festering drains had been covered up in a number of areas. Also, the lopsided currency

conversion rates gave the opportunity to spend on shopping sprees only a fraction of what it would cost back home in Australia (that fraction being about 1/6). On top of this, my rather large extended family and all of our old friends were only too happy to feed us newcomers, leading to a significant increase in weight for me, at least, over the two week trip.

The trip to Cox's Bazar proved very fruitful; the aesthetics of the longest beach in the world coupled with, again, the rather cheap produce as well as very friendly people of the

city left quite an impression; one of a perfect tropical holiday. The stop-over in Chittagong, the famous port city of Bangladesh, exposed a previously unknown to me, yet very beautiful and rather hilly, city lounging leisurely but surely beside the Karnaphuli River.

These, coupled with a visit to the small village of Jambari near Comilla, and its beautiful expanse of fresh, green paddy fields that the wonders of irrigation helped produce, revealed the breathtaking beauty of natural Bangladesh.

My mother was quite sceptical of Bangladesh and very nearly all things Bengali, and felt the need to sterilise just about everything before our family came into contact with it. Nothing was spared, and all the cutlery, glasses, and even fruit, were mercilessly thrust into a bowl of

boiling water. Despite her precautions, the inevitable and infamous stomach pains of Bangladesh descended upon us.

After learning of her cynical view of Bangladesh, our close friend from many years back, the friendly and rather dominating Dr. Ohidul Alam, saw it as his mission to reverse this obviously unjust view of my mother's. He took the liberty of driving us around Chittagong, giving a brief description of all the city's wonders as we drove past. We visited museums, universities, and, of course, the legendary Foy's Lake.

Thanks to his efforts, I must have come to know Chittagong better than I did my hometown of Sydney. We were also shown the high-life of the city, where we spent an evening shopping at the best shops and dining in the best restaurants. The

ever so dedicated Dr. Alam was even kind enough to accompany us on the 300km journey to Cox's Bazar and back, during which we experienced the glories of an astounding 3 Australian dollar buffet breakfast, one easily fit for a king. It was most definitely a trip to remember.

Lastly, the mega city of Dhaka presented to us the epitome of civilization, with the monster of a shopping centre, Bashundhora, satisfying all our shopping needs, as well as eating up much of our precious time. Another wonder of the city was it's 2 o'clock traffic jams, which are unheard of in Sydney, and this in itself almost made up for its inconvenience.

I had, in the past, heard countless concerned accounts of Bangladesh's extremely infamous corruption and the effects it had on society there. I

realised that this country still had a sizable distance to cover before breaking through its 3rd world status.

The poverty, too, had decreased significantly, largely due to the amazing work of both Grameen Bank and Professor Yunus, which was a great start. And while, according to the London School of Economics, the Bengali people may be the happiest in the world, amazingly, their government happened to be, until quite recently, one of the most corrupt in the world.

I believe that the Bengali government's vice was one of the major issues in terms of holding back the true potential of the nation's growth, and needed to be addressed as soon as possible. The interim government had recently done well to cleanse this country's leaders of corruption, and I am sure we will soon see

Bangladesh's true capabilities.

In retrospect, the trip to Bangladesh was rather eventful, and if the change over the last couple of years is anything to go by, then I tingle in anticipation of seeing an even more developed country the next time I visit. While I may not be able to save as much money shopping next time, due to an expectant rise in the Bangladeshi Taka, on my part, this loss will most surely be worth it for the Bangladeshi economy. The country has done well for itself; it has cast off much of my negative impression of it being "a dump," and has now become what we Australians may refer to as "a corker of a country, mate." Farewell, until another time.

Konrad Islam is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

Manhunt in Mesopotamia



EVAN THOMAS AND LARRY KAPLOW

THE credo is etched on the dog tags of every US soldier in the 10th Mountain Division: "I will never leave a fallen comrade." Last week, after three members of the unit were ambushed and spirited away south of Baghdad, the US military poured 4,000 American and 2,000 Iraqi troops into the area.

As surveillance drones flew overhead and spy satellites snapped images from space, the men searched door to door, offering a \$200,000 reward by loudspeaker and detaining hundreds of Iraqis for questioning. They drained a canal and sent out cadaver-sniffing dogs.

At FOB Youssifiyeh, battalion headquarters for the missing soldiers, grunts and officers alike told NEWSWEEK that finding their comrades was the most important mission of their military careers. "Easily," said Capt. Christopher Sanchez,

25, a West Pointer from Los Angeles. "Just because I know these guys. They're my friends."

Late last week in an interview with the Army Times, Gen. David Petraeus, the top US commander in Iraq, said he knew the kidnappers' names and believed that at least two of the three soldiers were still alive. But they remained missing. "Your soldiers are in our hands. If you want their safety, do not look for them," taunted a group called the Islamic State of Iraq -- an umbrella group of Sunni insurgents, including Al Qaeda in Iraq.

US military officials tried to keep a brave face on the recovery effort, but some, not speaking on the record for fear of seeming downbeat or defeatist, were asking uncomfortable questions. Why had the soldiers been vulnerable to an ambush? Had their comrades been slow to mount a rescue? How long could they continue to divert massive resources from the larger mission of pacifying

Iraq?

"Leave no man behind" is an ancient and noble warrior code. It evokes images of bone-weary Marines carrying the frozen corpses of their comrades on the retreat from Chosin Reservoir in Korea, or helicopters zooming in under fire to rescue surrounded special forces in Vietnam. But the cost of bringing back the fallen, dead or alive, can be high, as the Americans and especially the Israelis have discovered over the years.

The three American soldiers vanished from an area in ancient Mesopotamia that spookily resembles Vietnam -- soggy lowlands of tall grass and lush palm groves. They were in a squad of eight soldiers, seven Americans and one Iraqi interpreter, sitting in a pair of Humvees, waiting in the dark of night to catch Iraqi insurgents planting IEDs.

The GIs' location, nearly some houses, was hardly secret, and they

had been positioned there at least once before -- not the wisest move in a hostile region where, only a year before, a Humvee had been ambushed. This time, the Humvees were guarded by concertina wire, but the defenses were not enough to stop a grenade and small-arms attack.

One of the Humvees was burned, with occupants apparently still inside. A fifth body was later found in a house 50 yards away. The attack must have been sudden and overwhelming, because the soldiers were unable to get off a radio signal.

Their comrades, a couple of dozen soldiers stationed in Humvees some 500 yards to the north and 875 yards to the south, heard an explosion. But explosions are commonplace, and they did not race to the rescue. Rather, they called in an unmanned aerial drone to send back pictures. That took 15 minutes. It was another 40 minutes before American soldiers, slowed by the need to disarm IEDs in the road, reached the scene. They found marks in the dust suggesting that bodies had been dragged to a waiting vehicle.

Rescue operations, the first minutes and hours are crucial, or the trail goes cold. The abductors are pitiless. When the single Humvee was ambushed a year ago, the two captured GIs were mutilated and dragged behind a truck for video purposes.

No wonder that this time around American commanders were diverting resources to the recovery effort, stretching the already thin line that is supposed to be "surging" in Iraq. The door-to-door search, with its interrogations and detentions, is not winning new friends. "We hate Al Qaeda," said Salman Awda, a 55-year-old tractor driver. "But we hate the American troops more."

The military still spends about \$100 million a year finding fallen

soldiers from earlier wars -- a B-24 navigator shot down in 1944 was recovered in Croatia and buried in Michigan just two weeks ago. Before the Korean War, though, American GIs like British colonial soldiers -- were buried in foreign lands where they fell. Bringing home the dead for burial is a relatively modern phenomenon.

No one works harder at it than the Israelis, and their experience illustrates the dilemma of strict adherence to a virtuous ideal. "The policy is always to leave no man behind," says Noa Meir, an Israeli Army spokesperson. "Dead soldiers as well -- same value." Such a rigid rule "has a very practical dimension," notes Isaac Ben-Israel, head of security studies at Tel Aviv University. "People who know they won't be left will fight better."

But Israel has gone to extraordinary lengths to fulfill this promise. The Israelis are willing to trade hundreds of prisoners for even one Israeli, creating an open bazaar and offering an incentive to guerrillas to abduct a few more. The kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers seized by Hizbullah was a major reason Israel went to war against Lebanon last summer, at the cost of more than 100 Israeli lives and many more Lebanese. The fallout may bring down the Israeli government.

A prolonged, massive search for the missing American GIs in Iraq may undermine the overall mission there. But most US soldiers interviewed by NEWSWEEK have long since stopped insisting that their greatest mission is to bring peace and democracy to Iraq. More and more, they talk about their desire to simply protect their buddies, and to get everyone home alive.

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The second Asia shock

There are big unknowns. Will India's crumbling infrastructure put the brakes on growth? Will China's environmental issues slow its manufacturing juggernaut? Will the growing backlash against globalization and inequity harm both countries? But assuming they can rise to such challenges, increasing wealth and consumption are a matter of when rather than if.

THE growth stories of China and India have always been different -- China is well known for being the world's factory, while India's new wealth has been built on services. But the result is the same -- a consumer boom that will reshape global markets. Over the next twenty years, 213 million Chinese households and 123 million Indian ones will begin to have discretionary income. That means 1.2 billion people hitting the world's consumer markets -- a shopping spree of historic proportions.

If both countries continue on roughly their current growth paths, we will witness the creation of massive new consumer markets, as well as unprecedented reductions in poverty. The speed of the change will rival Japan's economic miracle of the 1950s to 1970s, as well as South Korea's more recent rise -- but will be magnified over populations 10 and 30 times as large.

In China, rising incomes have the potential to lift over a hundred million people out of poverty. In 1985, 99 percent of the urban Chinese population lived in households earning less than \$3 per person per day; by 2005, the number had dropped to 57 percent. We project that over the next 20 years, incomes will grow eight-fold, cutting China's poverty rate to just 16 percent.

India's numbers are no less impressive. In 1985, 93 percent of the population lived on less than \$1 per day; by 2005, it was 54 percent. The number is projected to decline to 22 percent by 2025. If current trends

continue over the next two decades, India and China will have 1.8 billion fewer poor people than before economic reform. Both countries will also develop massive new middle classes, with China becoming the third largest consumer market in the world (behind Japan and the US), and India taking fifth place.

International companies seeking to capitalize on this shift will face a number of challenges. Chief among them will be the fact that while 100,000 renminbi or 500,000 rupees buys a nice middle-class lifestyle in China or India (about \$50,000 to \$60,000 if adjusted for "purchasing power parity" or "PPP"), when exchanged at actual exchange rates, the amounts look less attractive, around \$11,000 to \$12,000. As one executive put it, "You can't put PPP dollars in the bank, only real dollars."

Multinationals thus face the dual challenge of adapting to local budgets as well as tastes. One example: Carrefour, the French retail giant, now has some of the highest-volume stores in China. Its trademark wide, brightly lit aisles display tanks of live eels, bullfrogs and turtles at prices that compete with China's "wet markets."

Further challenges include geography and distribution. In China, companies must choose which of its 177 cities with populations larger than one million to target. In India, there is no cold chain for food distribution, and a maze of internal tariffs and inspection points mean it can take days to ship short distances. Finally, foreign firms will face

increasing pressure from local players.

Development of these markets is not a sure thing -- keeping up past growth rates will require both countries to face up to common problems. First, despite rising wealth, public services remain weak. Households have high savings rates because they don't trust their governments to provide health care, education and pensions.

Better government services would free up that savings for consumption, leading to more growth. Second, both financial systems are unmodernized and subject to significant political interference. The result is that capital is both mispriced and misallocated. Work by MGI shows that financial-system reform could add as much as 17 percent to Chinese GDP annually, and 7 percent to India's.

There are big unknowns. Will India's crumbling infrastructure put the brakes on growth? Will China's environmental issues slow its manufacturing juggernaut? Will the growing backlash against globalization and inequity harm both countries? But assuming they can rise to such challenges, increasing wealth and consumption are a matter of when rather than if.

Part I of the China and India story, the rise of the worker, has already fundamentally changed the world order. Now part II, the rise of the consumer, is about to start. Is the world ready?

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